PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 233

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1993-94

COMPRISING PERIOD
18 November—3 December 1993

Chronology of "The Parliamentary Debates"

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

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Abbott, Ms Diane Julie (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)
Adams, Mrs. Katherine (Paisley, North)
Adley, Robert James (Christchurch) *[died, May 1993]*
Ainger, Nicholas Richard (Pembroke)
Ainsworth, Peter Michael (East Surrey)
Ainsworth, Robert William (Coventry, North East)
Aitken, Jonathan William Patrick (Thanet, South)
Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
Alison, Rt. Hon. Michael James Hugh (Selby)
Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Alton, David Patrick Paul (Liverpool, Mossley Hill)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Basildon)
Ancram, Michael (Devizes)
Anderson, Donald (Swansea, East)
Anderson, Janet (Rossendale and Darwen)
Arbuthnot, James Norwich (Wanstead and Woodford)
Armstrong, Ms Hilary Jane (North West Durham)
Arnold, Jacques Arnold (Gravesham)
Arnold, Sir Thomas Richard (Hazel Grove)
Ashby, David Glynn (North West Leicestershire)
Ashdown, Rt. Hon. Jeremy John Durham (Yeovil)
Ashton, Joseph William (Bassetlaw)
Aspinwall, Jack Heywood (Wansdyke)
Atkins, Robert James (South Ribble)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)
Atkinson, Peter Landreth (Hexham)
Austin-Walker, John Eric (Woolwich)

B

Baker, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Wilfred CH (Mole Valley)
Baker, Nicholas Brian (Dorset, North)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Matthew Richard William (Southport)
Banks, Robert George (Harrogate)
Banks, Tony (Newham, North-West)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Bates, Michael Walton (Langbaurgh)
Batiste, Spencer Lee (Elmet)
Battle, John Dominic (Leeds, West)
Bayley, Hugh (York)
Beckett, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Rt. Hon. Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North-West Norfolk)
Bendall, Vivian Walter Hough (Ilford, North)
Benn, Rt. Hon. Anthony Neil Wedgwood (Chesterfield)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Benton, Joseph Edward (Bootle)
Beresford, Sir Alexander Paul (Croydon, Central)
Bermingham, Gerald Edward (St. Helens, South)
Berry, Roger Leslie (Kingswood)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Biffen, Rt. Hon. William John (North Shropshire)
Blackburn, John Graham (Dudley, West)
Blair, Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blunkett, David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Body, Sir Richard Bernard Frank Stewart (Holland with Boston)
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas Cosmo (Upminster)
Booth, Vernon Edward Hartley (Finchley)
Boothroyd, Rt. Hon. Miss Betty (West Bromwich, West)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Eltham)
Bottomley, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bowden, Andrew MBE (Brighton, Kemptown)
Bowis, John Crocket OBE (Battersea)
Boyce, James (Rotherham)
Boyes, Roland (Houghton and Washington)
Boyson, Rt. Hon. Sir Rhodes (Brent, North)
Bradley, Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Brandreth, Gyles Daubeney (City of Chester
Bray, Dr. Jeremy William (Motherwell, South)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Bright, Graham Frank James (Luton, South)
Brooke, Rt. Hon. Peter Leonard (City of London and Westminster, South)
Brown, James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Michael Russell (Brigg and Cleethorpes)
Brown, Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East)
Browning, Mrs. Angela Frances (Tiverton)
Bruce, Ian Cameron (South Dorset)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burden, Richard Haines (Birmingham, Northfield)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)
Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Peter (Milton Keynes, North-East)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)
Byers, Stephen John (Wallsend)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Anne (Cambridge)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Cann, James Charles (Ipswich)
Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)

Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chaplin, Mrs. Sybil Judith OBE (Newbury) *[died, February 1993]*
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chisholm, Malcolm George Richardson (Edinburgh, Leith)
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clapham, Michael (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
Clappison, William James (Hertsmere)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clarke, Eric Lionel (Midlothian)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey Robert (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Coe, Sebastian Newbold (Falmouth and Camborne)
Coffey, Ann (Stockport)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Congdon, David Leonard (Croydon, North-East)
Connarty, Michael (Falkirk, East)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. Sir John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Corston, Jean Ann (Bristol, East)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South)
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry, South-East)
Cunningham, Rt. Hon. John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dafis, Cynog Glyndwr (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davidson, Ian Graham (Glasgow, Govan)
Davies, Bryan (Oldham Central and Royton)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)
Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Denham, John Yorke (Southampton, Itchen)
Deva, Niranjan Joseph Aditya (Brentford and Isleworth)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Donohoe, Brian (Cunninghame, South)
Dorrell, Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Dowd, James Patrick, (Lewisham, West)
Duncan, Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
Duncan Smith, George Iain (Chingford)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Sir Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Elletson, Harold Daniel Hope (Blackpool, North)
Emery, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Enright, Derek Anthony (Hemsworth)
Etherington, William (Sunderland, North)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evans, Jonathan Peter (Brecon and Radnor)
Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
Evans, Roger Kenneth (Monmouth)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Faber, David James Christian (Westbury)
Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Mid Staffordshire)
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington)
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)
Fookes, Dame Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Rt. Hon. Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foster, Donald Michael Ellison (Bath)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)

Fox, Liam (Woodspring)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Rt. Hon. Roger Norman (Kettering)
French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Gallie, Philip Roy (Ayr)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford, South)
Gardiner, Sir George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garnier, Edward Henry (Harborough)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gerrard, Neil Francis (Walthamstow)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Godsiff, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham)
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Grylls, Sir William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)
Gunnell, John (Leeds, South and Morley)

H

Hague, William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks)
Hain, Peter Gerald (Neath)
Hall, Mike Thomas (Warrington, South)
Hamilton, Rt. Hon. Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hanson, David George (Delyn)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Harman Ms Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Harvey, Nick (North Devon)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, John Nicholas (Blackpool, South)
Hawksley, Philip Warren (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Heald, Oliver (North Hertfordshire)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Richard George MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle upon Tyne, North)
Hendron, Dr. Joseph Gerard (Belfast West)
Hendry, Charles (High Peak)
Heppell, John (Nottingham East)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Sir Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Trevor Keith (Streatham)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hoey, Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall)
Hogg, Rt. Hon. Douglas Martin QC (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hoon, Geoffrey William (Ashfield)
Horam, John Rhodes (Orpington)
Hordern, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Sir Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Dr. Kim Scott (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, Kevin Michael (Doncaster, North)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, Rt. Hon. David James Fletcher MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, Sir John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard CBE (Witney)
Hutton, John Matthew Patrick (Barrow and Furness)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Glenda May (Hamsptead and Highgate)
Jackson, Helen Margaret (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Jamieson, David Charles (Plymouth, Devonport)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jenkin, Bernard Christison (Colchester, North)

Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Jonathan Owen (Cardiff Central)
Jones, Lynne Mary (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Nigel David (Cheltenham)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Jowell, Tessa Jane Helen Douglas (Dulwich)

K

Kaufman, Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Keen, David Alan (Feltham and Heston)
Kellett-Bowman Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Kennedy, Jane Elizabeth (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Khabra, Piara Singh (Ealing, Southall)
Kilfedder, Sir James Alexander (North Down)
Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool, Walton)
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy CH (Bridgwater)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkhope, Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Mrs. Angela Ann (Erewash)
Knight, Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill DBE (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knox, Sir David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)
Kynoch, George Alexander Bryson (Kincardine and Deeside)

L

Lait, Mrs. Jacqueline Anne Harkness (Hastings and Rye)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Rt. Hon. Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Lawrence, Sir Ivan John QC (Burton)
Legg, Barry Charles (Milton Keynes, South West)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon. Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Lidington, David Roy (Aylesbury)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Llwyd, Elfyn (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luff, Peter James (Worcester)
Lyell, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)
Lynne, Elizabeth (Rochdale)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCrea, Rev Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
MacDonald, Calum Alastair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Mackinlay, Andrew Stuart (Thurrock)
Maclean, David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
McMaster, Gordon (Paisley, South)
MacNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Maddock, Mrs. Diana (Christchurch) *[By-election, July 1993]*
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Madel, William David (South-West Bedfordshire)
Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)
Maitland, Olga Helen (Sutton and Cheam)
Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Malone, Peter Gerald (Winchester)
Mandelson, Peter Benjamin (Hartlepool)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Sir Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Mawhinney, Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Mayhew, Rt Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, Rt. Hon. David John QC (Putney)
Merchant, Piers Rolf Garfield (Beckenham)

Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Milburn, Alan (Darlington)
Miller, Andrew Peter (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
Milligan, Stephen David Wyatt (Eastleigh)
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Sir Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter AE (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Estelle (Birmingham, Yardley)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie (Redcar)
Mudie, George Edward (Leeds, East)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Needham, Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Sir Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)
Norris, Steven John (Epping Forest)

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, Michael (North Warwickshire)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South)
Olner, William John (Nuneaton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Sir Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Ottaway, Richard Geoffrey James (Croydon, South)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Rt. Hon. John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pickles, Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
Pickthall, Colin (West Lancashire)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Pope, Greg James (Hyndburn)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prentice, Mrs. Bridget Theresa (Lewisham, East)
Prentice, Gordon (Pendle)
Prescott, John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Primarolo, Ms Dawn (Bristol, South)
Purchase, Kenneth (Wolverhampton, North East)

Q

Quin, Ms Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)
Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Raynsford, Wyvill Richard Nicolls (Greenwich)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Redwood, Rt. Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Rendel, David Digby (Newbury) *[By-election, May 1993]*
Renton, Rt. Hon. Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Richards, Roderick (Clwyd North West)
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking)
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Robathan, Andrew Robert George (Blaby)
Roberts, Rt. Hon. Sir Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robertson, Raymond Scott (Aberdeen, South)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Mark Noel Foster (Somerton and Frome)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roche, Barbara Maureen (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Rooney, Terence Henry (Bradford, North)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Rt. Hon. Dame Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Rt. Hon. Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Hon. Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Scott, Rt. Hon. Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shephard, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert, (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East)
Smith, Llewellyn (Blaenau Gwent)
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Sir Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Spellar, John Francis (Warley, West)
Spencer, Sir Derek Harold (Brighton Pavilion)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Spink, Dr. Robert Michael (Castle Point)
Spring, Richard John Grenville (Bury St. Edmunds)
Sproat, Iain MacDonald (Harwich)
Squire, Mrs. Rachel Anne (Dumfermline West)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. Sir David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stephen, Michael (Shoreham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevenson, George William (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Streeter, Gary Nicholas (Plymouth, Sutton)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Sweeney, Walter Edward (Vale of Glamorgan)
Sykes, John David (Scarborough)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Sir Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin, MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro)
Taylor, Mrs. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Thomason, Kenneth Roy (Bromsgrove)
Thompson, Sir Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich, North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thornton, Sir George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Tipping, Simon Patrick (Sherwood)
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracey, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trend, Michael St. John (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Trimble, David (Upper Bann)
Trotter, Neville Guthrie (Tynemouth)
Turner, Dennis (Wolverhampton, South-East)
Twinn, Ian David (Edmonton)
Tyler, Paul Archer (North Cornwall)

V

Vaughan, Sir Gerard Folliott (Reading, East)
Vaz, Nigel Keith Anthony Standish (Leicester, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)

W

Waldegrave, Rt. Hon. William Arthur (Bristol, West)
Walden, George Gordon Harvey CMG (Buckingham)
Walker, Alfred Cecil (Belfast, North)
Walker, Rt. Hon. Sir Harold (Doncaster, Central)
Walker, William Connoll (North Tayside)
Wallace, James Robert (Orkney and Shetland)
Waller, Gary Peter Anthony (Keighley)
Walley, Joan Lorraine (Stoke on Trent, North)
Ward, John Devereux CBE (Poole)
Wardell, Gareth Lodwig (Gower)
Wardle, Charles Frederick (Bexhill and Battle)
Wareing, Robert Nelson (Liverpool, West Derby)
Watson, Michael Goodall (Glasgow, Central)
Watts, John Arthur (Slough)
Wells, Bowen (Hertford and Stortford)
Welsh, Andrew (Angus, East)
Wheeler, Rt. Hon. Sir John Daniel (Westminster, North)
Whitney, Raymond William OBE (Wycombe)
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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 233**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1993-94

House of Commons

Thursday 18 November 1993

The House met at twenty-five minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

2.30 pm

On resuming—

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw until their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

Witnesses

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Metropolitan Police

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to the House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

2.33 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. This morning, I experienced an unhappy incident when driving my car to the House of Commons. I was stopped at the Millbank roundabout and told by a police officer that it was impossible to proceed further because of the parked cars of distinguished visitors, and so forth. I was also told, perfectly properly, that I could go over the river and approach the House from Westminster bridge. I did so, although the traffic was rather heavy, but I was stopped at that bridge by another officer. I find that I was not alone, as at least two other Members of Parliament were similarly inconvenienced.

I told the officer that I had every right to come to the House of Commons—this did not happen immediately before the Royal carriage arrived but well and truly half an hour before that event—and I then spoke to a senior officer. I can only describe him as an officer with a certain amount of silver on his cap—I was unable to recognise his exact rank.

[Mr. Peter Shore]

I said to him that I had every right to come to the House of Commons, because that was the right of all Members of Parliament.

The officer told me that the police had received instructions from the Chief Whip, who had agreed that the approaches to the Palace should be stopped, for Members of Parliament as for others, from a certain time. I said that that was extraordinary and that I would take the opportunity to raise the matter at the first moment. I have done so, Madam Speaker, and I hope that you will make sure that the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police fulfils his duty to the House under Sessional Orders and that the parliamentary privilege of all Members of Parliament to come to this place will be maintained.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): May I say on behalf of the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) that she was equally inconvenienced. It took her about a hour and a half to get to the House this morning, even though she left in very good time.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman. I shall take all points of order.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Sessional Order is debatable, Madam Speaker. We are not required to make points of order to raise issues. I wish to draw the attention of the House to the importance of the Sessional Order. There are times when Members of Parliament need to come here immediately from some activity outside. I recall a student demonstration three or four years ago which was disrupted with what some of us regarded as excessive ferocity by the police. We wanted to raise the matter in the House.

If we are not given the right to enter this place rapidly, we cannot do so with the urgency which the break-up of such a demonstration demanded. Of course, the privilege is not for ourselves. It is to allow us to attend on behalf of our constituents and use the right of free speech to raise issues.

The tradition of the police in the House, organised by the Commissioner of the Metropolitan police, has always been that Members are known by their faces to the police officers stationed on duty at the various entrances. Any machinery that is established to be operated by cards does not apply to Members, because the absence of a card could unnecessarily impede a Member's entry to the House. The tradition of the experience of police officers cannot be replaced by any card system, no matter how complicated the magnetic record on the card. I hope that the Sessional Order that we are about to pass carries that clear implication. I hope that when complicated electronic devices are installed members of the Metropolitan police force will always be on duty nearby to allow Members access to this place so that we can represent our constituents unimpeded.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does not necessarily have to raise a point of order. This is a debatable order.

Mr. Lester: In support of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), may I say that I had precisely the same experience as him. I started at Westminster bridge at half-past nine. I was challenged at the Embankment and in Great Marsham street. Eventually, I managed to find one sensible police officer who accepted that Members of Parliament should be here in time for the ceremony.

Mr. Robert Hughes: This morning at 10.15, I was stopped at Westminster bridge and told that I could not proceed any further. However, as soon as I explained my purpose, I was immediately and courteously allowed through. Could you, Madam Speaker, make inquiries to discover which Chief Whip said that I would be allowed through, but not my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)?

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I rise to support the comments of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. I was one of the hon. Members who were delayed at the end of Westminster bridge when there was plenty of time to allow Members of Parliament through the Carriage Gate in their cars. I heard nothing of a Chief Whip giving such an order, but I heard a great deal about the order coming from senior officers of the Metropolitan police. The constables who had to deliver the message to us seemed extremely embarrassed. Fortunately, the officers were able to park us in New Bridge street, but it was a totally unacceptable situation.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): The Sessional Order goes wider than the problem raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. At 9.50 this morning, well before the state opening, police officers told me in Trafalgar square that I needed a special parking sticker on my windscreen, which I did not. I understand that that and, presumably, other problems arose because the police officers brought into the area for the state opening are not familiar with such orders. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) rightly said that we are entitled to an unimpeded right of entry into the House of Commons. We ask for no special privileges such as being able to jump red lights, but we have the right—on production of our pass if necessary —to have that right of entry respected. Will you, Madam Speaker, consider raising the issue with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to ensure that all his officers, including those brought in from outside forces, are aware of our pass and the rights attached to it in attendance of the House?

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): May I confirm everything that has been said? A police officer told me that it was more than his job was worth to allow me through. If that police officer were to come forward and identify himself, would you, Madam Speaker, give him a red hat? *[Interruption.]* Yes, the red bag that is given on some television programme.

There is always great difficulty in crossing Bridge street, so will you ensure that that area is properly policed during Divisions? Bridge street is extremely dangerous and there are only a few seconds to get from our offices across the road. If it is properly policed, we would be able to get to the House for Divisions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I came here at 7.30 am and nobody stopped me.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In spite of the early riser on the Opposition Benches, it seems churlish that, on agreeing the Sessional Order this year, the House thus far has not seen fit to thank the police for their excellent policing of the Palace.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Contrary to what has been said by some hon. Members, I am sure that Chief Whips on each side of the House have not been involved in any restrictions on access to the House. Nor do I believe that the fault lies with the officers manning the barriers or that the problem arose because of their unfamiliarity with procedures. The three constables who prevented me from having access to the House were well aware of the contents of Sessional Orders, but had had specific orders from their superior officers that roads were to be closed to Members of Parliament. I agree with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney that it is a serious abuse and one which needs to be pursued with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I have written to him today to point out there is little point in the House promulgating Sessional Orders if he and his supervising officers choose to ignore them.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): I understand that the problem has not arisen only today. During the previous Session, the police, whom I have found to be most helpful for the past 15 years, had a letter from their superintendent instructing them not to help hon. Members crossing the road to come to vote. That is unacceptable. I should be grateful, Madam Speaker, if you would take up the matter with the Metropolitan police.

Madam Speaker: I have listened very carefully to what all hon. Members have said and I shall follow through the points raised. It is probably appropriate for me to make my comments on some of these matters.

The purpose of the Sessional Order is to authorise the police to deal with obstructions put in the way of hon. Members coming to Parliament. Hon. Members do not enjoy—I am sure that they do not seek to enjoy—immunity from the ordinary operation of the law relating to traffic regulations. Nor do I believe that they seek permission to leave their cars unattended in areas where there are signs saying, "No parking".

I am aware—*[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Members should listen to this. I am aware of the recent complaints about difficulty in access for Divisions. The head of security has issued new guidance to his police officers and I hope that the problems that some hon. Members have experienced—I know of them—will not recur. However, I make it clear that the primary responsibility rests with hon. Members themselves. They must ensure that they allow adequate time to reach the Division Lobbies.

May I make a point about automatic access control? In doing so, I remind the House that the second report of Session 1987-88 from the Services Committee, which was approved by the House on 30 January 1989, recommended that consideration be given to extending the use of automatic access control arrangements to appropriate entry points in the Palace of Westminster. The Committee also said that hon. Members should be willing to set an example by using the new systems. May we now proceed?

Question put and agreed to.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by the Speaker; and that she do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as she shall appoint do presume to print the same.

OUTLAWRIES

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

JOURNAL

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Sir Clifford John Boulton, KCB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by the Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Madam Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to our tour of Caribbean countries next spring. We shall visit France to inaugurate, with the President of the French Republic, the Channel Tunnel in May; and to attend the ceremonies to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings, in June. We shall visit Canada to attend the Commonwealth Games in August.

My Government attach the highest importance to national security. They will maintain full support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. They will work to secure NATO's adaptation to the changing security environment, and to continue developing the operational role of the Western European Union. My Government will work for full implementation of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, and for the entry into force of the Open Skies Treaty. Britain's minimum independent nuclear deterrent will be maintained.

My Government will work for the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to promote the indefinite and unconditional extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to encourage international responsibility in conventional arms transfers. They will take part constructively in negotiations on a verifiable and comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban. They will continue to help with the safe and secure transport of nuclear weapons for dismantling in the former Soviet Union.

Now that the Treaty of Maastricht has entered into force, My Government will attach particular importance to implementing the new common foreign and security policy and intergovernmental co-operation in the fields of justice and home affairs. They will work to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is applied to European Community legislation. My Government will promote financial and budgetary discipline in the Community. They will work within the Community for a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations.

My Government will work for a rapid conclusion of accession agreements with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and will continue to put forward the case for European countries which are ready and wish to join the European Community.

My Government will strive for a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia. They will provide help for political and economic reform in the states of the former Soviet Union, and their integration into the international community.

My Government will play a constructive role in strengthening the United Nations' capacity to undertake peacekeeping and preventive action. They will work for full Iraqi compliance with Security Council Resolutions.

My Government welcome the recent breakthrough in the Middle East peace process. They will continue to support efforts to bring lasting peace to the region.

My Government will work for the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and to co-operate with China to implement the Sino-British Joint Declaration in the best interests of the Hong Kong people.

My Government will play an active part in the Commonwealth. They will support construction of a democratic society in South Africa.

My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme to promote sustainable development and good government.

My Government will introduce legislation to place the Secret Intelligence Service and Government Communications Headquarters on a statutory basis; and to make further provisions for the oversight and accountability of them and the Security Service.

In Northern Ireland My Government will continue their efforts to defeat terrorism through impartial and resolute enforcement of the law, to uphold the democratic wishes of its people and seek political progress by broadly based agreement, to strengthen economic progress and to create equality of opportunity for all sections of the community. They will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland.

My Government will maintain their fight against terrorism, throughout the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the public service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will continue with firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation.

My Government will bring together tax and expenditure decisions in a unified Budget. Fiscal policy will be set to bring the budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term. My Government will reduce the share of national income taken by the public sector. They will continue to promote enterprise and improve the supply performance of the economy.

The Citizen's Charter will remain central to My Government's programme for improving public services.

Legislation will be introduced to give force to the changes in the European Community's system of own resources following the agreement at the Edinburgh European Council.

Legislation will be introduced to facilitate deregulation and to remove obstacles to contracting out by central and local government.

My Government will continue to give priority to law and order. Legislation will be introduced to allow the courts to deal more effectively with young offenders and to make improvements in the criminal law.

A Bill will be introduced to improve the organisation and management of the police so that they are better able to combat crime, and to strengthen the administration of magistrates' courts.

My Government will continue to develop its policies on social security so that help is concentrated on those most in need and expenditure is kept within affordable limits. Legislation will be introduced to raise the National Insurance Contributions paid by employees.

Legislation will be introduced to privatise British Coal.

My Government will bring forward legislation to reform local government in Scotland and Wales.

My Government will introduce legislation to establish new arrangements for funding teacher training in England and Wales and to reform student unions.

My Government will bring forward a Bill to reform the law on Sunday trading in England and Wales.

Bills will be introduced to take forward Environment Agency planning, and to reform the law on trade marks.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons
I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[First Day]

Madam Speaker: I shall now acquaint the House with the arrangements for our debate.

Friday 19 November—foreign affairs and defence; Monday 22 November—local government in Scotland and Wales; Tuesday 23 November—home affairs and education; Wednesday 24 November—trade, industry and deregulation; Thursday 25 November—the economy.

It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that on Friday 26 November there will be a debate entitled "Progress towards the national education and training targets" on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

2.48 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

After all that, I feel especially lucky to have got here at all. I deeply appreciate the honour that the House has done me by giving me the opportunity to move the Loyal Address. I recognise, too, that it is an honour which rightly belongs to my constituency.

The only trouble that I have with my constituency is that very few people outside its confines seem to know where it is. There is no town, village, river, or part of any map which gives a description of the location of my constituency. I will take this unexpected opportunity to reveal that it is situated in the county of East Sussex and stretches southwards from East Grinstead in the north to within a few miles of Pevensey Bay and Eastbourne.

My constituency embraces four small towns, many small villages, and some attractive—largely unspoilt—rolling and wooded countryside. Timber from one of our villages is used to support the hammer frame roof in Westminster hall. The wide open spaces of Ashdown forest —*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is welcome to meet me any time in those woods; not that there is much wooded life left. Much of the wood was cut down and used for the ships of the Royal Navy from the time of the Armada up to Nelson's day. Iron ore from my constituency was used for the guns that were supplied for the Navy's ships. The woods and forests are now more likely to be associated with Pooh Bear and Christopher Robin.

I hope that I may be forgiven for regretting that the town of East Grinstead no longer gives its illustrious name to my constituency. The town had the distinction of sending Members to the "First Complete and Model Parliament" in 1295, which was formed some 30 years after Simon De Montfort's prescriptive rebellious prototype.

In 1541, the town returned one Thomas Sackville esquire. It says something about the staying power of that family and its commitment to public service that a descendant represents the constituency of Bolton, West today. I congratulate my hon. Friend on winning that seat by, if I may say so, rather more democratic means than the previous eponymous Sackville.

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

Alas, East Grinstead—although under the benign influence of the Sackville family who, as Earls de la Warr, have their family estate in my constituency—became what was known as a rotten borough. It was not unusual for a few people who had the vote to accept inducements, and it was not unusual for Members to accept payment for favours rendered. But East Grinstead was unusual in having a Member who was hung, drawn, and quartered for his treasonable relationship with a Spanish Governor of the Netherlands, the Duke of Alva, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

The best-known and most distinguished of my constituents was the late Harold Macmillan, whom I canvassed during general election campaigns. That was not, I hasten to add, to tell him how things were, but to see them through his prophetic political eye. He treated my calls as compliments. "Dear boy, how nice of you to call," he would say as he opened the door. With a deprecating wave of his hand, he would add, "Of course, I am out of the picture now." I admired him enormously. He was concerned deeply with contemporary issues throughout his long political life. Although he never stopped feeling deeply about the slaughter of his generation in the Great War, as he called it, he also looked forward. Nowhere were his courage and foresight better displayed than on the floor of the South African Parliament, when he beckoned its Members to accept the challenge of the "wind of change". How he would have rejoiced yesterday, had he been with us.

Today, the new Wealden constituency has an outward air of prosperity which conceals the personal difficulties and hardship caused by the recession. People see East Sussex as a rich county, but its income per head is the second lowest of any shire county in the country. Farming, which is no longer our biggest employer, is still an important industry. Whether or not there is a recession, the Wealden clay is not exactly the easiest land to farm.

Over the years, our farmers, who are in mixed or dairy farming—there are also a few vineyards—have seen a steady decline in their incomes, and some have left the land. However, with true Sussex stubbornness, many have stayed. "We will not be druv" is an old Sussex saying. The farmers have diversified their activities: barns now house businesses and add life to the rural community; our milk producers have accepted the challenge of the milk marketing boards' new competitive marketing system. Golf courses have also emerged, the most outstanding of which is the new 36-hole golf course, the East Sussex National, which recently staged the European open golf championship. I am sure that hon. Members who belong to the Parliamentary Golfing Society will testify that it is regarded as one of the finest golf courses in Europe.

Over the past 25 years, there has been a growth, not only in the number of the enterprising self-employed, but in the quality of small businesses, as shown by the number of those holding BS5750 certificates. We may not be big in manufacturing, but several firms stand out nationally and internationally. They include companies such as Servomex, Feedback and TR Fastenings, which are on the leading edge of industrial technology.

Wealden is not a constituency which accepts an inflexible division between the public and private sectors. It does not take kindly to dogma that persistently ignores injustices or refuses to adapt to change. Compassion and value for money are not regarded as the exclusive monopoly of either the private or public sector. Wealden council has for many years encouraged shared ownership in the housing sector.

This year alone, the council has received two awards. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presented it with a charter mark, the gold medal of the citizens charter, for pioneering a scheme at one of its leisure centres to provide facilities for national health service patients for whom local doctors have prescribed exercise rather than medication. The people who have taken advantage of the scheme have grown in number and fitness—a fact which, I think, will please my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), our gym master. Personally, I prefer to run up and down the stairs here.

Secondly, under the Government's investment in people award, the constituency has met the most exacting standards in the management, training and development of employees.

East Sussex county council was one of the first in the country to introduce local financial management in education. It has developed community colleges, and the commitment by its governors, teachers and the wider public to ever-higher standards is most impressive. In the health sector, there have been outstanding voluntary contributions to our local hospitals in Crowborough and Uckfield. How nice it would be to apply the dynamic and innovative spirit of my constituents to the problem of our unreliable, under-used unelectrified Uckfield line. I look forward to the day when private investors will be brought in to modernise the line. I remind any backers that the line would still receive a commuter subsidy.

There is one omission from the Queen's Speech and, as a member of the all-party Lords and Commons Fly Fishing Club, I know that it will cause disappointment to its members. The speech contained no mention of legislation to abolish drift net fishing in the North sea. We are united in our determination to get such legislation on the statute book. I recall one occasion when we in the club were less united. Two former Opposition Members shamelessly broke ranks as the club was fishing at a charity match. They were the former right hon. Member for Barnsley, who is now in the upper House and president of the club, and the former hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme. They observed that I hooked an unbelievably large trout, which was probably about 2 ft long—anyway, it was big. I was extremely worried that the slender leader, which connected the line to the hook, was unequal to the weight of the fish. Observing my concern, they asked what the trouble was. I replied that my leader was weak. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear hear."] They asked, "What was that you said?" I replied that I had no confidence in my leader. *[Interruption.]* I think that hon. Members had better wait for it. Turning to the press on the bank, they said, "Did you hear that? There's Tory loyalty for you, and only yesterday he was in the birthday honours list." You will infer from that, Madam Speaker, that it was many years ago. *[Interruption.]* The references that were made were to another leader.

Like many other parts of Britain, my constituency suffers from an increase in robbery. The proposals in the Queen's Speech on law and order will be warmly welcomed by my constituents. The proposals should make it clear that the "back to basics" theme and other areas of Government policy are not just a reassertion of traditional

values or an exercise in nostalgia, but a recognition that good citizenship rests on a willingness to assume individual responsibility. I hope that the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will reinforce the accountability that will lead to a better balance between the citizen and the state, not just in law and order but in other areas.

Our expectations have soared over the past two decades, but we live within limited means as individuals, and as a nation we must temper our utopian aspirations.

Finally, I refer to my membership of the North Atlantic Assembly over the past 12 years, which has brought me into close contact with European and American parliamentarians. Naturally, I welcome the Government's continued support for NATO. I am especially glad to note that the Queen's Speech accepts the need to adapt NATO to modern security in the changing security environment. It is imperative that NATO adapts as a matter of urgency, or its existence will increasingly be seen as irrelevant.

I see that adaptation taking two courses. The first is to develop an out-of-area capability in co-operation with the United States, and the second is to create a western and European defence structure through the Western European Union linked to NATO on a Government-to-Government basis, which will establish a closer relationship with the eastern European neighbours. One day, those nations will become Members of the European Community. If we do not take on that responsibility, the willingness of the Americans to be associated with us will, I fear, fade away.

The great success of NATO has been not that it has just kept the peace or won a war without firing a shot, but that it has controlled the more dangerous and undesirable aspects of nationalism, which is one of the most important objectives of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's vision of a wider European Community.

I am grateful to hon. Members for courteously and patiently giving their attention without too much interruption. That contrasts strangely with my first election to the House in 1959 for the constituency of Holborn and St. Pancras, South. I never had a meeting there without being subjected to a barrage of interventions. The Prime Minister had a similar experience when he stood as a candidate for St. Pancras, North in 1974. "Tonight," said my chairman optimistically at the beginning of one of the meetings, "we are going to listen to the candidate make his speech, and we are going to listen in silence, give him a fair hearing and then you can put your questions and interruptions to him afterwards." "Why should we wait?", said an outraged voice from the back, "We will only have forgotten what the bleeder said." I fear, Madam Speaker, that that is the fate of more of our speeches than we may care to acknowledge.

3.3 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): In seconding the motion, I pay tribute to the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) who, in 33 years in the House, has gained the most widespread respect and affection. For my part, the honour is very much due to my constituents and supporters in Bolton, North-East who first chose me to represent them 10 years ago.

Constituency engagements have kept me from two previous state openings, but this year I am grateful both to Her Majesty and to Mr. Jack Morris of the Bolton and District Butchers' Association for ensuring that the state opening did not clash with the arrival in Bolton of my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), the Minister for food, who so amply performed the opening ceremony of the national black pudding competition in my constituency. I should warn the House to treat Bolton's black puddings with respect. Within hours of my hon. Friend the Minister sampling that delicacy, he announced his engagement to be married!

My right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary kindly suggested that I should look up some previous speeches and he also wisely advised me to stay away from the Octagon theatre in my constituency where the current production is "Billy Liar" or, as we would say in the House, "Billy, Economical with the Truth."

In his speech last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) described the choice of speakers as a

"genial old codger on the way out and . . . an oily young man on the make."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 56.]

I am immensely proud to be a fellow of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and to have earned my living as a service engineer, but I am clearly now in danger of being classed as an "oily old codger on the mend."

An engineer by profession, I never expected to experience the great exhilaration which I felt 10 years ago on entering the House and which I still feel today. Meeting my future wife while at Cambridge, I held out prospects based on a career in industry. With basic rate income tax at 8s 6d in the pound and MPs' salaries at £1,000 a year, I did not give Parliament a thought.

While my Cambridge contemporaries debated in the union, I was perfectly content to reach the dizzy heights of president of the Peterhouse Wine Society. No wonder that my contemporaries now occupy great offices of state while I am chairman of the marginals club and no wonder that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, my exact contemporary at Peterhouse, so appropriately marked my year as his Parliamentary Private Secretary by generously giving me a book entitled "Modern Fairy Tales".

It was not until 1981 that I resolved to enter politics. My experiences in starting and building my own business convinced me that Margaret Thatcher's enterprise policies were right for the country. Resistance to those policies stirred me to act. My letters to Conservative Central Office did not receive an immediate response. I offered to help in the Crosby by-election and my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) may remember that my enthusiasm was mistaken for that of an SDP mole until Shirley Williams branded me "the grubby end of the Tory party".

No constituency association would give me an interview until the opportunity arose in the new seat of Bolton, North-East. Told that I was most unlikely to be selected, I decided, as a father of four, to base my appeal on being a family man—not knowing that the local favourite was a father of seven.

Delighted to be selected, I set about working on local issues. My constituency is a microcosm of the country as a whole, with a strong emphasis on manufacturing industry. It suffered in the 1981 recession, so I concentrated my energies on creating new jobs, welcoming the then Prime Minister to launch the new enterprise agency, Bolton Business Ventures.

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

Apart from its history as a cotton town, Bolton is known for its football team. It was remarked to me that my opponent in my first election, the present hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), was a keen supporter of Bolton Wanderers, but, sadly for her and the Wanderers, neither gained any promotion at the time.

When I arrived in the House of Commons, I was amazed at the lack of facilities. Finding it a little too breezy to work on the Terrace, I settled at an empty desk nearby, only to be accosted by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Drake (Dame J. Fookes). "Are you trying to prove a point?" she demanded. The former hon. Member for Cheltenham told me to stay where I was, but I beat a retreat, as I realised that I was in the Lady Members' Room.

I booked an early lunch with my wife in the Strangers' Dining Room. We chose a table by the window, but, starting our meal, we noticed growing consternation. Eventually, the head waiter came over to ask my wife whether she was a Member, pointing out that we were sitting at the Labour Chief Whip's table in the Members' Dining Room.

It is private Members' Bills which best bring together hon. Members on both sides of the House. My first modest success in the House was working with the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on issues to do with handicapped children. I am delighted at the cross-party welcome now given to the Government's adoption White Paper, which puts family values first and foremost.

Back in Bolton, all parties agree that Bolton belongs to Lancashire, but we have a little local difficulty in convincing the Parliamentary Boundary Commissioner of that. Bolton's coat of arms carries an elephant, historically linked with Coventry. I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) all success with his campaign to restore the historic county boundaries.

Samuel Crompton's spinning mules have all gone now, but Bolton is more prosperous than ever. The key to Bolton's success lies in its enterprising family businesses. Best known is Warburton's, Britain's largest independent bakery, now employing 5,000 people and selling here and abroad with great success. Another excellent employer is W. and J. Leigh and Co., Britain's most successful unlimited company, selling specialist paints all over the world.

One of Bolton's most famous characters is steeplejack Fred Dibnah. Worried that he would soon run out of mill chimneys to demolish. Fred is diversifying into making weathercocks, sold under the slogan

"Fred's Cocks—guaranteed to twirl."

Fred's book of his life as a steeplejack starts with the words

"When I was a little lad, I went to school, like all little lads do."

If only they did today. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is absolutely right—back to basics. Surely the most important basic is to bring up our children to know the difference between right and wrong.

For my constituents in Bolton, the centrepiece of the Gracious Speech is the new Criminal Justice Bill. Thank goodness that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues in the Home Office are challenging the misguided thinking that put the criminal first and the victim last. We are building new courts in Bolton; now give us new powers for our magistrates as well.

The speech that we heard today in the other place represents action to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of our people. It is the speech of a Government determined to change Britain for the better. The Government do best for Britain when they are true to their convictions. The Gracious Speech reasserts the convictions that common sense and continuity matter; criminals need punishment, not simply reform; self-reliance is better than state dependence; and the Government must be prudent with other people's money. So let us go forward with this programme—forward under strong leadership, Conservative leadership and leadership that is working.

3.15 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): It is a pleasant convention of the House that the first duty of the Leader of the Opposition today is to congratulate the mover and the seconder of the Loyal Address. For me, it is an easy duty because of the quality of the contributions from both hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) has a long record of service in the House—33 years as a Member of Parliament and, as he reminded us, most of it representing Sussex. Of course, he was also a London Member. He had a celebrated tussle with Lady Jeger for the Holborn and St. Pancras seat. He won the seat from Lady Jeger in 1959 and then lost it to her in 1964. The hon. Gentleman made a wise decision to move to Sussex in 1965 because Holborn and St. Pancras has been Labour ever since.

Before the hon. Gentleman entered the House, he had a distinguished career as a broadcaster. He was a founding member of the famous "Tonight" team. Of course, those were the days when interviewers were a much more courteous bunch than they are today. "Tonight" has developed to become "Newsnight", but I am glad to say that the hon. Gentleman is much too stylish and urbane a performer ever to be compared with the likes of Jeremy Paxman—*[Interruption.]* That is probably the most courageous remark that has been made for some time and it is made in the cause of being generous to a Conservative Member.

It was in a television studio that the hon. Gentleman had perhaps his greatest moment. He was the first British interviewer to question Brigitte Bardot on television. I have been told that he got straight to the point and that his opening question was, "Apart from men, what are your other interests?"

From such great heights, the hon. Gentleman has declined to senior membership of the 1922 Committee. I understand that an election to the executive of that Committee is presently in hand. It is widely expected that it will provide yet another opportunity for the Conservative party to display its spirit of unity and comradely affection. I wish the hon. Gentleman well. He wears his grey suit with style. He sounds and looks the part of a member of the executive of the 1922 Committee, which is a lot more than can be said for some others who occupy that position these days.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) seconded the address with fluency, flair and, if I may say so, disarming wit. His description of the

adventures of the new Member will strike a chord with many Members of the House. He has not been with us as long as the mover of the address, but he has managed to get elected twice since he first came here in 1983, with majorities of less than 1,000 on both occasions—813 in 1987 and 185 last year. He is on record as saying that concern about unemployment made him decide to go into politics. Given the size of his majority and its downward trend, that is a wholly understandable concern.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East was bold enough—perhaps even rash enough—to tell us of the present that he received from the Home Secretary for service as his Parliamentary Private Secretary. He told us that the book was called "Modern Fairy Tales". He did not tell us that it was a collection of speeches to the Conservative party conference.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East was reported in a diary column in the press the other day as having said that the speech that he had prepared to deliver on this occasion had been stolen from his car. He appealed for it to be returned because, it is said, it was of no use to anyone else. The hint was taken and it was found in a wheelie-bin.

The House is grateful to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East for his witty speech and we also recognise the contribution that he has made to many of our debates. He has not hesitated to be deeply embroiled in controversies as wide-ranging as abortion and social security, and his genuine devotion to the cause of the disabled is widely admired on both sides of the House.

The mover and the seconder referred to some parts of the Gracious Speech. I shall start, on the lines of the mover, by referring to foreign policy. There are some important developments which I am sure all hon. Members will welcome. In September this year the momentous agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation signalled a new start in the middle east. It is vital that those who have taken risks for peace receive the whole-hearted support of the international community as they grapple with the formidable tasks which they have set themselves.

Yesterday, as the mover noted, Mr. Mandela and President de Klerk made a historic agreement about a new democratic constitution for South Africa. On 27 April next year, the first—and crucial—non-racial elections in the history of South Africa will be held. It is vital that Her Majesty's Government give all possible assistance to ensure that those elections are both free and fair.

We welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to strengthening the United Nations' capacity for peacekeeping and preventive action. That cannot be achieved without greater support by the international community in terms of financial and military resources, if the United Nations is to make a more effective contribution to the solution of acute and deeply distressing situations such as those that are occurring in Bosnia, Somalia and elsewhere.

Opposition Members warmly welcome the signing of the chemical weapons convention and we agree with the Government about the importance of an indefinite and unconditional extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The cause of non-proliferation will be immeasurably assisted by early agreement on a nuclear test ban. The continued moratorium on tests, led by the current United States administration, is encouraging and the time is overdue for Her Majesty's Government to give the initiative their full support.

We welcome enthusiastically the early accession of Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden to the European Union. In making their applications they have not sought to opt out of the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty, which they all strongly support. Once they are members, Conservative Britain will be isolated, not just as one among 12, but as one among 16.

In Northern Ireland a window of opportunity now exists to achieve a lasting and peaceful settlement. The Government must grasp this opportunity and work with the Irish Government and the constitutional parties in the Province to create the conditions for peace. The speech by the Tanaiste on the principles that should be applied has rightly been recognised as an important step forward, particularly his acknowledgement of the importance of recognising the legitimate concerns of both communities in Northern Ireland.

We agree with the Government that if the IRA genuinely and clearly abandons the use of violence, there should be no objection to the participation of Sinn Fein in constitutional discussions. We believe also that the elected representatives of Northern Ireland have an obligation to respond to calls from all sections of the community to enter into discussions to agree a peaceful settlement. The British Government should not hesitate to call the parties back to the negotiating table. Compromise and concessions will be required from both sides. All the parties involved, including the British Government, must not be afraid to take risks for peace. They must all be prepared to transcend the old dogmas that stand in the way of reconciliation, which is passionately desired by the vast majority of people throughout the whole British Isles.

At the Conservative party conference the Prime Minister launched his big idea—"back to basics". It is true that those magic words do not appear in the Gracious Speech itself. We should perhaps be grateful that Her Majesty was not obliged to repeat the mantra, but there is no doubt that that is the right hon. Gentleman's chosen course. He could not have been clearer about it at Blackpool. The Conservative party, he told us, is now going back to basics.

Ever since then political commentators, some bewildered members of the Cabinet and millions of incredulous electors have been trying to work out what the Prime Minister means. The first thought that occurs to them, perhaps not surprisingly, is that the Conservatives have been in government for 14 years. If now we have to go back to basics, what on earth has been happening over 14 years of Conservative Government? Or is this perhaps another coded attack on the glorious achievements of the former Tory leader—another oblique reference to

"the golden age that never was",

to quote the Prime Minister's own revealing description of his predecessors's achievements? I hope that there are still some loyal souls on the Tory Benches who will be prepared, as a matter of honour, to rebut such a surreptitious attack on the Thatcher Downing street years.

We know, of course, that the Prime Minister is haunted by those years and even more troubled by the recent flood of memoirs from former Cabinet Ministers all bearing the same title, "How I almost stood up to Mrs. Thatcher". Her memoirs rather stole the show at the Conservative party conference. Even the Prime Minister's speech could not avoid them. At the start of his speech to the conference he said:

[Mr. John Smith]

"Memoirs to the left of me
Memoirs to the right of me,
Memoirs in front of me
Volley'd and thundered".

He borrowed the quote from Tennyson's great poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade". Perhaps he should have read on. The poem continues:

"Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death . . .
Rode the six hundred".

I know why the Prime Minister did not finish the quote —there are only 332 Tory Members facing obliteration at the next election.

We all know that, after 14 years of Conservative Government, "back to basics" is no more and no less than an appalling admission of failure. The Conservative party and the Prime Minister have clearly reached the conclusion that they can no longer plausibly defend their record in office, so they are seeking to wipe from our consciousness the fact that they have been in power for the longest single period of any Government since the second world war and that they—and they alone—after all these years, are responsible for the state of Britain today.

Let us look at the record of failure from which the Conservatives seek to shy away. Since 1979, economic growth on average has been only 1·7 per cent. per year —worse than the preceding decades of the 1960s and the 1970s. Now, after all those years, we have an economy weighed down by the burden of two massive deficits in our public finances and overseas trade. Worst of all, the 14 Conservative years have seen the return of mass unemployment, with millions of our fellow citizens denied the opportunity, dignity and responsibility of work.

Let us look at the other dismal record-breaking achievements of the Government. Record levels of crime —up by a massive 120 per cent. since they came to power; record levels of homelessness; record numbers of families living in poverty; and the gap between the rich and the poor wider now than in Victorian times. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] With a record like that, it is no wonder that they want to divert attention from their own responsibility. Their means of diverting attention is the oldest trick in the book—create a diversion, search out a scapegoat and put the blame on someone else. They know that it is no longer convincing to blame the last Labour Government or the trade unions—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Why not? There are still some brave souls prepared to try that one on. Well, let them try. The public will not listen very carefully to that.

They cannot use the last Labour Government or the trade unions as an excuse; it is doubtful that they can any longer blame the Government of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). After 14 years in power, the Government know that those excuses are unconvincing. The Prime Minister in particular knows they are unconvincing.

This summer the Prime Minister gave an interview to the *Los Angeles Times*. He was asked directly about the unpopularity of his Government so soon after they had won an election, and he replied:

"Fiddle-de-dee! I said immediately after the election, sitting up the day after we won the election with a number of people around me: 'Within the next twelve months the Government will be the most unpopular we have seen for a long time!' Nothing in the interim has changed my judgment about that. It was staggeringly prescient. It perhaps hasn't come about in quite the way I had myself imagined, but it has. We have been here for 14 years. There is no-one else one can blame for anything that has gone wrong."

What a revealing conclusion—

"there is no one else one can blame for anything that has gone wrong."

The Prime Minister's conclusion, hidden until now in the columns of the *Los Angeles Times*, deserves a wider audience. I suggest that he circulates the remarks in a memorandum to his Cabinet colleagues, in particular to those who, for reasons of delicacy, have now become known as the B team—for they were the ones who were let loose at the Tory party conference to target single mothers as the new enemy within. What a disgraceful exercise that was. It was an exhibition so odious that it drew a stinging rebuke from the right-wing commentator, Mr. Simon Jenkins of *The Times*, who described it as:

"Mob oratory of the worst sort."

Let me quote his assessment. He wrote:

"Ministers paraded the Tory Party in its least attractive mode: lecturing the working class on personal morality. No single parent, no homeless teenager, no dole recipient, no immigrant refugee was free of a sneer from somebody on the platform."

We all listened to those speeches and watched that conference and we all know how true that assessment is.

What Ministers did at Blackpool, consciously and deliberately, for their own political purposes, was to exaggerate cynically a social problem. In doing so they insulted thousands of conscientious and caring parents, widowed as well as divorced.

Simon Jenkins went on to say:

"Such sanctimoniousness is a measure of the insecurity and desperation of some in the Tory party."

That desperation is nowhere more evident than in the bizarre theories of the Home Secretary that rising crime and what he calls moral decay can be traced back to the second world war when fathers were absent in our fighting forces. Of course that was a time described by a former Conservative leader as "Britain's finest hour". No evidence is produced for the Home Secretary's wild assertion, but with this lot evidence is not required.

Apparently it is not enough to blame it all on Harold Wilson and the 1960s; now it is all Winston Churchill's fault. Do the Government really believe all this? Do they seriously expect anyone in the country to believe it? Clearly it is not just a few Conservative Back Benchers who are barmy. I do not know to which of the two B teams the Home Secretary has been assigned. For all I know he may have sought to qualify for membership of both.

I mentioned evidence. The Government's view is clearly that not only—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] Hon. Members do not like it when "back to basics" is challenged. All I am asking for is some evidence for the assertions that the Government have been making. They do not believe that it is necessary to have evidence when one is making a constant appeal to prejudice. If they get contrary evidence, what do they do with it? They have a simple solution—bin it. Even the evidence of their own advisers at the Home Office, the Department for Education and the Cabinet Office is treated to the same response— "Just bin it". Perhaps they should also shred it, for sometimes it comes out.

In the leaked memorandum from the Cabinet Office —*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members do not like reference to be made to that memorandum from the Cabinet Office. I am glad to say that it has now made its way into the public domain despite the fact that every single page has stamped at the top, "Policy in Confidence". *[Interruption.]* It is

wholly in the public interest that what I am about to say has been revealed to the public. Having in mind what I am about to say, it would be disgraceful for it to be prevented from reaching the public because that memorandum dealt with the assertion of the Secretary of State for Social Security that young ladies get pregnant just to jump the housing list.

The facts that the Cabinet Office produced are these: only 5 per cent. of lone mothers are teenagers; 88 per cent. of pregnancies are unplanned; most single mothers do not know the benefits to which they are entitled; and 90 per cent. of 16 and 17-year-old mothers live at home with their parents. That was what was contained in the evidence given to Ministers in the Cabinet. But what have facts to do with Tory prejudice?

Despite the evidence, the Secretary of State for Education ploughed on with his ill-considered plans for tests in schools. Two senior advisers resigned and this week he even lost his permanent secretary. Undeterred by those failures and, once again, with no evidence whatever to back it up, he proposes to begin the deskilling of the teaching profession. He would be much better employed if he had plans to provide nursery education for all children and the Queen's Speech would have been much better if it had contained such plans.

As the report of the National Commission on Education shows only too clearly, investment in the education of the under-fives is the right sort of basic investment in education and provides real benefits for children, families and society. Typically, the commission's evidence was not good enough for the Government.

It is not just Ministers who ignore evidence. In one of his recent essays on modern Conservative thought, delivered at the Carlton club earlier this year, the Prime Minister—ever eager to scapegoat and to ignore evidence—sought to distinguish between the social problems of suburbs, small towns and villages on the one hand and inner cities and that that was not the fault of 14 years of Conservative Government but was down to socialism. As the Home Secretary knows well, when the evidence is examined, it can be seen that crime in rural areas is, regrettably, rising much faster than in the inner cities. But when did facts ever get in the Government's way? *[Interruption.]* The Conservative party does not like discussing "back to basics", but we shall have many such discussions.

I fear that the abject failure to tackle the real problems that affect our nation is reflected all too clearly in the legislative programme that has been laid before us. Apparently, we are to have a Bill on deregulation.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I respect the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concern for crime and defeating violence. Does that mean that he will now resume support for the prevention of terrorism Act?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that, when that matter has been debated, we have drawn attention to advice given by Home Office advisers supporting the points that we have made on the prevention of terrorism. Conservative Members should reflect on why the so-called "party of law and order" has seen crime rise by 120 per cent. during its period of office. The right hon. Gentleman would be better employed asking the Home Secretary why that has occurred during a period of Conservative Government.

I was about to refer to the Bill on deregulation, which is to be presented to the House as part of the legislative programme. Apparently, after 14 years of Conservative Government, too many regulations have accumulated. How that happened during the years of the so-called enterprise culture, and the M and S and economic miracle, is hard to imagine. Of the 3,500 regulations apparently reviewed by the Government, 71 per cent. have been introduced since 1979.

There can be no objection to weeding out outdated and unnecessary provisions. What is to be objected to is a weakening of the proper protection for both employees and consumers in the name of the same misguided dogma which, last Session, saw the abolition of wages councils. Any weakening of safety standards for people at work will be fiercely resisted by the Opposition. Too many avoidable accidents already happen at the work place and it cannot be right to dismantle protection that would increase their number. Consumers, too, will be rightly concerned at any weakening of protection contained in, for example, fire safety regulations. It is right, is it not, that there are strict provisions controlling the manufacture of furniture and children's nightwear? To avoid horrific dangers, that protection should be not only maintained but enforced with vigour.

It would also be wrong, although I understand that it is being considered, to seek to reduce insulation standards for new houses. Energy costs for millions of people are being increased enough already by the imposition of VAT on fuel without extra costs being caused by a lowering of standards, which inevitably will cause greater energy waste.

Hard though it is to believe, I understand that one of the regulations being reviewed is the obligation on employers to provide toilet paper and soap in workplace lavatories. What kind of uncivilised nonsense are the Government engaged in? *[Interruption.]* That may not sound important to Conservative Members, but it is extremely important to people who work in factories. The public, listening to Conservative Members' sneering reception of that, will draw their own conclusions.

Surely the basic truth is that this much-trumpeted deregulation programme is marginal to the real problems that confront our industry and our economy. Let me remind the House that Britain is still struggling to recover from recession—the greatest recession since the 1930s—and is still afflicted by mass unemployment. Neither in the Gracious Speech nor in any other manifestation of their policies do the Government show any understanding of the real problems that lie in the way of recovery and prosperity. Our problem is persistent underinvestment in industry, persistent underinvestment in skills development and persistent underinvestment in innovation and in our regions, causing structural defects in our economy, which cause low growth, high unemployment and a deficit in overseas trade which is unprecedented at this stage of the economic cycle.

The external deficit in the first half of this year is equivalent to 2 per cent. of national income. After 14 years of Conservative economic management, the wealth-creating core of our economy is simply too small to sustain our prosperity or to allow us to pay our way in the world.

Sadly, there is no sign that those vital and, if I may say so, basic strategic issues are being tackled by the Government. They are engaged, in contradiction of their election promises, in a series of tax increases which are not

[Mr. Smith]

only unfair to millions of people but which threaten to undermine the consumer confidence that is necessary to any recovery of demand.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that the introduction of a minimum wage would cost jobs?

Mr. Smith: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to ask me about VAT, but I know that he does not want to do that. The introduction of a minimum wage, as experience in other countries shows, works, if anything, towards the strengthening of employment rather than in the opposite direction. The hon. Gentleman would benefit from reading some of the recent research that has been conducted, especially the evidence from France. Does he agree with the right-wing Prime Minister of France, who said that despite its austerity programme the minimum wage would be preserved because it was part of the social compact with the people of France?

The hon. Gentleman will not ask me about VAT and nor will other Conservative Members because they stood at the last election on a manifesto that said that they would not increase VAT—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall not warn the hon. Gentleman further.

Mr. Smith: I am not sure what happened there, but I shall get on with my speech.

The trouble is that not only does the Gracious Speech show no contrition for the tax increases that the Government have imposed, but it signals another piece of legislation that flows from the previous Budget—an increase in national insurance contributions from 9 per cent. to 10 per cent. For most people in this country, that is an extra tax on income slightly higher than another 1p on income tax—so much for Tory promises at the general election not to increase taxes on income. As a result of tax increases already announced and even without taking into account what the Chancellor may propose in his forthcoming Budget, a typical family in Britain will be paying another £8·50 per week from next April. Who at the general election could have divined from anything said by the Conservative party that tax increases of £8·50 per week would happen within a year of its being elected to office?

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): On the subject of taxation and its fair and proportionate nature, on which some of us may wish to comment later in the debate, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that taxation should be collected? As leader of the Labour party, what does he say about the London borough of Lambeth, which dismally fails to collect 75 per cent. of its council tax?

Mr. Smith: All the agencies, including central Government, should make it their business to collect tax properly. If the hon. Gentleman has a genuine sense of proportion and of fairness—I take his comments as an indication that he may speak on that later and I hope that he does—why not ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he does not begin to block up the tax loopholes that cost the country's taxpayers billions of pounds? If that was an aspect of fairness that had passed him by until now, he can mention it in his speech. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Calls from sedentary positions do not enhance our debate one bit. Indeed, they are boring.

Mr. Smith: The discomfort that occurs on the Government Benches whenever tax increases are mentioned is quite noticeable because it is the party that told a lie at the general election. It said that it would not increase taxes and even told us which taxes it would not increase. Those are the very taxes that it is now increasing and it will cost a typical family in Britain an extra £8·50 per week.

The Budget later this month needs to be geared to economic recovery that promotes investment and begins to tackle the deep-seated long-term problems that are the legacy of 14 years of Conservative Government. Instead of concentrating on those issues, the Government are intent on promoting irrelevancies. A prize example of that is to cause yet another upheaval in local government. Not only is there no demand in Scotland and Wales for the Government's proposals, but there is massive opposition across a wide spectrum of political views. An overwhelming majority of the hon. Members who represent Scottish and Welsh constituencies are against the Bills that will only be carried by the votes of English Conservatives who do not represent the people in the countries concerned. I understand that it is proposed to introduce the Bill concerning Welsh local government in the House of Lords. That is a quite outrageous and reprehensible way for the Government to proceed.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting that hon. Members from England should not determine issues in Scotland and Wales. Is not it the case that we are a United Kingdom Parliament? Does not everyone deserve to be able to speak on such issues?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) showed a sense of aptness in intervening at that point. I was about to point out that the change was especially reprehensible because the true purpose of the legislation in Scotland was to gerrymander boundaries in the interests of the Conservative party. One of the most blatant examples occurs in the hon. Gentleman's constituency where there is deliberate gerrymandering to assist the interests of the Conservative party. Everyone in Scotland knows that to be the case.

Local government reform in both countries should be preceded by the devolution of power from central Government. That would be a genuine increase in democratic accountability. But of course a Government who are committed to a relentless increase in quangos and to the imposition of unelected Conservatives to administer our public services are hardly likely to be interested in democratic accountability.

There is one thing for which we should have a little gratitude. The Government were forced back from their plan to privatise water in Scotland because of a nationwide campaign led by the Labour party. They were forced into the curious halfway house of removing water from local authorities, and therefore from democratic control, and giving it to so-called "public" boards which, of course, will just be another set of quangos. The only thing that can be said for that is that it is not privatisation. The Government should be warned that if it is intended to be a paving step towards privatisation, the passage of time will not diminish public opposition to the privatisation of water. Taxpayers

in Scotland, Wales and England will continue to wonder why the Government spend hundreds of millions of pounds on another local government reorganisation when vital public services are being undermined by a lack of finance.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will not convince my constituents. The Bournemouth and District Water Company, which has been private for more than 100 years, has consistently had the lowest rate of charges in the United Kingdom and has never had even a restriction on supply.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman seems to be unaware that the privatisation of water in England and Wales has pushed water charges to unprecedented heights. The people who pay the water charges know that that is the case.

In 1979, at the start of their party's years of power, the Conservatives complained loudly about the prevailing levels of crime. Their manifesto boasted that they would restore the rule of law. We know their record 14 years later. Crime is up by 120 per cent., violent crime is up by 126 per cent. and burglary is up by 180 per cent. Only one in every 50 crimes committed ends in a conviction in court. So much for restoring the rule of law!

We shall, of course, examine with care the Government's proposed legislation on criminal justice. We believe in a twin-track approach. While we should be prepared to be tough on crime, we should be equally tough on the causes of crime. We need to make far more effort to detect crime and to bring its perpetrators to justice. We also need to take more effective action to prevent crime from occurring in the first place. We need visible and effective policing in our communities. We need to take seriously the prevention of crime by better security for property and by better safety in public places. We also need to offer our young people in particular opportunities for employment and for personal fulfilment to counter the alienation from society which corrodes a sense of responsibility and which inevitably fosters crime.

We have been told that part of the intention of the "back to basics" policy is to teach people the difference between right and wrong and the importance of the acceptance of responsibility. The problem for the Government in that approach is their credibility as teachers and the example of responsibility that they have set. Surely it is wrong to break election promises as cavalierly as the Government have done. Surely it is wrong to impose a tax on the heating of every household in Britain when such an action was expressly excluded before the 1992 election. Surely it is wrong to scapegoat single parents and to stigmatise their children. Surely it is wrong never to resign voluntarily if major errors are made. Surely it is wrong to deny responsibility for policies which have led to mass unemployment and misery for millions of families. Surely it is wrong to have deliberately widened the gap between the rich and poor in our society.

Those are actions of a Government who purport to lecture others about getting "back to basics". I believe that "back to basics" is easily exposed as a political sham, but there are basic needs and aspirations among our people. They want jobs for themselves and for their children. They want a truly national health service which is available to all and which provides the best possible health care proudly in line with the principles of the service's founders. They want well-equipped schools and well-trained and valued teachers to provide opportunities for their children to learn and to succeed. They want decent and affordable homes for their families. They want our industry to compete with the best and to win, for they know that that is the best security for their prosperity.

I regret that the Gracious Speech is irrelevant to the real aspirations and needs of our people. It is so removed from those aspirations that, instead of going "back to basics", the Government should be going back to the drawing board.

4.3 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): The House will wish me to congratulate my hon. Friends who so ably moved and seconded Her Majesty's Loyal Address.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) reminded the House, we have both contested parts of St. Pancras in our time. My hon. Friend did so rather earlier and with rather more success than I. He won Holborn and St. Pancras, South and held the seat between 1959 and 1964, whereas I regret that I lost St. Pancras, North to the noble Lord Stallard in 1974. However, it is as the hon. Member for East Grinstead, and now as the hon. Member for Wealden, that my hon. Friend has become best known in the House.

During his lengthy public service the House has benefited from his expert knowledge in many areas of policy, and perhaps above all in defence, in which he was a Minister during the 1970s. He was also the Chairman of the Conservative Back Bench defence committee for many years. He is an acknowledged expert and is recognised as such by every hon. Member. During that time, my hon. Friend has built a reputation as being someone who speaks when he has something to say, and as someone who deserves to be listened to. That is an enviable reputation for any hon. Member to obtain.

I looked back at the maiden speech by my hon. Friend. At that stage, he was much exercised by a traffic scheme which turned much of St. Pancras into what was then called a "pink zone". Alas, that area has turned into a political red zone, and my hon. Friend has moved onwards.

The Leader of the Opposition, like me, has passed the age of 50 and recalls my hon. Friend's other distinguished career as a television interviewer. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, my hon. Friend interviewed the famous, the notorious, and the not so famous on "Tonight". When my hon. Friend did so, he was watched by four times as many people as will watch "Newsnight" tonight. That may speak volumes for the discrimination of those who watched television at that time, rather than those who will engage in late-night television watching this evening. The House will be grateful to my hon. Friend for the way in which he moved the Loyal Address.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) is one of the House's survivors. He has been targeted three times by the Labour party at elections; on three occasions, it has missed. At the previous election, the bookies gave odds of three to one against my hon. Friend. He laid a hefty sum of money on himself and cleaned up. I advise my hon. Friend to lay his money now for the next election before the odds begin to change—as they surely will. My hon. Friend has been an outstanding businessman. He started his own business which now employs hundreds of people in different parts of the

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country. He is held in respect here, not only for his expertise as an engineer but, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) generously acknowledged, for his deep and abiding compassion for disabled people and others who are unable to help themselves.

My hon Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East, is a formidable fighter for his constituency. Week after week he persuades Minister after Minister to visit it. Those Ministers are brave men. When I visited Bolton with my hon. Friend, a large crowd kept throwing eggs at him, very nearly hitting me. Curiously, none of my other right hon. and hon. Friends who have visited Bolton with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East faced that difficulty.

This will be a memorable week for my hon. Friend. Today he seconded the Humble Address. Tomorrow, following the marriage of his daughter, Sophie, in the Crypt Chapel, he will address an audience on an occasion that will be more memorable even than today's. I am sure that the House will join me in wishing him and his daughter and her husband a happy day.

Neither convention nor conviction compels me to be as complimentary about the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—as ever, it was Monklands music hall. It was excellent for the Palace of Varieties, but a touch light for the Palace of Westminster. It was the old content-free regime. *[Interruption.]* It was an agreeable speech that said nothing at length, as always. I shall turn to the speech of the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a few moments—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Gentlemen must contain themselves or I shall have to take action against them. I do not wish to do that so early in the Session.

The Prime Minister: To the extent that anything is written here, it is a compliment on my powers of anticipation. I shall return to some of the observations of the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a few moments. I first wish to speak of other matters of concern to every hon. Member.

Despite the legislative programme, Northern Ireland must remain at the head of our priorities in the foreseeable future. Our outrage in this House and elsewhere at repeated carnage must not be blunted simply because we have lived with the problem for so long. The stark fact is that terrorism has claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people in Northern Ireland since 1969—75 of them this year alone.

There are, I believe, two moods in Northern Ireland. There is a palpable mood for peace. But there is also, among some people, a feeling that the dead must be endlessly avenged and that any accommodation with the opposing view would betray those who have died. Surely the right memorial to those who have been murdered is to ensure that no one else is murdered in future. Unfortunately, avenging the dead means more dead, and they then call out to be avenged as well.

We are not looking for peace at any price. A peace that involved conceding to terrorism or negotiating under its shadow would not be acceptable to the Government or, I believe, to the people of Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, there may now be a chance that we should try to take. I do not wish to raise false hopes. History and deeply entrenched positions can all too easily bring a sense of despair, as we have seen so often in the past. However, there may be an opportunity for progress, and we must explore that opportunity. If we do not succeed on this occasion, we must go back and keep exploring again and again that opportunity for peace.

Our chances improve if we have the support of both sides of the community, of all the constitutional parties and of the Irish Government. But no party and no organisation can exercise a veto on progress. That has been the basis of my consultations, and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends, over recent months—those consultations with the constitutional parties and with the Irish Government. We hope to make further progress before, during and after my meeting with the Taoiseach in Dublin next month. Our aim is clear. We seek both a permanent end to violence and a political settlement. We have made substantial progress in the three areas of the political talks. We are talking bilaterally, because a premature attempt to convene a round table conference would probably be counter-productive. But if at an appropriate time it would help the process to put proposals of our own on the table, we shall be ready to do so. We are certainly prepared for that.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: In one moment, if the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

I said earlier this week that Sinn Fein could enter the political arena if the IRA's violence ended for good and was so demonstrated over a sufficient interval. If they send such a message, we are ready to listen to them. Indeed, it would be irresponsible not to. But, by itself, a statement of intent by them is not enough. The violence must stop and it must be seen to stop.

The position of the Government should not be misunderstood. The democratic process is there for all who show that they can abide by its rules. But there will be no rewards for terrorism. Nor will we compromise on the vital principle that there can be no change in Northern Ireland's status without the freely expressed consent of its people. It is for the people of Northern Ireland freely and democratically to determine their own constitutional future.

I warmly welcome what the Irish Prime Minister and deputy Prime Minister have said to support the principle of consent, and the talks process, and to accept the need for changes in the Irish constitution. That is the framework within which we and the Irish Government will work for peace, stability and reconciliation. We are ready to respond to a cessation of violence. I said so with the Taoiseach in Brussels on 29 October. I said so at the Guildhall and I say so again to the House. It is now for Sinn Fein and the IRA, and equally for the loyalist paramilitary organisations, to draw the right conclusions.

Mr. Ashdown: The House will have heard the important statement that the Prime Minister has made on the subject of Northern Ireland. To the extent that the Prime Minister has—and he has—put his personal authority behind that, he deserves the support of the whole House and ought to get it.

The point that he made earlier about being prepared for the British Government to put down their proposals if agreement cannot be reached between the constitutional

parties is an extremely important one. I put it to him that it is probably equally important that he does not leave it too long before doing that, and that there is a moment arriving —surely not far away—when that step, if agreement cannot be reached between the constitutional parties, will have to be taken and the British Government will have to put their own initiative where agreement cannot be fully reached.

The Prime Minister: We are still seeking to talk and reach that position through dialogue bilaterally with the constitutional parties. That clearly is the first prize, but we have prepared for the proposition that that may not be possible. I very much hope that it will.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): The House will have listened extremely carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said. Will he give the House a clearer indication as to what he thinks the negotiations would be about? Is not it the case that Sinn Fein is not interested in pure power sharing with Ulster? Is not it the case that the only conditions on which the IRA would give up violence, and with the agreement of Sinn Fein, would be if there were further moves towards the unification of Ireland? Is not that the point?

The Prime Minister: I think that my right hon. Friend will have heard me a moment ago, for I said it quite deliberately so that nobody could misunderstand it. The House heard me repeat the constitutional guarantee that was set out before. I have repeated it publicly on a number of occasions so that nobody seeking to make judgments on these matters can be in any doubt about the seriousness with which the Government take that constitutional guarantee. It is a cast-iron guarantee. The future constitutional position of the people of Northern Ireland is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland to determine and for no one else to determine. I am happy to repeat to my right hon. Friend that that is the firmly established position of the Government and that it will remain so for so long as I lead the Government.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Prime Minister accept that, while it is desirable for the constitutional parties to be involved, if at the end of the day agreement cannot be reached with the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, an agreement of a wide-ranging kind for a political settlement can be reached between the two Governments which obviously accepts the wish of the present majority in Northern Ireland to remain in the Union? In those circumstances, does the Prime Minister recognise that it would be the wish of the British people at large that the two Governments should reach agreement and not allow a veto which, in effect, would mean that there would be no chance of peace in Northern Ireland? Is not there one constitutional party, the Democratic Unionists, which cannot be relied on to provide the progress that we all wish to see?

The Prime Minister: I chose my words with great care and with some consideration a few moments ago. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised that I do not wish to add to them. The consent of the people of Northern Ireland, to whatever is determined, is clearly going to be the central and most important requirement of any successful settlement.

While Northern Ireland touches us all, the economy affects us all. The whole House will have welcomed the increasingly good news in the past few days——

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I missed it.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) says that he missed it. Where has he been? There were better than expected trade figures last week; better than expected inflation figures yesterday—down from 1·8 per cent. to 1·4 per cent. in October—and there were better than expected unemployment figures today. The figure is down by 50,000 and that is the biggest monthly fall for four years. Unemployment has now fallen by 137,000 this year.

I can pinpoint with great accuracy the moment when the figures started to turn downwards. It was exactly the moment when the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) predicted:

"I make one Budget forecast—that, after the Budget, unemployment will rise this month, next month and for months afterwards."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 289.]

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East is, alas, clearly engaged on more important matters than the debate on the Queen's Speech. However, he does not have much luck with predictions. He is always wrong. For him, the laws of probability and statistics are suspended. If I could persuade the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East to tell me which horse was bound to lose the grand national, I promise him that I would put my shirt on that horse with a great deal of confidence.

As other countries remain in recession, we are emerging from it. We now have the opportunity of a long period of sustained growth with low inflation. There has been a great deal of pain, effort and difficulty in getting inflation down, but we can now see the rewards. Inflation has been under 2 per cent. for the past nine months, a situation not seen for more than 30 years. As a result of that, recovery—as we said it would—is folowing: gross domestic product is up; manufacturing output is up; retail sales are up; and export volumes are up. It is no wonder that a recent survey of international business shows that Europe's business leaders think that the United Kingdom is now the best place for manufacturing investment.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will give way in a little while.

Those business leaders know that we have the lowest inflation rate in the G7; the second lowest inflation rate in the Community; among the lowest interest rates in the Community; the predicted highest growth rate in the Community this year and next; and that we are one of only two Community countries in which unemployment is falling.

Business also knows that, contrary to the position that was honestly stated again by the right hon. and learned Gentleman, we are determined to keep social on-costs down. The right hon. and learned Gentleman went to Brussels last Friday to sign up to every dot and comma of the socialist European manifesto. But that was Friday. On Saturday, he said that he had not meant what he signed up to. I do not know why—perhaps he had not read it or he had not understood it. At any rate, on Saturday he did not mean it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman obviously

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thought that it was unfair of those beastly foreign socialists to take him at his word. I sympathise with him—they are difficult—but the right hon. and learned Gentleman really should read what he signs. It is tedious, I know, but it is very worthwhile, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman found out.

One other thing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman signed up to, which he neglected to mention in his speech today, when he had a great deal to say about VAT on fuel, is the European socialist manifesto which says:

"We stand for a tax system which penalises work less and environmental pollution more . . . Forms of taxation which can improve the ecological and energy situation have a role to play."

I could only assume that that was another part of the socialist manifesto that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not read, did not understand, or had his earphones on and did not hear.

The economic news that I outlined a few moments ago is the background against which we bring forward our legislative programme. At the heart of the Gracious Speech are measures to tackle crime, improve teaching in our schools and make our economy more competitive. I believe that those are the right policies because they provide the foundations for a successful, tolerant and responsible society. We can raise standards in our schools, make our streets safer and make our economy more competitive by building on those basic values.

I am not surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman cannot understand the point about going back to basics. How can we expect him to understand basic values when Opposition Members repeatedly vote against increasing sentences for violent crime, when they oppose tests in schools, when, in the same breath, they call for lower taxes and higher spending, and when they still do not trust people to make their own decisions in health, in education, in pensions, in housing and in many other aspects of life? "Basic values" means basic economic values such as low inflation, free markets and a climate that encourages free enterprise, basic social values such as self-discipline, respect for the law, concern for others, individual responsibility and an emphasis on getting the basics of education right first. That means taking on as well the spread of politically correct thinking.

I am afraid that the Labour party is all too often out of touch with the values and instincts of the British nation. Labour Members voted against every piece of legislation to introduce tougher penalties for crime, voted against the measures that allow people to appeal against over-lenient sentences, against testing in schools, against grant-maintained status, against A-levels, against city technology colleges, and against rents for mortgages. They have voted against every one of those—against stopping people jumping the housing queue, against privatisation and against a great deal else. They have voted against every single measure to extend choice and give greater opportunity to individuals, every single measure to help people to take more responsibility for themselves, and every single measure to make life more difficult for the criminal and to make people safer in their streets. It is no wonder they do not understand back to basics.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Since it is the Prime Minister's vogue word, I ask the Prime Minister the basic question: if back to basics is suddenly the right policy, who is to blame for the past 14 years?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening, but I will tell him about the past 14 years. It is a time when average incomes have risen, when there is more spent on the national health service than ever before, when the number of young people going into further and higher education has gone up to one in three in the community, and when the value of pensions has gone up. But there is one battle which I concede we did not win. That was the battle against fashionable opinion and the theories of those who are light years away from the interests of the British people.

I turn directly to the centrepiece of the difference between the Government and the Labour party. The centrepiece of this programme is a criminal justice Bill. The whole House shares a deep concern about the level of crime. To prove that, I hope that the whole House will unite behind our proposals to tackle crime instead of, as Labour Members have done on every occasion in the past, voting against every measure that we have brought forward to tackle crime.

Our proposals respond to people's fear. Crime is not just a problem for the well-to-do. It often hits hardest those people who have the least, which is why the right hon. and learned Gentleman utterly failed to understand the quote of mine that he misused a few minutes ago. Nor is the loss of material possessions the only damage done by crimes like theft. Often, the greatest hurt by far is the loss of treasured possessions of sentimental value and the loss of that feeling of security that people have an absolute right to feel in their own homes.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?—*[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is so concerned about crime, why did he vote against every measure that we brought forward to curtail it? It is no wonder that he is against back to basics. He is certainly pretty basic himself. He makes Neanderthal man look chic.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall make a little progress. I share the view of most people in this country that the balance has been tilted for too long in favour of the criminal and away from the victim. The criminal justice Bill will correct that. We shall continue to give the police greater flexibility in the use of their resources to fight crime.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way in a moment. We will provide extra prison places so that sentences can reflect the gravity of the crime, not the availability of prison cells. We will crack down on people reoffending while on bail. Some people seem to think that bail is a licence to commit crime. The new Bill will show them that they are wholly wrong about that.

One of the most serious problems we face is that of juvenile crime. Far too many crimes against property are committed by young people. The Bill will introduce new

secure units for persistent offenders to break the cycle of offending. The fact is that, unless we are prepared to make clear to people at a young age that some behaviour will not be tolerated, we cannot be surprised if they continue to reoffend as they get older. To be too lenient in the short term means that we fail our children in the longer term, and it is time that that was faced up to.

The Bill will also deter criminals by making sure that, once caught, they are prosecuted and, if convicted, effectively punished. There will be less cautioning and an end to the abuse of the right to silence that has been exploited by so many.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

In some areas, the current law has been too slow to act. If squatters, travellers or trespassers occupy people's property, they should be able to get them out—and quickly. The new Bill will ensure that they can do so.

The Bill covers a range of other matters. I will mention just one of them today. It will provide stronger powers and heavier penalties against child pornography. Previously, possessors of child pornography could only be fined. For the first time, the Bill will provide, in appropriate circumstances, for a prison sentence, and the police will have stronger powers of arrest and search and seizure of those who make and sell this material. I hope that the whole House will welcome that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Prime Minister has much to say about crime. Can he answer a simple question? Why has the incidence of crime doubled during the past 14 years of Conservative government?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's question was not quite complete. He should have asked why the incidence of crime has doubled in every western country. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to help us, perhaps he and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will tell us that they will support the proposals that we now put before the House.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The right hon. Gentleman knows that in the Home Office's recently published figures it was revealed that 5·7 million crimes were committed in the latest recorded year. Is that because he has been neglecting the basics for the past 14 years—or is it because the 64 pieces of legislation that he has already produced have failed to tackle the problem?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that it was entirely wise to give way to the hon. Gentleman, for he trails over very old ground. Will he now tell us whether he will support the measures that are before the House? I suspect that the Labour party will not support them. The shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), was already preparing his escape route when he referred to my right hon. Friend's new measures to tackle crime as "gimmicks". Tougher powers for the police to stop terrorism are apparently a gimmick, as are cutting down paperwork and putting more policemen on the streets. Tougher measures to stop people offending on bail are, according to the Opposition, a gimmick. New prisons are a gimmick. That is the triviality of their response to the battle against crime.

As for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, who is sitting their shouting, he is no one to shout about the law. It was the hon. Member who said:

"do you obey the law or not obey the law? We"

—that is the Labour party—

"don't have any firm . . . principles . . . of how we might deal with this problem."

The hon. Gentleman said that in late 1989 and early 1990. I will give him the quote. If he is worried about that quote, perhaps he can tell me this: why, just last month, did Labour Members vote against a provision in the National Lottery etc. Bill to prevent lottery proceeds funding terrorism? What sort of party and what sort of values do they have?

Let me turn to the deregulation Bill that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East spoke about. One significant difficulty for business lies in meeting the demands of regulations. Over the years we have repealed examples of ludicrous over-regulation. Many of those that we repealed recently have lasted since the Labour Government of 1929, such as regulations on the temperature of bath water, on animal feed factories and on the distance between clothes pegs in cotton factory cloakrooms. There is still a long way to go to minimise regulation on companies.

Earlier this year, we set up a series of task forces chaired by business men and business women to identify regulations that might be repealed. I thank the noble Lord Sainsbury and his colleagues for their report. As a result of their work, we shall introduce a deregulation Bill that will sweep away rules that tie firms up in excessive red tape. It will be the biggest package of deregulation since the 1950s and we shall bring the legislation forward in January. That approach is far more likely to help business than the policies of increased burdens, minimum wages, social chapters and more detailed regulations that are favoured by the Opposition.

We want to repeal legislation that is a burden on business; the Labour party wants to repeal our legislation that removes burdens on business, especially trade union reform. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made clear—with that candour that we like so much—if given the opportunity, Labour are

"going to repeal"

—in terms of our trade union legislation—

"all of it—there is no little bits you can keep . . . It all has to go".

That means back to the closed shop, back to flying pickets, back to unions above the law and back to no more compulsory ballots. That is what the hon. Gentleman stands for.

Mr. Prescott: The Prime Minister is earning an unenviable reputation as a Prime Minister who constantly quotes from Labour Members' recent speeches without giving any evidence of where those quotes come from. It is about time the Prime Minister produced the sources of his quotes. I challenge him to do so.

The Prime Minister: I will provide the hon. Gentleman with the sources. He probably thinks that he has been a victim of impersonation. I will give him another quote, together with the source, and perhaps that will help him.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, in his celebrated speech to the Confederation of British Industry, in which he said so little about the matters on which it would have wished to hear, did not remind the CBI that he had described ballots for union elections as

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"intellectually disreputable". Perhaps that explains why the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) remains a member of the shadow Cabinet, despite losing in the ballot. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East is having some trouble containing himself. We have learnt what one member, one vote means: the right hon. and learned Gentleman is the member and his is the vote, despite what Labour Back-Bench Members vote.

In the Gracious Speech we propose to introduce legislation to improve the training of teachers. Our best schools are as good as any in the world, but we aim to raise the standards of all our schools to those of the best. The process is already under way with the national curriculum, annual reports, regular inspections and regular pencil and paper tests, not beloved by some Labour Members. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East should take a sedative and calm down.

The education Bill this Session will underpin the reform of teacher training. For too long teacher training has been based too heavily on theory. The Bill will create a new teacher training agency in England and will extend the powers of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. It will build on the arrangements for teacher training in the classroom, which we have already put in place. The agency will bring together funding for all types of courses and will be able to fund the most cost-effective to ensure the growth of the best courses.

The Bill will end one of the last closed shops in the United Kingdom—the student unions. Students should not be compelled to join their student union. In future they will not be so compelled.

We shall introduce local government Bills to establish unitary authorities in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is it the Prime Minister's intention to dismember Scottish local government and to remove Scottish water from local democratic control by the expedient of stuffing Commons' Committees with English Conservative Back Benchers? Can he confirm that?

The Prime Minister: I would not put the matter remotely like that, so I cannot confirm it.

Alongside the reforms in Wales and Scotland are the reforms still being developed in England. We intend these to be the last significant reforms of local government for many years. We are putting in place a structure to endure and to pass the test of time.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman's intervention is too tempting to miss.

Mr. Canavan: How can the Prime Minister possibly justify local government reorganisation in England being referred to an independent commission while proceeding immediately with legislation for Scotland and Wales without any reference to an independent commission? In view of the widespread concern, indeed outrage, throughout Scotland about this most expensive and extensive political carve-up in the history of local government, will the Prime Minister do the decent thing and refer the matter to an independent commission? Otherwise, people in Scotland will rightly conclude that their country is being governed by a gang of gerrymandering crooks.

The Prime Minister: I do not think that they will remotely conclude that. The hon. Gentleman may believe it, but that is his problem and not mine. He is rather more of a problem to the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition than to me or my colleagues.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): Earlier in his speech the Prime Minister said several times that it is for the people of Northern Ireland to decide, freely and democratically, their own constitution. Why does the Prime Minister deny that right to the people of Scotland? Why does he resist the demands of the constitutional parties in Scotland for a multi-option referendum? The constitutional parties in Scotland—the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National party—represent 75 per cent. of the voters in Scotland whereas the Conservative party represents only 25 per cent.

The Prime Minister: There was a referendum, and it failed. The hon. Gentleman has clearly forgotten that the necessary majority was not achieved.

The Queen's Speech will introduce a range of Bills—to privatise British Coal, to reform Sunday trading, to enable the preparations for an environment agency to proceed, to reform elements of the social security system and a Bill to make the security services more accountable; the Bill will place the secret intelligence services and the Government communications headquarters on a statutory basis. That follows on from the announcement I made in the debate on last year's Gracious Speech, and represents a further step towards greater openness and accountability for the three intelligence security services.

This is a realistic programme that will meet the concerns of the country. It addresses practical problems in a practical way, and is light years away from the policies of the Opposition. Many people have complained about the Opposition's lack of an economic policy, not least a number of Opposition Members. As the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said:

"Where we"—

the Labour party—

"are absolutely deficient is in suggesting that, in any respect, we have a clue about how to manage the economy. Or whether we should even try."

Now he has his answer. His leader has signed up for an off-the-peg economic policy made in Brussels. The socialist European manifesto that the leader of the Opposition signed commits him to a single currency, with no mention of the opt out which we negotiated and which the Danish socialist Government retained. That manifesto also commits him to restrictions on free trade, European works councils, a guaranteed minimum wage and higher taxes for British businesses so that they do not compete "unfairly" with European firms. It may well be that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not read all that, but that is what he signed up to.

The Labour party is not a party that is seriously seeking power. *The Guardian* said recently that the Labour party is like

"a natural party of opposition"

—and it will remain a natural party of opposition. We are in government and will stay in government.

I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends will give a warm welcome to the programme outlined in the Gracious Speech, and I commend it to the House.

4.43 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): It is a great pleasure to speak after the Prime Minister and the leader of the Labour party and to congratulate the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and I have two things in common: first, the area of Britain from which I take my name is in his constituency and, secondly, both he and I started off as voters for and supporters of the Labour party—a fact which may not be widely known. We left the Labour party for slightly different reasons: I left because I disagreed with Labour party policy on the trade unions; and, as I understand it, he left because he was turned down for a job application for the international department of the Labour party organisation in London. I am not certain which reason history will say was the more reasonable.

In 1979 the hon. Member for Wealden introduced a private Member's Bill to limit the growth of quangos. If he is true to the principles that he enunciated in that Bill, I wonder what he thinks of the exponential growth of quangos that has occurred under the Government he now supports.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) entertained us with an amusing speech. He said that originally he had no intention of going into politics and he went into business instead. He then decided that Mrs. Thatcher was right about her business and enterprise policies—so right that he decided to leave business and come into the House, which is an odd way of expressing his belief in her policies.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East and I entered the House at the same time, and one of his enthusiasms has been the creation of new jobs through new ideas. Sadly, none of that will result from the Government's programme which was unveiled today. Given the state of our country today, at no time in recent years have the people of Britain looked so earnestly to Westminster and the Government for signs of hope and for solutions. They will look at the Government's programme in vain and with disappointment.

It has already been said that it is 14 years since the Conservative party came to power and 18 months since the last Queen's Speech, but still the Government seem to spend more time and energy in seeking scapegoats for what has gone wrong than in proposing solutions to put right the mess that they have created.

The Prime Minister sometimes inadvertently gives us glimpses of the extent of the failure of his own Government. Hon. Members will recall that he made a speech at the Guildhall on Monday and invited the country to make comparisons between children of different nationalities. He said that children were asked to multiply 9·2 by 2·5, and that in Taiwan and Korea 70 per cent. got it right, in western Europe 55 per cent. got it right and in England 13 per cent. got it right.

Who is responsible for that? The Prime Minister gave us a clue when he said that those children were 13 years old. That means that they were born a year after the Conservative party came to power; they are children born under the Government, brought up under the Government and educated under the Government. If there is a responsibility for the failure of their education, it lies with the Government alone.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: No, I must make progress.

The Prime Minister has conveniently failed to mention that the Government have reduced spending on education, expressed as a percentage of national wealth, by more than 10 per cent. since they came to power while every other competitor nation, in Europe and the far east, has increased the percentage of its national wealth invested in education.

The Government's answer to the crisis—for which the Government bear the greatest responsibility—was unveiled in the programme announced today: it is to create another quango, a quango for teacher training. Not a penny more will be spent on education. No doubt the Bill will reflect the well-stated aim of the Government—to create a culture of amateurism among teachers when we should be increasing their professionalism.

This country must begin to start investing in educaton. It is the key investment that we must make. Unless we are prepared to do that and to match the investment made by our competitor nations in terms of a percentage of our wealth invested in education, our children will not be properly educated. In an age when our economy will depend on information, they will be incapable of using the new technologies to make the best use of it. In an age when we want to encourage higher standards of citizenship, they will not receive the necessary education at school to produce that.

Perhaps the key to this is to follow the proposal put forward by the commission headed by Sir Claus Moser, which advocated that every child in our country should have the right to have access to a year or more of pre-school education. Perhaps there is no greater talisman than such investment because it marks whether a Government are guided by short-term or long-term considerations. Pre-school education is true investment. Studies done in America and elsewhere show that £1 invested in pre-school education will deliver £7-worth of value-added in education and result in a reduced incidence of crime in later years. That is true investment.

The Secretary of State for Education, however, has responded to that commission, which represents a year or more of work, by saying that the country cannot afford such investment. I must tell him and the Government that it is not that the country cannot afford to invest in education, but that this country cannot afford not to invest in education. That is why my party is prepared to say, as was made clear in the election and reaffirmed today, that that investment is so important for our country that we are prepared to ask people to add a penny in the pound to their income tax. That would produce between £1·8 billion and £1·9 billion to invest in education.

What we have seen happen to education under this Government and their predecessors in the past 14 years is repeated when one studies other indicators of the health of our country. The Prime Minister made great play of whether or not the Labour party voted for certain items of legislation. I must remind the House that in those 14 years, 64 items of legislation on law and order have been passed, but the incidence of crime has doubled. Indeed, some legislation that the Government have had to introduce is

[Mr. Ashdown]

designed to unstitch the damage done by their previous legislation to which we were opposed. The Prime Minister has now been forced to repeal some of the legislation that we told him was wrong.

In those 14 years the number living in poverty in Britain has gone up by 250 per cent. The gap between the rich and the poor has grown into a yawning chasm, contrary to the shouts of dissent from the Conservative Benches when that opinion was voiced earlier. The income of the poorest 10 per cent. in Britain has gone down by 14 per cent. while the income of the richest 10 per cent. has gone up by 50 per cent.

The Government have introduced new reforms, as they call them, directed at the health service, but, as a consequence, as we discovered yesterday, we now have 30,000 more administrators in the health service, but 20,000 fewer nurses and 116,000 fewer beds. The Government tell us that they are now to target benefits, but this is the same Government who have allowed the amount of uncollected tax to go up twenty-fourfold, from £64 million in 1980 to £1·7 billion today.

Unemployment has risen from 1 million to 3 million. It is a good thing that that figure has come down slightly —it should be welcomed—but I regret to say that it is a small reduction when one considers that lying at the heart of the figures are 1 million long-term unemployed people.

There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to build on the tiny and inadequate pilot measure that the Government introduced in the Budget when they decided to transfer some of the benefit paid to the long-term unemployed in order to build a subsidy to create employment opportunities. Unemployment has not even been mentioned in the Government's programme which was unveiled today.

The Government talk about economic recovery, but if one devalues one's currency by 20 per cent., of course one will gain economic advantages over one's neighbours. The Government's long-term record reveals that, in those 14 years, 18 out of 22 countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have achieved faster growth than we have.

Mr. David Nicholson: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, tragically, unemployment is rising in France, Germany and other European countries and that there is no downturn in the rate of unemployment in those countries? However, his party supported and voted for the imposition of the social chapter in this country, which has done so much damage in the other Community countries.

Mr. Ashdown: I invite the hon. Gentleman to leave the House and visit some of the advanced firms in Britain, as I did recently. I visited Toyota, the foremost car manufacturer in the world, as some would argue. It discovered that to create an effective quality product one must have a quality work force. It has far exceeded the milk and water bulwarks for fair practice and reasonable conditions as laid down in the social contract. That company does not believe that those terms and conditions have damaged its product. It understands, as the Government apparently do not, that by giving the work force proper training, proper status and decent conditions it can produce the quality goods that are necessary to win in the marketplace. The difference between the hon. Gentleman's party and mine is that we want to create an economy similar to that which exists in Bonn, but he wants to create an economy similar to that which exists in Bangkok.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a leading Japanese company. Is he prepared to accept that Japan is placing more investment in the United Kingdom than in any other country in the world? Why should it be prepared to do so if conditions in this country are as bad as the right hon. Gentleman has pointed out? Will he also accept that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has, uniquely, created an opportunity for the reinvigoration of our manufacturing industry by establishing the lowest level of inflation for some time and low interest rates, which are absolutely right for manufacturing expansion?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted the other portion of the Queen's Speech about which I wanted to speak.

Japan and other countries have found it appropriate to invest in what they see as developing, low-cost production centres. I want this country to be a high-skill, high-wage, high-investment production centre. In that way, we will have an economy like that of Japan because we will be able to design here and invest abroad in production. That is the important path that this country should follow, but that is not happening.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) mentioned investment, but our rate of public and private investment is falling and is lower than that of any of the advanced competitor countries in Europe and elsewhere. Our public and private investment ratio is half that of Singapore.

We see the consequences of that record when we consider the Government's approach to the channel tunnel. They allowed the French to build high-speed railway links right up to the mouth of the tunnel even before we started to put the first sleepers down for our railways.

Robert Reich, the economic adviser to President Clinton, recently said that in the developing world economies we will find that footloose capital for investment will go to those areas with high skills, high educational standards and strong investment patterns capable of building modern infrastructures. If that is where investment will be travelling to in the future, God help Britain, given the state of the country that the Government have left behind.

It is not just in internal matters that things have changed since the last Queen's Speech. The previous Queen's Speech touched briefly on what has become the predominant problem for Europe and the world in the past 18 months—the tragedy that is occurring in Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia. I do not believe that anything that the Government have done can measure against their failure to take the necessary actions in that region.

When I first called for action 18 months ago, the Prime Minister said that what I was calling for could not be done. Every single thing I called for then has, subsequently, been done, but it was too little and too late. Just as many of us predicted, the situation in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia has descended into a maelstrom of chaos and misery, in which our troops are now positioned.

Every time I have questioned the Prime Minister on that matter and criticised the Government for failing to act on

Bosnia, he has turned that criticism to suggest that I was criticising our troops. I have been to the troops on the front line, as he has, and we both know that they are leading the way in military practice in Bosnia. I regret that the Government are leading the retreat by not shouldering their responsibilities and acting appropriately. The consequences will be paid for in the next 10 years and more because the ex-Yugoslavia is not just about Europe's past; it is a prediction of what will happen in Europe's future.

I suspect that the situation, particularly in Bosnia, has now descended to such a point that there is little that we can do to resolve the problem. All our best opportunities have been left behind us. However, the one duty left to us in Bosnia is to save innocent lives. The condition in central Bosnia now is such that, unless the Government are prepared to act soon, there will be a humanitarian tragedy.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: How?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman asks how. I wrote to the Foreign Secretary three days ago begging him to take the lead in opening up Tuzla airport. In central Bosnia some 1 million people are now living on a quarter of the rations that they need to survive. The airport there is less dangerous than Sarajevo and has a massive runway and huge facilities that leave Sarajevo in the cold. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recommended a move to open Tuzla airport and fly food in. Unless we do so, a catastrophe will happen. May I leave the Prime Minister with the words of his appointed negotiator, Lord Owen, who said about the condition of central Bosnia:

"Wake up, wake up! It's no use waking up in January or February to find thousands dead from a humanitarian disaster."

Unless the Government act, that is precisely what will happen. I hope that, when the debate on the Queen's Speech is summed up, perhaps on Friday, the Foreign Secretary will say whether the Government are prepared to take action to open Tuzla airport.

This is a Queen's Speech of small measures. We welcome the Prime Minister's position on Northern Ireland and some other matters. The Government have at last understood that we need a change in defence posture, and their commitment to a comprehensive test ban treaty, which is new and important, is welcome, as is their commitment to a comprehensive non-proliferation treaty. Indeed, I congratulate the Government as, on those matters —if not on the spectrum of defence policy—they seem to have adopted the Liberal Democrats' defence policy.

Elements of the Bill on deregulation will no doubt be welcome and we shall look at those in detail, but much of the Bill is deeply offensive and we shall oppose it.

We shall oppose legislation to enact the White Paper on police reform because it goes two thirds of the way towards creating a national police force. It will place in every police service a paid representative of the Home Secretary. We cannot solve crime in the streets by making the police a division of Whitehall. Whitehall civil servants will not tackle crime; more policemen on the beat will tackle crime. What a disgrace that chief constables' requests in the past two or three years for more policemen have been consistently turned down. In 1992 they asked for 1,753 more policemen on the beat to tackle crime; they were allowed to have 796. Last year they asked for 2,167 policemen to tackle crime on the beat; they got none. If the Government really want to tackle crime, let them at least support those calls for more police to do the job where it is necessary—on the street.

We shall oppose legislation to reform the magistracy, which seems designed to take the "local" out of local justice. We shall oppose legislation on student unions, which is opposed by every college director and university vice-chancellor in the country. It has nothing to do with the closed shop, as the Prime Minister said. It is merely tossing yet another well-gnawed bone to Conservative Back Benchers and will have no impact on education problems.

The real problem with the Queen's Speech is not so much what is in it but what is out of it. It could have included an education Bill that would have given every child the right of access to pre-school education and ensured that the necessary investment was made; a statement that the Government intended to invest in the country's infrastructure rather than leaving it to run down; a Bill to promote competition, to tackle some of the monopolies which the Government have allowed to grow up; a Bill to encourage small businesses, particularly legislation to tackle the problem of the late payment of debt; a statement that the Government would abolish their iniquitous plans to increase value added tax and put in place an energy tax as proposed by the European Community, based on a revenue-neutral position in which the vulnerable would be properly compensated and investment could be made in energy saving.

The Queen's Speech could have announced a comprehensive Bill to tackle crime across the spectrum. If the Government want to see how that might be done, they should go to Solihull where a programme on crime has been put together to mobilise the whole community, tackling crime from the school to the policeman on the beat. The extraordinary thing is that it is successful. Crime figures are coming down where people recognise that crime is not about a short slogan at a Tory party conference but about putting together a comprehensive programme to tackle crime at every level.

The Queen's Speech could have announced an armed forces review to provide for the skill and ability of our forces to be reshaped to match the nation's needs as we face new threats. It could have made a commitment to helping to frame international institutions and earmarking forces to respond to the United Nations Secretary-General's calls for peacemaking.

The Queen's Speech contained none of those. It is a programme, the lightness of which portrays the Government's bankruptcy of ideas and complacency about the state of the country which they have created. It is more like a programme for an election than one for a Government two years after their election. It looks as though it has been constructed to save the Prime Minister by June rather than save and improve the country by the end of the century.

4.56 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I always smile when I hear such a speech from the Leader of the Liberal Democrats. On Government policy, he always says, "We told you so", or "The Government are taking up Liberal policies." The Liberal Democrats seem to speak with so many voices on every issue that it is inevitably possible for them to make such remarks. Their statements seem to cover the whole field.

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

I have always believed that the House can function properly only when we have a strong and effective Opposition. I have been in the House for just over 29 years and I am sorry to say that I have never heard a weaker response to the Queen's Speech from a Leader of the Opposition. The glum faces behind the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) reflected the weakness of his speech. I hope that in future we shall have a stronger Opposition response.

I do not wish to concentrate on the content of the Queen's Speech. The Leader of the Liberal Democrats was wrong, because the Queen's Speech is a programme of strong measures. I have no doubt that they will be highly controversial, but they are important to the country's future. My constituents will welcome the firm steps proposed to deal with juvenile crime.

Today, I wish to discuss how the House intends to handle the legislation. It is just over two years since the Leader of the House asked me to chair a Select Committee to deal with sittings of the House. A strong Committee was appointed. It included the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party, the chairman of the 1992 Committee, a former shadow Leader of the House and an old friend, the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery).

Two years ago, we worked extremely hard for a few months. Just before the last election, we managed to produce and debate the Select Committee's unanimous report on how the House should conduct its affairs. It was debated again 18 months ago at the beginning of this Parliament, when, on behalf of the Government, the Leader of the House appeared to accept about 85 per cent. of our recommendations on modernising procedure. At the same time, an early-day motion was tabled, attracting more than 200 signatories, about 120 of whom were Opposition Members.

We have been exceptionally patient, but nothing has been done. I warn the Government that the patience of many hon. Members is running out because of the inactivity in modernising our procedures. I am continually beset by hon. Members, the majority of whom are probably Opposition Members, who ask, "What has happened? Why don't we all make a stand?" I strongly discouraged such action because to achieve meaningful change, which the Committee recommended, there must be consensus in the House. I was an hon. Member when the famous Crossman changes were proposed in the 1960s. They did not work because there was no consensus.

The package proposed by the Select Commmittee was carefully balanced between the rights of Government and Opposition. I believe that all its members were convinced that a fair balance had been struck. I am one of the relatively few hon. Members who have served as a senior Whip in government and in opposition and I believe that the package strikes a fair balance between the rights of Government and Opposition.

Some hon. Members say, "What about the Maastricht Bill?", which took up so much of the previous Session. The House should be reminded that if the Select Committee's recommendations had been in place, not one minute less would have been taken debating the Maastricht Bill. We were careful to state that constitutional Bills should not, in general terms, be guillotined.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the major difference between the Crossman proposals and those on which the Select Committee so diligently worked is that the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, of which I had the honour to be Chairman, streamlined part of Parliament's procedures, which would have held up a great deal of work in the past? There can now be no argument against his streamlining proposals following the procedure for private Bills.

Mr. Jopling: My hon. Friend has great experience of these matters and we were both Members when the Crossman changes were made. I thoroughly endorse the recommendations that his Select Committee made, which have so helped the procedures of the House.

The time has come, however, to press the Government to act, because there is strong support for action on both sides of the House. The Select Committee was purposely not specific on how Bills should be timetabled. It was part of our recommendation that if Bills are considered at length, there should be some procedure to allow them to be timetabled.

If we are realistic and straightforward, all hon. Members know that there is a certain amount of gamesmanship in the using up of time, but it is now time to modernise our procedures to the demands of the end of the 20th century.

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): I understand my right hon. Friend's point about constitutional Bills, but what is the point of streamlining our procedures, on which he is placing so much emphasis, if it is not to increase the powers of the Executive against the legislature? Surely the power of the legislature is to take its time and to prevent a too streamlined approach to legislation and to debate. That is effectively the only power that the legislature has over the Executive.

Mr. Jopling: If my hon. Friend reminded himself of the Committee's recommendations, he would find that the Government would not like many of its proposals, such as the one on the regular rising of the House at 10 o'clock. The House sits longer and for many more days in the year than any other legislature in the developed world, which we felt is quite absurd. We recommended that we should normally rise in the middle of July. We recognised that we should do away with some of the absurd all-night sittings that we so often have.

I know that my hon. Friend has read those recommendations already, but if he reminds himself of them he will recall that many of them are against the interests of Government and Opposition, but, together, they make a fair package that would allow the House to conduct its affairs in line with the needs of the end of the 20th century.

The efforts of the Leader of the House to force the pace are welcome. I hope that he will be able to arrange early meetings between members of the Select Committee and spokesmen from both Front Benches so that we can reach a conclusion. I hope that the small minority of Members who have blocked progress in the past 18 months will now allow the modernisation of our procedures.

Mr. Marlow: I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way; he is being very generous in accepting interventions. He said that his Committee's proposals would not have changed what happened under the Maastricht Bill because it was a constitutional Bill, but who decides what is a constitutional Bill? I believe that, in this Session, we shall debate legislation to give force to the so-called changes in the European Community's system of own resources. Is that a constitutional Bill? Who will decide?

Mr. Jopling: It has always been the practice, which has worked quite well for centuries, that the Committee stage of a constitutional Bill is automatically taken on the Floor of the House. The criterion has always been whether a Bill is constitutional. It has always been decided by the usual channels, which are crucial. The House cannot operate properly unless the usual channels are working. That is how it has always worked in the past and I do not see why it should not continue to do so in future.

Mr. Marlow: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Jopling: I must get on because many hon. Members want to speak.

I want to refer to a second matter involving the way in which the House will conduct the legislative programme and to express my worries, as a business manager formerly responsible for the Government's legislative programme, about how this Session will proceed. We have begun the Session far too late. November 18 is intolerably late, especially now that the Budget occurs before Christmas. Why have we wasted 10 days? Why did not we have the state opening of Parliament on the Tuesday before last as could have been done perfectly well? I cannot understand why we did not.

I shall outline the programme that faces us between now and Christmas. After the state opening today, this debate will end a week today, on 22 November. The new Bills, of which I hope there are plenty, will be laid before the House by the end of the week and, as two weekends must then elapse, Second Readings cannot occur before the week beginning Monday 29 November. I hope that there will be one Second Reading on 29 November.

The Budget debate will start on Tuesday November 30 —the new joker in the pack. That debate will be combined with discussion of the public expenditure programme for next year. That is likely to last for a week and would wind up on Tuesday 7 December. At last, on Wednesday 8 December, we shall be able to consider Second Readings. The Second Readings of four Bills may take place on Wednesday and Thursday 8 and 9 December and Monday and Tuesday 13 and 14 December. Those four Bills will then be subject to the Committee of Selection being able to meet on 15 December to appoint the Committee members. The Standing Committees on those four Bills will not be appointed before that day and, therefore, will not be able to sit before 21 December. The House may not sit during that week. Even if it does sit in Christmas week, I know exactly what will happen. Deals will be struck with the Opposition Front Bench in return for not wasting a morning over a sittings motion, with which we are all familiar, and no Committees will meet until after Christmas.

If we have only one Bill for Second Reading on 29 November and into Committee before Christmas, it will be a bad way to begin the legislative programme. I warn the Government; in the days when I had responsibility for such matters, it was always my aim that eight or 10 Bills should be in Committee before Christmas. This year, there will be only one Bill. That is a huge mistake.

Mr. Riddick: Why?

Mr. Jopling: A late start of the legislative programme will cause a log jam later in the year. The Bills will not reach the Lords until far too late in the Session. The Lords must pursue their programmes, which include archaic and ludicrous rules such as all Bills being taken on the Floor of the House. I hope that, in time, that fatuous situation will change, but I know that we are not allowed to criticise. My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) should take it from me that if the programme does not get away to a flying start and Bills complete their Committee stage well before Christmas, it will run into serious problems later. I had to learn that lesson the hard way.

Mr. Riddick: My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) is making an extremely interesting speech, but surely serious problems arise only if there is a heavy legislative programme. I hope that we shall see fewer Bills before the House in this Session because the country is suffering a little from legislation fatigue. Less legislation would benefit the country as a whole.

Mr. Jopling: Perhaps my hon. Friend has had a sneak preview of the remainder of my speech.

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does my right hon. Friend agree that by the end of January the Finance Bill will be in Committee and will further clog up the process?

Mr. Jopling: Yes, of course that is so. Even if the Session had begun on Tuesday 9 November, the new practice of staging the Budget before Christmas means that only five Bills could be in Committee before Christmas. That leads me to the firm conclusion that future Sessions must begin in October. If they start in November, the Government are always running to try to catch up, and that is a great mistake.

I am glad that in the Queen's Speech it appears that there will not be a huge number of Bills. The leader of the Liberal Democrats was quite wrong to say that those Bills are not of great importance. I counted 12 massive Bills of huge import in the Gracious Speech.

Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley, I stress that the Government and the business managers must resist shuffling extra Bills into the programme under the immortal words

"Other measures will be laid before you".

Business managers must do everything possible to ensure that the Session begins in October so that, with the new phenomenon of a winter Budget, a good start can be made and we are not always chasing ourselves to catch up.

Following from the Select Committee report to which I referred earlier, the Government must also try to do everything in their power to complete the legislative programme in July without an overspill. A short legislative Session this year will reap massive benefits in the next. I hope that the business managers will be extremely tough with their colleagues; otherwise our legislative programme will continue to be muddled in the years ahead.

5.27 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) who has a distinguished record of service in the House. I also appreciate his valuable work on reviewing the procedures of the House. He said that he has had 29 years' service. I have served for almost 28 years and, like him, I remember the reforms introduced by the late Richard Crossman when he was Leader of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he was concerned about the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and referred to it as a weak speech. I thought that, far from being weak, it told the truth about the Government's record. That is what irritated Conservative Members.

The Gracious Speech seemed to contain few surprises. The accent is on deregulation, and on law and order. It can be argued that deregulation is essentially about a lowering of standards, whether safety standards or conditions at work. The Government seem to feel that the country's salvation lies in its being a sweatshop economy.

Deregulation is also intended to lead to more privatisation. My impression is that the general public are now heartily sick of the word "privatisation", and that impression has been reinforced by the fight being put up by the workers at the Patent Office in Newport. I am glad to see that the Minister responsible is present. The public support the workers against any privatisation proposal. Hundreds of jobs are at stake, and the issue of the intellectual content of the work carried out there and the danger of its falling into the wrong hands are also important. The establishment has recently been given an award for efficiency. No wonder that even the local women's institutes are lodging their protests against the Government's proposals, which seem to take dogma to the nth degree. The Government would be well advised to leave that establishment alone.

A proposal to reorganise local government in Wales is included in the Gracious Speech. That proposal comes 20 years after the expensive extravaganza, which nearly broke the Bank of England, carried out by Lord Walker. It seems that Wales is now to be divided into unitary authorities. Newport will welcome the return to a one-tier authority because it was a successful county borough until the 1973 reorganisation. That status should never have been taken away and I fought hard at the time to prevent the change. However, I regret the demise of Gwent county council which, together with its predecessor, Monmouthshire county council, has a record of service to the general public going back for more than 100 years.

We must appreciate that much of the power of local government has been eroded. I say that with deep regret, because British local government was once an example to the rest of the world. Local autonomy and local decision making are the very heartbeat of democracy. So much has changed. The Treasury and central Government now have overall control. That may be inevitable, as only 8 per cent. of local expenditure is now raised locally; the rest comes from central Government. It is inevitable, as night follows day, that he who pays the piper calls the tune. We need to look again and to devise a system in which local government, once again, becomes truly local and in which finance can be raised locally to provide projects and services in line with the wishes of local residents.

The major theme of the Gracious Speech is the fight against crime. No longer can the Conservatives make any claim to be the party of law and order. The Government have failed dismally and it is no good their making the police a scapegoat. Our local Gwent police are up in arms against alleged Government plans to create a super-force by merging Gwent with the South Wales constabulary. Such a change would be a retrograde step. My experience during a long time in public life leads me to believe that bigger units mean less efficiency and more bureaucracy, and, in the case of the police, an undermining of links with the local community which are so essential.

The Gwent police force, like other police forces facing a rising tide of crime, has been up against it in recent years, yet it has coped better than most. It has a 47 per cent. clear-up rate whereas the national average is just 30 per cent. The Gwent police force should be left well alone. I appreciate, of course, that, according to the local government proposals for Wales put forward by the Secretary of State, county boundaries in a limited sense will still be recognised. If one accepts that, there could be a Gwent police force, including Caerphilly and Merthyr, which would at least be the lesser of two evils.

The rising tide of crime undoubtedly gives great cause for concern to all of us. At the recent Conservative party conference, the Home Secretary listed no fewer than 27 points for combating crime. The accent seemed to be on imprisonment. It is one thing to put young people in gaol —heaven knows, so many of them deserve it, especially for their cowardly attacks on elderly people—but experience shows that prisons are a remarkable training ground for criminals. Many young people become habitual offenders after a spell in prison. I agree that we need to be tough on crime, but, as my hon. Friends the Members for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) have said so many times, we also need to be equally tough on the causes of crime.

There are two major factors here. One is obviously mass unemployment and the other is the breakdown in family life as we used to know it. On the first point, I believe that there is much wisdom in the old saying that the devil will find work for idle hands. So many youngsters today have no stake in society, so they engage in car crimes, in muggings and in other crimes. The more vulnerable sections of society, such as women and elderly people, are at risk.

I have heard the Prime Minister say that we had large-scale unemployment during the great depression of the 1930s, but that there was nothing like the present level of crime. That is a perfectly factual statement which I do not dispute. However, it has not been realised that young people today are brought up in a consumer-led, television age. Many come from broken homes. My image of the 1930s—I am a bit older than the Prime Minister is—is of a working-class couple walking down the high street and seeing shop windows full of goods. One says to the other, "It is not for us." In that sense, they were perfectly law-abiding people. Today, by contrast, young people will smash those same shop windows to obtain the goods that they desire.

I believe that there is a distinct relationship between crime, on the one hand, and unemployment and the breakdown of family life, on the other. The police have had the unenviable task of trying to keep the lid on the explosive situation. It is an almost impossible task, and when the police appear to be failing, the Government seem

to turn on them. Ministers, from the Prime Minister down, should look instead at the mote in their own eye. The policies that they should have pursued during the past 14 years have contributed so much to the present situation.

The Government have the levers of power, and can do so much to remedy things. In my opinion, Keynes is as relevant as ever on unemployment. Pump priming could do so much, particularly in the construction industry, for instance. Much of the precious North sea oil revenue could have been used to bring our manufacturing industry up to date. Instead, so much was razed to the ground. Even the family silver was sold to bring tax concessions to the better-off sections of the community.

The Government now claim they want to restore traditional family life, presumably as part of the "back to basics" campaign. Personally, I welcome such a development. For me, the trendies have had their say and we can see the results. However, I do not go along with the attacks on unmarried mothers who are so vulnerable at present. We need to look at the basic causes of the situation and see what can be done to remedy things.

The Government have a distorted view of society. They have pandered to individual greed, and now, eventually, they have had to call a halt. There is all manner of speculation about what additional taxation could be contained in the forthcoming Budget. The Government at last seem to recognise the mess that the country is in. Yet where do they turn? They decide to put 17·5 per cent. VAT on domestic fuel, with all the hardship that that will cause to pensioners and the less well-off. What a disgrace the proposal is. Is that what the Prime Minister means by going "back to basics"? Is that a proposal for creating a nation "at ease with itself"?

Heaven knows the country needs a change of Government. I remind Conservative Members of what happened recently in Canada. The electorate gave their verdict and only two Conservative Members were returned to the Canadian Parliament. It seems that the feeling in this country is now hardening in such a way against the Government. A general election cannot come too soon.

5.44 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), with whom I have debated for most of the 28 years to which he referred. I know that he will forgive me if I do not follow him exactly in the way in which he described the nation's fortunes. The hon. Gentleman might remember that events in Canada did not do the Labour party much good, because the party is not represented there.

I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on an absolutely first-class speech. The speech will be particularly welcomed in my constituency, since my right hon. Friend referred in detail to legislation to be introduced to deal with new age travellers and hippies. Those people are a serious threat to my constituency. Part of the New Forest, Stoney Cross, was invaded by a menacing group of no fewer than 600 individuals. The thought of a relief from that threat in the future will bring great happiness and encouragement to my constituents.

Much of the Gracious Speech deals with Europe and with the economy. The European aspects are of enormous importance, as they were during the debates in the previous Session. We find on page 1 of the speech the following statement:

> "Now that the Treaty of Maastricht has entered into force, My Government will attach particular importance to implementing the new common foreign and security policy."

I hope that if there is to be a common foreign policy—I am far from convinced that that is possible—it will not be drawn up in the same way as appears to have been the case over the former Yugoslavia. The policy has been led by German decisions, which have been followed meekly by everyone else.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat party seemed to give the impression that the House agrees with his policies for the former Yugoslavia. All that I can say is, had we bombed Serbia and carried out the other policies which he suggested, there would have been a major international war in the former Yugoslavia.

It is ungenerous of the right hon. Gentleman—a former soldier—not to acknowledge the incredible commitment of the British Government to assist with the humanitarian effort in that part of the world. We have the largest single group of troops in the Balkans and they are assisting that effort. I believe that it will hardly encourage those British soldiers to continue if they are now told that their efforts have been in vain. Far from being in vain, they have done a first-class job of work.

When it comes to the security policy, I am reminded of the fact that a European army has sprung into being within the past two weeks. This most unusual organisation speaks —at the moment—two languages and a third is being pressed upon it by one of its member states. In many international organisations, English is the common tongue. I do not think that that is a particularly good idea, but it must be a convenience for those who do not speak foreign languages. It has been decided that orders in the European army will be given either in French or in German. However, one of that army's component members is Belgium and, as we know, Flemish is also spoken in that country. The Belgians are threatening to withdraw their contingent from the army unless orders are also given in that tongue.

The point that I am making is serious. Thankfully, we are not contributing troops to that European army. However, are we contributing financial support to the idea of a European army? If we were to do that, or we were to become involved in such an enterprise, I believe that we would lose the freedom to place our troops in situations such as Northern Ireland where, unfortunately, those troops are frequently necessary.

It would be extremely dangerous to hand our future security arrangements to an organisation of that kind. Indeed, one is concerned at the cost of the huge European adventure. I was interested to see a reference in today's edition of *The Times* to how the Germans see the future of Europe as it is mapped out post Maastricht. The report in today's edition of *The Times* states:

> "The high level of German funding of the European Community is no longer justified according to the Bundesbank; it's November monthly report says that Germany's position as the biggest net contributor was justifiable up to unification, when West German living standards were second only to Luxembourg in the EC. Since then Germany has fallen to sixth place, while the country's net EC contributions grew from DM19·1 billion in 1991 to DM22 billion last year."

The German contribution is being called into question by the German central bank, the Bundesbank.

[Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson]

If we continue with such wild adventures, how long will it be before we have to ask almost the same questions as the Germans? Page 2 of the Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will work for a rapid conclusion of accession agreements with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and will continue to put forward the case for European countries which are ready and wish to join the European Community."

Many countries wishing to join the European Community have huge begging bowls stretched in front of them. If there are to be additional members of the Community, we must ensure that it will not be Liberty hall for some, but a place where others have to pay taxes to fill the begging bowls. I am concerned that the widening of the Community beyond some of the countries that appear in the Gracious Speech will lead to a Community where some industrial countries will be expected to pay even more to support the organisation—this country is clearly one of that group as we are one of the three net contributors. It is a dangerous policy, but it goes further than that. Many of the countries that will be joining do not have products that we need and do not have the money to buy the products that we produce. Therefore, we will be heading towards a negative economic position. If we consider our balance of payments deficit against the other 12 nations, we find that we are in surplus with only two of them, but are in deficit with the others.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right to seek a wider European Community —or European Union as it is now—rather than the deeper federal Europe which I think he is describing?

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a near neighbour of mine in parliamentary terms, for his intervention. One reason that has always been advanced, perhaps covertly, for widening the Community is that it will submerge the Germans. One of the principal questions that we must now address is whether we want a European Germany or a German Europe. The hope is that, by widening the Community, we extend it to such a size that we can contain the new rising star in the shape of the unified Germany.

My hon. Friend, while understanding the policy that I have just mentioned, must also realise that it will not have the desired effect. Germany will not be contained by having many other countries in the Community alongside it; the Germans will go their own way, as shown in my comments on Yugoslavia and in my quotation about the Bundesbank in today's newspaper.

We must recognise that we are part of Europe and intend to remain in Europe; there is no question of our not being there. I believe that I can consider myself a perfectly good European—I have a home in Europe——

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): England is in Europe.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: That is right. I have a home in France as well, which is also in Europe.

The Community is a trading organisation and should have a positive effect on this country's balance sheet. It should not become what the nationalised industries used to be: a sink for taxpayers' money. I hope that future European legislation that comes before the House demanding that we pay even more will not be the modern version of the old borrowing powers legislation for the nationalised industries to which some of us became accustomed in the past.

Mr. Marlow: A seductive little measure about increasing our commitment in terms of resources to the European Community is signalled in the Gracious Speech. Will my hon. Friend tell the House what he thinks about that?

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson: As my hon. Friend will no doubt have anticipated, I am uneasy about it. That is precisely what is happening—we are gradually becoming the paymaster of an organisation over which we have no direct control. I gave the apparently farcical example of the European army, but it is not farcical because it is there tonight and somebody is paying for it. We must be much tougher in the House when deciding how much money we can justifiably spend on the great march towards the future integration of all the countries in the Community and the wider community to which I have referred.

On the British economy and the Budget, page 3 of the Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will bring together tax and expenditure decisions in a unified Budget. Fiscal policy will be set to bring the budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term."

Yes, there is a £50 billion overdraft and it exists because revenues have fallen due to the recession. Benefits have had to rise and more money has had to be spent by the Exchequer. However, I hope that the Chancellor will not try to get rid of that deficit at one stroke. Any attempt to do that will lead to a complete collapse of the recovery that we are all nurturing and hoping will grow.

I very much hope that on 30 November, when the Budget is unveiled, it does not contain substantial tax increases. The previous Chancellor set in train a policy which means that a substantial number of taxes are already waiting in the pipeline—unfortunately, some will be arriving quite soon. The Gracious Speech contains references to employees' contributions to national insurance. Such measures are all additional taxes.

Therefore, it is much more important for the Chancellor to recognise that all he needs to do in the Budget is to take such action as is necessary to continue to promote the confidence in our currency which is held by those overseas who can almost determine our future. To ensure that the holders of sterling retain confidence in our currency is the only objective about which the Chancellor need worry. Any attempt to try to balance the deficit at one stroke, given that it grew as a result of various unpredictable factors in a world recession, would be a disaster. I am absolutely convinced that any attempt to do that would not only produce hardship for individuals, but would ensure that, far from coming out of recession, we slid back into it.

At present, the economy has a number of satisfactory features. There is low inflation, an improving balance of payments and, as we heard today, a reduction in the level of unemployment. However, it is a precious and fairly sensitive plant that needs all the encouragement that it can get. I hope that, rather than raising taxes on 30 November, the Chancellor will produce incentives and encouragements for industry and individuals to take advantage of the recovery in our economy.

A good and full programme has been set out before us today which has within it a number of extremely innovative and interesting ideas. I am glad to see that we

are moving away from the days of the commanding heights of the economy, so much beloved by the Labour party, towards industries such as coal, steel and the rest, which are standing on their own feet and making money for the people who work in those industries. The Labour party does not need to congratulate itself on anything that it ever did for the coal industry. I remember speaking from the Opposition Dispatch Box when the Labour party was in government. The Minister announced a plan for pit closures that cut the industry in half at a stroke, so the Labour party has nothing to teach us about the coal industry.

It is a first-class Gracious Speech and one which I warmly support.

6 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I cannot ever recall following the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) in a debate. On many occasions I followed his brother, who, at that time, was the hon. Member for Newbury, but sadly is no longer with us—a great loss. There were times when he followed me and we were able frequently to register our accord on areas of common concern. However, on this occasion I shall move on.

I must register my regret at my inability to be in attendance this morning for the Gracious Speech, but I was returning from Washington, where I represented the House on the scientific and technical committee of the North Atlantic Assembly.

On Tuesday afternoon we had a chilling session with the newly appointed director of the Environment Protection Agency, which has responsibility for the management of nuclear waste. The House may remember that I have some knowledge of that topic having led a campaign for some 18 months to two years when it was the flavour of debate in Britain. I thought that I knew something about that topic.

However, I must tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the newly appointed director of the EPA reduced the sub-committee to a state of shocked silence. There was no confusion but a total inability of the sub-committee to express the degree of its fear at the facts that the director released about the situation in the United States. I have known for some time that systems in the United States are much more open than ours. In fact, on my inquiries about the nuclear industry in this country, my best, safest and most reliable source of information has always been the library of Congress. But I was unprepared for the level of apprehension that permeates the EPA in the United States. That prompted me to look in the Gracious Speech for reference. I see that we are bound to take forward environment agency planning. I hope that when the Government are taking it forward they go for a briefing from the newly appointed director of the EPA in Washington.

There is good news in the Gracious Speech about the chemical weapons convention and the indefinite and unconditional extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. That is fine, but it leads me to ask, if there is to be the indefinite and unconditional extension of that treaty, why are we still manufacturing nuclear warheads? We continue to do that. If that is non-proliferation, I do not understand the English language.

However, a constructive part in negotiations on a verifiable comprehensive nuclear test ban is fine, although I was not aware that some of our chief scientists are unwilling to accept the computer modelling and want to go back and take full advantage of the three tests that are reserved for us if President Clinton decides to remove his moratorium. The comment that the Government will

"work to ensure that the principle of subsidiarity is applied . . ."

is wonderful, or it would be if it were not simply confined to European Community legislation. I would not mind some subsidiarity between the Government and Stockton borough council, for instance. That council is elected by my constituents. Many members of the Government are not and never would be.

I welcome, too, the words that the

"Government will maintain a substantial aid programme to promote sustainable development and good Government."

That would be fine if it were true and if it were on the increase rather than the decrease, because all the Government have sought to do is drive it into an inkwell in the desk rather than into the ledger of outgoing expenditure.

We heard earlier that the Home Secretary gave as a gift to his departing Parliamentary Private Secretary a book entitled "Modern Fairy Tales". I want to tell you a story, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is modern, but is far from being a fairy tale. It is fact. It is slightly complex. I shall distil it down to the basic elements and will try to be as brief as I can—about 10 minutes, I hope.

A small advertising agency is a customer of a high street bank. It starts its business, has no borrowings and is in credit with its bank. It wins a contract to promote one of four telephone systems licensed by the DTI with a consortium, where its own bank is a one third shareholder, together with an oil company and an electronics company. They each own one third. They engage the advertising agency to work for it. The bank, incidentally, has the advertising agency's account.

The contract accounts for about 70 per cent. of the advertising agency's business and the company is geared up to handle an account that is backed by three of the biggest and most reputable companies in the world, all AAA credit rated. They are by far the main source of the agency's reliable and regular income. Let us be clear—ad-man's bank is now ad-man's employer. Suddenly, the consortium stops honouring its contract. It does that by not paying more than £500,000 in less than four months. The consortium defaults on payment. The cash flow of the advertising agency clearly is devastated and the work force must be cut.

The agency finds itself sitting in a meeting with one of the biggest receivers in the country, which tells it that the consortium has no assets and will be able to pay the agency only if another buyer can be found for the consortium's business. It is a pretty grim picture: three of the biggest corporations in the world join together but have no assets. That is astonishing.

However, out of the east comes a saviour—a relative "superman". He scoops up the business and apparently saves the day. He is welcomed with open arms and open pockets by the Government, who, incidentally, have received donations exceeding more than £1 million from him to its party coffers. He was thought, perhaps, to be able to save Canary wharf and perhaps pump billions of dollars into a British economy that sorely needed such an injection.

[Mr. Frank Cook]

That year, his eastern empire acquired many British telecommunications companies and their DTI-granted licences, which was probably what he was more interested in buying than the companies. Incidentally, while that was going on, the high street bank, one of the third partners in the consortium, got 5 per cent. of the shares in our eastern superman's United Kingdom operations as part of the deal that had been agreed.

But what about the small advertising business? To survive, it ran up a large overdraft. It was charged interest on the overdraft, laid off a third of its staff, earned itself a bad credit rating and lost several major clients. That is thought by some to be the inevitable consequence of a positive exercise of healthy and robust capitalism, is it not? Did they all live happily ever after?

Superman's company immediately demanded the worldwide copyright in a now famous logo that belonged to the owner of the advertising agency. It is on every high street. Sadly, our eastern superman was not prepared to pay for the logo. When our ad-man refused to let him have it without payment, he was fired. The agency was somewhat aggrieved by that sequence of events, so it began to advertise its complaint about its bank on a giant mobile poster which it trundled around the country. The high street bank offered the agency a £400,000 overdraft facility if it would sign a "gagging agreement".

If that astonishing document had been accepted, it would have prevented the ad-man from ever criticising or suing the banker. Once signed, neither party could have told anyone that the document existed. However, our ad-man refused to sign the agreement and the high street bank refused to restore the facility. Therefore, a business with a £7 million turnover had to stop trading and 43 people signed on the dole as unemployed.

I am afraid to say that the story does not end there; it begins there. Our eastern superman sued the ad-man and the owner of the agency for the logo copyright.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is that true?

Mr. Cook: All the facts are recorded in the courts. I notice that at least one hon. Member has entered the Chamber to listen, so if any questions arise about the veracity or validity of all this, I am sure that they will be put in the usual way.

Our eastern superman sued the ad-man and the ad agency's owner for the logo copyright. The ad-man, in turn, sued the bank, the oil company, the electronics company and superman. We have a classic court case which is typical of our British modus operandi. The battle has continued for two years. The eastern superman has yet to prove his ownership of the logo. Nevertheless, it has been used on every high street, in every bank branch and in many other places. It appears during many sporting occasions. We see it regularly on our television screens.

When I raised this matter during the debate on the Queen's Speech last year, the bank sued the ad-man for his overdraft the very next day. The bank obtained a High Court judgment and it used that judgment to quash the interest that had been generated by my speech. I remind the House that the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell), who followed me in the debate on the Queen's Speech last year, was sufficiently concerned about these issues that he wrote to all and sundry. He wrote to the Prime Minister, to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, to the then Governor of the Bank of England, to the Department of Trade and Industry and to the chairmen of the four companies involved. To his eternal credit, the hon. Gentleman has conducted himself very diligently in trying to assist me to resolve these matters because they have a direct bearing on the affairs of everyone in this country.

Under enormous pressure from the three multinationals and his own high street bank, the owner of the ad agency even tried to invoke the citizens charter because he had heard a lot about it. That did him no good at all and he is very disappointed about it. I doubt very much whether he will ever vote for the Government again—if he ever did in the first place.

However, the ad agency owner's early efforts earned him full legal aid. Eight other national and multinational companies were sucked into the copyright dispute because they had been displaying his logo when they had no right to do so without his permission. The ad agency owner's bank and the telecom company had done everything in their power to stifle his legal action and legitimate claims. They even instigated criminal proceedings against the ad-man and wasted two days of Crown court time and taxpayers' money trying to add credibility to their own legal position. The jury took less than five minutes to find the ad agency not guilty on all counts. The jury pitched the case out of court and it did that after the bank had obtained the High Court injunction to stifle publication.

The ad agency has now discovered—and this is a real twist to the tail—that its own bank, the bank in question, had failed to pay it £43,000 in interest on its account. The ad-man had his accounts checked by professionals who went over them in detail. They found that, had the bank operated the affairs properly, when it pulled the plug for the sake of the overdraft, the advertising agency would have been £43,000 in credit. Payment could not have been denied in that case.

The bank calls it a "clerical error" and it has apologised. It is offering "to knock it off the final bill." That is like giving a blood transfusion to a corpse. The bank had no right to stop the payment on the account anyway. The whole thing is not only preposterous, it is so farcical that high comedy could not do justice to it.

The ad agency has overturned the bank's High Court judgment. However, to add insult to injury, it transpires that for the past two years the bank has been deliberately misleading the High Court of Justice. It asserted that it was only one third responsible. In fact, the bank had complete control over the consortium during the sale because the oil company and the electronics company had sold their shares to the bank. Therefore, the bank had total control. However, those transactions are not registered properly.

The bank decided not to honour the ad-man's contract. However, it paid the Test and County Cricket Board, which was a creditor of the agency. If all that is not enough of a conflict of interest, the bank has also given our eastern superman the telecom company—in which it was a 5 per cent. shareholder—a guarantee that the logo did not belong to the ad-man. The bank guaranteed that. No wonder the logo is everywhere. In other words, a high street bank sold the property of one of its customers without consulting the customer. The bank guaranteed it to the buyer, but withdrew the customer's facilities to avoid having to pay out under the guarantee.

The bank had a privileged position as the ad agency's banker with an intimate knowledge of its financial

circumstances and those of its directors. The bank portrayed itself as an honest broker, but it did not disclose that vested interest. In other words, it breached its trust.

When the bank sued the now penniless agency and its legally aided directors, it was the only creditor of the agency with a vested interest in not being paid. For the bank to be paid, its business partner—the telecom company—would have to lose and that would cost the bank very dearly under its warranty.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I have some difficulty in relating this to the Queen's Speech. However, I am sure that the link will become clear any second.

Mr. Cook: Indeed, it will. It is in the punchline.

I questioned the chairman of the bank last year at the bank's annual general meeting about the "gagging agreements" to which I have referred. He told me that they do not exist. When I pulled one from my pocket, he was most surprised. He said that it was unique in his experience. He also told me that his bank had never been more than a minority shareholder in the consortium company. I remember watching a former Chancellor, who is now a director of the bank, sitting beside the chairman on the podium shaking his head in disbelief at what was coming out. He was right to do so because it turns out that the bank has enforced literally thousands of those "gagging agreements". As a result of media coverage, an organisation called SAFE has been formed. It is ironic to think of the expression "as safe as banks", but SAFE stands for "Struggle Against Financial Exploitation." It will all become clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I promise you.

It now turns out that the bank controlled the consortium company, too, and has been misleading the High Court. When last heard of, the bank was attempting in court to argue

"that bankers do not owe their customers a duty not to seek to take undue advantage of their economic strength, a duty not to exercise economic duress, and a duty not to seek to intimidate."

They are all remarkable statements of intent and objective. The bank's attempts to mislead, conceal and destroy the agency and its directors to prevent the claim against the warranty is nothing short of scandalous.

It is important that we consider these matters, because the agency and its directors have survived to tell the tale. It is the story of David and Goliath, but this David happens to be in the communications business. His attitude is that if someone is trying to kill one, tell the media about it and bring it into the open. For years, it seems, some high street banks have got away with financial assassination. They have dragged their victims down dark alleys of litigation and beaten them to death with court actions. Because of their position of privilege, power and trust, they have been allowed to abuse the judicial system to gag their unfortunate victims—that is, their critics. They tried to drag the ad-man down that same dark alley, but they cannot get away with that in the full glare of media because he will not allow it.

The agency asked the Bank of England to investigate the matter in its supervisory role over high street banks with regard to the Banking Act 1987. The Department of Trade and Industry has been asked to investigate the matter under the Companies Acts. What has been the result of that? Not a lot. The Bank of England held a meeting with the agency on 11 November. The bank put up two deputy heads of supervision, two representatives from its legal unit, an analyst, and the head of the serious investigation unit. The complaint against the bank was explained and names were put forward in confidence.

The Bank of England went to great pains to justify its modus operandi of secrecy and confirmed that the outcome of any investigation, if an investigation were to be made, would always remain secret. It emphasised its preference for settling rather than, as the representatives put it, rocking the boat. The ad-man would have to trust the Bank of England that it would do something at all. In the light of experience with BCCI, we seem to be learning very few lessons.

The ad-man asked whether legal actions were permitted under the Banking Act 1987. That, apparently, is within the domain only of the Bank of England, and it was not at liberty to tell the ad-man of any previous judgments, if any, that had been obtained under that Act. That is hardly open government á la the citizens charter.

The image of the friendly banker is a sham. Arthur Lowe's Captain Mainwaring has become Arthur Daley, in the eyes of the people of this country, and we can no longer turn a blind eye to what is happening. Big institutions should be big enough to admit their mistakes and rectify them. Small businesses will never grow into large businesses or be able to pay back their debts if banks panic and send in the bailiffs, especially when they do so in respect of small businesses which still have healthy order books.

We are legislators. It is up to us and the Bank of England to formulate and apply clear guidelines that everyone can understand. This case reveals matters in which bank-funded ombudsmen fear to tread. They are too dependent for their own existence on the banks that they are supposed to scrutinise. What can one do if one's bank has a conflict of interest and it has one by the financial proverbials? In the past, far too many have failed because the odds have been too great. We must ensure that our banks put the interests of their customers first—you and me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the borrowers and depositors. It is the growth and prosperity of customers that benefit the shareholders and, more important, this country. We really must ask where the banks' interests lie—with their shareholders or customers?

The House has an honourable history of protecting the interests of the ordinary citizen. We should recognise that tradition and continue it. Without employment legislation, we would have slavery. Without landlord and tenants Acts, we would have Rachmanism. Without effective regulation of the British banking system, we would have economic usury.

The House might like to know that the telecom company has announced that its business is to close on 31 December. That announcement was made without settling with the ad-man. It has, however, announced provision to cover all closure costs, estimated at £122 million. It has indicated to the ad-man that it wishes to settle, although it has not stated figures, but the banks still have not agreed to settle. It is a pity that the bank does not record similar readiness, not just with the ad-man but with the many other businesses which have had similar grounds for redress.

Last year, I made this matter a principal item in my contribution. At that time, I asked that there be, if not a royal commission, at least a judicial review. Not only was my request ignored by Conservative Members other than the hon. Member for Corby, to whom I have already paid tribute—I do not qualify that tribute in any way—but the

[Mr. Cook]

Queen's Speech did not even refer to the financial institutions of this country and the grossly inept manner in which they are being operated. After the BCCI affair, that is an insult to the British people.

6.26 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) is a popular Member, but I am sure that the House will be relieved to know that I do not intend to follow his points. Indeed, he lost me at an early stage, and I only hope to make some sense of the hon. Gentleman's speech when I read *Hansard* tomorrow.

We have just completed one of the longest Sessions of Parliament in memory—a Session that was dominated by the Maastricht Bill, as you know better than most, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There were also many other long and important Bills. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) suggested that the Queen's Speech did not contain quite so much legislation this Session. I am bound to say that my reading of the Gracious Speech suggests that we have another heavy programme of legislation before us.

When the Conservative party was in opposition prior to the 1979 general election, it argued, with great justification, that there had been far too much legislation in previous years and that a Conservative Government would mean less legislation. That is one election promise that has not been kept, as we seem to have had more legislation than ever during the past 14 years. I often wonder whether some of my right hon. Friends realise the problems, inconvenience, trouble and, often, muddle that such frenetic legislative activity causes those in the real world who are trying to get on with their jobs. Unfortunately, all too often, for one reason or another, legislation fails to achieve its objectives and causes more problems than it solves. Often, further legislation is introduced on the same matter before the original legislation has had time to settle down.

It is not that I greatly dispute most of the legislative proposals in the Gracious Speech, but there are too many and they might have been spread over two or even three Sessions. I particularly welcome the Bill on Sunday trading. The present laws are a mess and are widely ignored. Although I hope that the House will vote for unrestricted Sunday trading, which undoubtedly is what most people want, it is important to resolve the matter once and for all. Local authorities, shoppers and shopkeepers are fed up with the present situation, and it must be clarified.

As for lightening the legislative load, perhaps I may suggest for a start that the Bill to reform student unions be dropped. I do not think that it would be any great loss. That Bill would be like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Given the recent action taken by the National Union of Students, it is now unnecessary in any event.

I warmly welcome the references in the Gracious Speech to the European Community. Over the past 18 months, the European Communities (Amendment) Bill has wound its weary way through the House. Despite the claims of its opponents, it was a small but important step forward in the development of the Community. The thing that distressed me most as the Bill passed through the House was that the real objective of the Community seemed to be forgotten.

Twice in this century, awful wars which started in Europe resulted in the slaughter of the cream of the youth of Europe and the destruction of industry and property throughout Europe. Both wars could have been avoided if Europe had been united. After 1945, the other countries in Europe looked to Britain to take a lead in uniting Europe. Alas, they looked in vain. Eventually, they decided to take on the task themselves. We refused to go along with them.

At the Messina conference in 1955, we sent only a Board of Trade official, the unfortunate Mr. Bretherton, as an observer. When he left he said:

> "I leave Messina happy, because even if you continue meeting, you will not agree; even if you agree, nothing will result; and even if something results, it will be a disaster."

He was hopelessly and utterly wrong. However, I am afraid that for too much of the past 40 years, Mr. Bretherton's attitude has been that of this country—and it has been to our great disadvantage.

As the Community was being set up in the mid-1950s, we tried to negotiate a free trade area. The Six rejected that. They wanted a customs union. They wanted to build a Community that would lead to the unity of Europe, and that is what they formed. Four years after the formation of the Community, it became obvious to this country that our failure to join had not been in our best interests. Frankly, we had missed the bus. We then applied to join. We applied to join not a free trade area but the European Economic Community. In his statement announcing our application, the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, said:

> "This is a political as well as an economic issue. Although the Treaty of Rome is concerned with economic matters it has an important political objective, namely, to promote unity and stability in Europe".—[*Official Report*, 31 July 1961; Vol. 645, c. 928.]

That was 32 years ago.

Let us have no more pretence that the organisation that we eventually joined in 1973 was merely about free trade. It was about the unity of Europe in 1961 when we first applied to join, it was about the unity of Europe in 1973 when we joined and it is still about the unity of Europe today. Indeed, if the Six had not believed that we were committed to that in the early 1970s, we would never have been allowed to join in the first place. They have not changed their view, and they do not expect us to do so either.

The constitutional form of unity was not spelt out then, and it need not be spelt out today; it will depend on how the Community institutions develop and evolve. The process should not be forced. It should move forward steadily and surely. No one knows how it will finish. That is why a dogmatic rejection of federalism or, for that matter, any other system is absurd at this stage.

At present, we hear a great deal, especially in this country, about a change of view in other Community countries. We are told that they are coming around to our view about the future of the Community, whatever that is. During a recession, such as the one that the Community is passing through at present, people tend to lose confidence in their institutions. Certainly there is less confidence in the Community today than there was before the recession. Of course, that is also true of national Governments—there is less confidence in them as well. But when the Community

emerges from recession, the lack of confidence will disappear and the Community will resume its forward march once again.

I hope and pray that this country will adopt a positive attitude to the future development of the Community and not be dragged along reluctantly, as we have been so often in the past. At present, I am thinking especially of the exchange rate mechanism and the economic and monetary union. When we came out of the ERM just over a year ago, the advantages were obvious. Our immediate problems were relieved. The run on the pound was halted; it was no longer necessary to maintain interest rates at such a high level; and exports became cheaper and easier to sell, with beneficial results to the balance of payments. But in the medium and long term, there will be a price to pay for that. The disciplinary effects of the ERM on inflation are no longer there. There is no effective alternative to replace that, unless one believes in the discredited theories of monetarism, which I certainly do not.

The price of imported raw materials will rise, with disadvantageous results. Worst of all, floating exchange rates will bring back the uncertainty that has been so damaging to our international trade and the manufacturing sector over the past 20 years since the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreement. To sell abroad is hard grind, requiring years of patient slog to interest potential customers in products. When the exchange rate is reasonably stable, exporters attract sales with good stable prices, good-quality products and early delivery dates; but when exchange rates are floating, quality goods and early delivery dates can easily be undermined by an adverse movement in the exchange rate. Years of work building up confidence with customers can be destroyed overnight.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I do not understand part of my hon. Friend's argument. We are out of the exchange rate mechanism now; we do not have inflation—in fact, we have low inflation—and we do not have instability. What will happen suddenly to change events?

Sir David Knox: I am referring to what happened when we had floating exchange rates. My hon. Friend knows perfectly well, because he is knowledgeable about these matters, that he is talking about the short-term position. It is only one year since we came out of the ERM. During the 1980s, the fluctuations in sterling were devastating to the manufacturing sector of this country. I shall come to that matter in a moment.

Undoubtedly, there has been a substantial adverse effect on the manufacturing sector as a result of floating exchange rates. It is no coincidence that manufacturing output rose by 88 per cent. between 1952 and 1972 when we had reasonably stable exchange rates under the Bretton Woods agreement. It increased by only 8 per cent. in the 20 years between 1972 and 1992, when for most of the time we had floating exchange rates. The simple truth is that the arguments that led my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to join the ERM in 1990 are still valid. In my view, the mistake that was made was that we joined with sterling considerably over-valued.

The argument that somehow the British economy is the only one that cannot be in an exchange rate mechanism is deeply worrying. Are those such as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) saying that our economy is so weak that we cannot match the performance of the other countries? In any case, how did we manage, under the Bretton Woods agreement, to last in an exchange rate mechanism from 1944 until the early 1970s? I believe that the present Government are concerned about the balance of payments and about the manufacturing sector. I believe, therefore, that they must take a positive attitude to rejoining the ERM at the earliest possible time. I am not saying that that should be tomorrow or even within the next 12 months, but I hope that positive action will be taken to rejoin the mechanism as soon as possible.

I now turn to economic and monetary union. I hope that the Government will also take a positive view on that. There is no doubt that at least 10 of the 12 countries in the Community intend to move forward to economic and monetary union and to a single currency, although that may take a little longer than was envisaged in the timetable decided at Maastricht. We should, in our own interests, be involved in that from the beginning.

A single currency is essential if we are to gain the full advantages from the single market; indeed, the single market will not operate properly unless there is a single currency. Surely no one seriously suggests that the United States of America would be as prosperous as it is if all the states had separate currencies, with all the obstacles that that would create for the flow of trade and other economic activity, not to mention the cost of changing currencies. If that is true of the United States of America, it must also be true of the European Community.

Already we have suffered from our opt-out from EMU at Maastricht. The siting of the European Monetary Institute in Frankfurt rather than in London is the economic price to be paid by the City of London for our political ambivalence towards economic and monetary union. In my view, it was not a price worth paying.

I hope that in the years ahead the Government will press on with enthusiasm with the implementation of the Maastricht treaty. I hope also that they will adopt a positive attitude towards the Community and its development. We need to hear far more from the Government about the advantages of the Community and its achievements and far less about its supposed defects, most of which are trivial.

When we signed the treaty of accession in 1972, 21 years ago, we committed our future to the European Community. It is in Britain's interests to do everything that we can to ensure that the Community achieves its full potential.

6.42 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I had better declare an interest from the word go. What I have to say tonight affects many barristers and I am a practising barrister. It affects many subjects that will affect real people in real circumstances in what I call a shambles of a country.

During the summer I heard, as did many other hon. Members, the new Home Secretary almost charging across the media—there was not a day when his shining face was not to be seen on the box—telling us that he had the perfect answer to the fight against crime. At Blackpool he outlined 27 points. I may be a cynic—I probably am—but I could not find one of those points that would catch a single villain.

Having been in the trade, as it were, man and boy, solicitor and barrister, for the best part of 30 years—including my time as a student—I know a little bit about

[Mr. Gerald Bermingham]

it. The first step in fighting crime is to make the fear of detection a deterrent. People are frightened only if they know that they will be caught.

During the summer, I carried out some inquiries. I asked how many of every 50 crimes that are committed in this country are detected and, if the case is not discontinued for some reason, result in a court appearance or a caution. The answer came back: one. We are so good at fighting crime that we detect one in 50 offences.

That is not good enough. It used to be much more. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) said earlier that there was a 47 per cent. clear-up rate in his area. That is wonderful, but some areas have a virtually zero clear-up rate. There are areas where crimes are not even investigated. There are areas in this country of ours where burglary, if it is commercial, is not even investigated because the police do not have the resources. Hon. Members have rightly said that car crimes are not investigated. They are recorded, but not investigated. They are not even recorded on occasions because the figures are getting too big.

Does putting people in prison—I would be the first to say that a lot of people deserve to be in prison, and I am not soft on crime—for longer and longer periods help us to detect a single crime? No. Does changing the right of silence help us to detect a single crime? It is a fundamental fact that it goes against Magna Carta, but one cannot expect that to register with the Government these days. Will that detect a single crime? No.

I sat on the Standing Committee that considered the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Time and again, I said that section 29, which says that one could not take previous offences into account, would not work. I said that section 1(2)(a) would not work because one can only charge a sentence on the first two of however many counts there were. I said that it was a load of rubbish; all lawyers said that it was a load of rubbish; the judges said that it was a load of rubbish. Did the Government listen? No.

The minute the legislation came into effect it was proved to be a load of rubbish. What happened? The Government amended the law in accordance with what the professionals had said all the way through. The Government do not think, and, when it comes to criminal justice, they cannot think. What sort of society do we live in when we have a rising crime rate that is going through the roof? I know that it is now coming down a bit, but not through detections.

There were 192,000 discontinued cases last year. That is 192,000 victims who did not get justice. Why were they discontinued? Shall we blame the Crown Prosecution Service? The Government always have someone to blame. We cannot blame the Crown Prosecution Service. I asked the CPS why the cases were discontinued. The answer was:

"We did not have enough evidence."

I asked why they did not ask the police for evidence. I was told that their budgets would not stretch to getting it.

Now we begin to touch the truth. If one does not pay policemen to detect crime, one does not catch villains and one does not deter people from committing crime. It is simple. What has happened to the police budgets? There are some lovely stories about that which are quite true. Police budgets have decreased.

I was speaking yesterday to a detective inspector in a regional crime squad. He said "Gerry, one of the things that I have to do when I am asked to put out a surveillance team—and they are very good—is to work out whether it is cost-effective."

I said, "What?" He said, "whether it is cost-effective. Will we catch enough villains to justify the expenditure?" I asked what would happen if he did not think that they would. He replied that the team would not do it. The villain who is sought to be observed might be a crack house dealer, a heroin dealer or a cannibis dealer. Observation evidence is vital. One cannot go in there without the evidence to back it up. The crime is not detected and it continues, because there is not enough money for the police force.

It gets even funnier. If a regional crime squad does a major surveillance and its members have run up overtime they do not get paid the overtime. They are sent home. In one case, they ran up 400 hours overtime each. That is 10 weeks—crack detectives at home for 10 weeks, doing nothing, because the Government will not give the police the money that they need to cut down crime.

We will not beat crime until we detect it. The little villain must know that he has a good chance of being caught. I do not say that we shall ever achieve a 100 per cent. detection rate, but we may detect more than one in 50 and bring more villains before the courts.

We are to have a criminal justice Bill and I shall probably end up serving on the Standing Committee again, but it is a waste of time. We will change the laws and make more work for us lawyers—great—but that will not beat crime. The Government will beat crime only by putting their hand in their pocket and paying for the police service that a civilised nation deserves.

It is time people asked the Government for the truth. The Government do not always tell us all the facts. I know that I must not call anybody a liar because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will ask me to withdraw my comment or chuck me out of the Chamber. So, I remind the House that the north American Indians had a lovely descriptive phrase: they spoke of people who talked with forked tongues.

I have a perfect forked tongue tale to tell. The Government believe that individuals should get on their bike, improve themselves and look for work or a better job. The fact that unemployment has been rising since 1979, such that we never knew the like of it, seems of no concern to them. They do not seem to care. In the 1980s, I lost count of the number of changes to the rules. Was it 27 or 32 different ways of calculating unemployment figures?

Let me give the Government a statistic that is undeniable. Of all children over 17 leaving school or college or ceasing to participate in a YTS training scheme in my constituency, only 4 per cent. hope to get work. What a land of no hope for the youth. The forked tongue says, "Get a job and train yourself."

What about the lovely married lady with a young baby in my constituency who seeks to improve herself? She goes to night school and passes her exams. Then comes that wonderful day when she is offered a place at university —not in St. Helens, because we do not have a university, but further afield so that she must travel to it. She is an honest, honourable woman. Her husband is young and, like many of the young men of St. Helens, does not have a job. He does not have a prayer of a job. They are on social security—income support, as it is called. She accepts her

grant cheque of £2,800 and intends to stay in lodgings in the university town and to return at the weekends. She goes to the Department of Social Security, where she is told that her husband's benefit will sink back to £34 a week and that he can have 2p for the baby. She says, "We cannot survive on that. Here am I trying to better myself and you are taking away my husband's and our child's income. What am I to do?" So much for this wonderful Government of ours. "Oh", came the advice, "if you and your husband separate—you cannot even spend the weekends with him —he can have his family income support back and he can keep the child." It is this Government of the family who bring in these rules.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ask me what I think of this country and this Government. How can such separation ever be justified in a civilised society? The other day when I told a welfare worker of this story he said, "Don't be upset about it. It happens all the time. Families have to break up to survive."

The Gracious Speech is all about changing the rules on evidence; there is nothing about funding the fight against crime. One lovely phrase leaps out from the economic section:

> "My Government will continue with firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation."

When I walk the streets of St. Helens, I see men in their fifties who have not worked for 10 years or more, not because they do not want to work but because there is no work. When I drive off the motorway to my constituency, I pass Sutton Manor, that old colliery which was there when I was first elected in 1983 and survived almost until the last election, but which is now flattened. I can see the smoke rising from the cooling stacks of the power station three or four miles away where its coal went. Now, my constituents hear the trundling of lorries from Liverpool docks with Mongolian and other imported coal. I ask myself: is this common sense; is this a civilised society? The answer must be no.

For 14 years, we had the oil boom. We had money and the opportunity to invest. The money has been squandered and the opportunity gone. The Government have failed the nation. The industry of St. Helens is in decline. Not a single apprenticeship has been available this year, last year or the previous year. Where are the skills of tomorrow? The Government even sold the skill centres. Then they were closed because they went bankrupt. Where is the training of tomorrow?

I came tonight to make two comments. For goodness sake, leave the criminal justice system alone. Stop tinkering and go after the villains. Go after the people who cause the elderly, the young, the sick and the frail to be frightened to go out at night. Clean up our streets. Please, just employ policemen. That is all that the Government need to do.

Secondly, do not muck around with the magistrates court system. Even the magistrates see how stupid the proposal is. They are up in arms about it. But, of course, this Government do not listen to anybody. They have not listened for 14 years. They are a shambles. It is time they went and let the country return to the standards of decency where thought is given to giving people jobs and hope, where families can grow up as a unit and where housing is available. There are numerous homeless people in my constituency because my council is not allowed to buy or build houses. When will the Government give the people of this land a chance to return to respectable standards? We have suffered from this shoddy shambles for too long.

6.57 pm

Sir Thomas Arnold (Hazel Grove): I hope that even the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) would recognise and accept that since the Gracious Speech on 6 May 1992 we have seen a welcome measure of recovery in the economy. Indeed, I would expect both sides of the House to agree that that improvement has been real. It may have been slow, hesitant or less than we would desire, but it has taken place. It holds out a promise for a better future.

Our enforced departure from the exchange rate mechanism last year assisted in the recovery process. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take the view at the very least that the recovery was not hindered by our departure. Indeed, in his brighter moments he may accept that the recovery has been assisted.

Above all, the Government should seek to promote the recovery by every means possible. I trust and believe that that is what the Chancellor will seek to achieve in the Budget on 30 November. It may well be necessary to rebalance policy in order to promote further confidence and hope in the working of our economy. If the Chancellor decides to reduce interest rates to bring that about, I would welcome such a decision. A further reduction in interest rates would not only cut the Government's borrowing bill but would give further confidence and hope to industry, commerce and individuals. Interest rates are a key relative price, and what can be achieved by a change in that key relative price has been demonstrated time and time again. I hope that the Chancellor will seriously consider that possibility, particularly as recent evidence seems to suggest that inflationary pressures on the economy have further abated, and we should all welcome that.

We should not underestimate the very large increases in taxation due to come into force next spring, and I urge the Chancellor to be cautious about making further increases in taxation beyond a fairly modest level. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), when he was Chancellor, took the view that tax increases should be delayed. The Chancellor should be very cautious about what additional taxation he seeks to impose, given what will come into force next spring.

The engine of our future prosperity must be coaxed and encouraged by every means possible, and the Government should be pragmatic in seeking to bring that about. Welcome though the recent falls in unemployment most definitely are, unemployment and not inflation is now the principal economic problem. By "unemployment" I mean running the economy at a capacity level way below that achieved in the past and what we should aim to achieve in the future. It makes no sense to have an economy containing idle hands, idle resources and idle plant. The Government should do everything possible to get the economy moving further and faster ahead.

In the debate on the Loyal Address in May 1992, and thereafter, I said that economic policy should be about responding to the demands of the domestic needs of the economy and not the other way round. I urge the Government and the Chancellor to be very cautious about

[Sir Thomas Arnold]

European entanglements that impose conditions on our economy and about what we could or should seek to achieve.

Today's Queen's Speech showed signs that the convergence criteria of Maastricht are no longer uppermost in the Government's mind. That is a welcome step and one that I hope will continue.

Unemployment is a problem not only in our country but right across Europe. Some 18 to 20 million people are currently unemployed in Community countries, and that is a serious development which threatens not only the prosperity of Europe but the political stability of a number of countries. There is no room for complacency when the Community is faced with such a problem.

The European Community has been and is acceptable to the electorates of Europe because it has been associated with success. There is now a danger that the Community might be associated with not only short-term failure but failure over a longer period. That is something that we should earnestly and steadfastly seek to avoid.

As to the immediate future, the Government are right to pursue a policy that puts British interests first and seeks to run the British economy at a level that we can sustain, with low inflation, and without taking too much account of any signals from Brussels to move faster in the direction of economic and monetary union. That would be a great mistake at the moment and would perpetuate the current problems.

The world is rapidly changing and we should take account of such changes. The conventional wisdom of yesterday is rapidly being replaced by new forces and new circumstances. The sensible position for our country would be to take advantage of not only the opportunities which Europe offers but those offered by the changing circumstances in the world.

The prospects for British exporters, commerce, industry and businesses in the far east are probably unprecedented. A recent World bank forecast predicted that by the year 2002—which is not too far away—the Chinese economic area, when the so-called "Tiger" economies are taken into account, will have a gross domestic product way in excess of that of Germany and the United States of America. We should be positioning ourselves in such a way that we can take advantage of these opportunities. That is unlikely to happen if we set our economic policy in the medium term by artificial demands to meet our treaty obligations too literally.

I urge the Government and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to take heed of the request that the Government should adopt a longer term posture, and recognise that there is a world beyond Europe, particularly in Latin America and the far east, in which we can play a major part. If we take advantage of what is on offer there, it will promote renewed self-confidence and vigour in our industries and commerce.

Above all, I hope that the Chancellor and the Government, in approaching the Budget on 30 November, will do everything possible to promote the recovery and the interests of the British economy. I am mindful of the fact that there has been a welcome recovery since the last Queen's Speech, but we still have a long way to go.

7.7 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The Queen's Speech is totally irrelevant to anything that the country needs at the moment in economic terms and particularly in its approach to Europe.

I have looked at the section that says that legislation will be introduced to privatise British Coal. The Government can save their time, because when they come to introduce that legislation every single pit will be closed, despite assertions from those on the Government Front Bench about how concerned they were for the miners.

In the debate on the coal industry on 27 October, I asked:

"The second question concerns the review procedure. When Grimethorpe in my area came under the review procedure, it was a review in title only. What happened was that the machinery began to be brought up straight away and faces were closed. That is not a proper review procedure. I should be grateful if the Secretary of State in his winding-up speech would give a guarantee that it will be a genuine review procedure, and that faces will not be closed and machinery will not be taken out. The men will then know that an honest review is taking place."

The Secretary of State for Employment stood at the Dispatch Box and replied very clearly:

"The corporation has decided to resume consultations with the unions through the modified colliery review procedure. I welcome that. The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) asked me whether it would be a meaningful consultation. It has to be: I give him that assurance. The resumption of that procedure is a welcome return to the normal consultative arrangements within the industry."—[*Official Report*, 27 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 897, 916.]

That was a clear promise. On 12 November, however, I received a letter from Mr. W. J. Sheldon, the assistant director of the Northern Group of British Coal, which read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Enright,

Mr. Houghton, the Northern Group Director met the Trade Unions today and informed them that he would be recommending the closure of Frickley Colliery to the British Coal Corporation. He proposed that development tunnelling would stop immediately and that coal production would cease on November 26th."

That clearly makes what the Secretary of State said if not a lie, because you would not allow me to call him a liar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but his utterances somewhat strange. It also demonstrates a gross lack of faith with the House —not just those on the Labour Benches but those on the Conservative Benches. It is quite intolerable that the Secretary of State should give a cast iron, plain guarantee that is torn up within a fortnight and that he does nothing about it. That is the trust which we can put in his words.

What does this all mean in terms of human beings? What does it mean for the 800 men and the 800 families who, a bare two years ago, were told by the authors of the Rothschild report that they had a pit that was worth selling? It was put in the top10. Suddenly, just a year ago those people were told that their pit was on the extra hit list that the President of the Board of Trade produced. The pit was then given a reprieve and those people have had to live for a year under threat. They were then cast aside as so much chaff. That is what it means to 800 men, 800 families, wives, children and grandparents. That is what it will mean for the villages of South Emsall and South Kirkby as well as other neighbouring villages.

That community has also had to deal with a recent announcement that has meant the loss of 200 further jobs which were created by another firm that we helped to establish in the area 10 years ago. That announcement

together with the decision on Frickley represents unemployment on a catastrophic scale and it is inexcusable.

We have heard from the Conservatives that there is surplus coal and that therefore we cannot keep on producing it. However, in Wintersett, which is a pleasant area with which I know you are familiar, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Hiendley, which is another nice part of my constituency and in North Featherstone——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I hesitate to interrupt, but if the hon. Gentleman referred more to the privatisation of British Coal his speech would keep in order. At the moment he is straying somewhat from that.

Mr. Enright: I shall do so because British Coal, which the Government are planning to privatise, proposes to allow opencast mining in Wintersett, North Featherstone and Hiendley. That operation will take place in those three country areas and will involve relatively small amounts of coal, but it will disrupt the lives of the very people who British Coal has just put out of work. That is totally unacceptable and immoral. Any Government who set that sort of policy as a guideline for the future and who wish to privatise coal in that particular way would resign if they had any sense of decency. That, however, is not the fashion these days. If people are responsible for something they do not resign.

What the Queen's Speech says about the European Community is sheer flannel. It is clear that the Government are trying to wriggle out of their social responsibilities by arguing that the people can look after themselves. They claim that that is what subsidiarity means and that they know how to look after the people.

What the Government in fact mean is that Whitehall and Westminster between them—scarcely Westminster because responsibility lies more with Downing street and the Cabinet—will do the job. We know from the coal debate, however, that the majority of Conservative Members are like sheep. Some are black sheep, but they are sheep all the same and they will trot through the Lobby having made sanctimonious utterances about how sorry they are for the miners and the mining communities. Nevertheless, through the Lobby they trot because the Government line is that we can look after our own people. But the one thing that the decision on Frickley has proved is that we should sign up to the social chapter, because we cannot trust that lot on the Conservative Benches.

I was appalled when, during the Maastricht debate, the Prime Minister read at the Dispatch Box from a letter that he had received from ICI, which stated that death, doom and destruction were around the corner if Britain signed up to the social chapter. We know very well, however, that ICI functions in all the other EC countries perfectly well. It has not withdrawn its operations from them, but if it had a shred of honesty it would do so. We also know that ICI treats its work force far better than the minimum standards that are demanded in the social chapter. The Prime Minister's action was just political chicanery, which was inexcusable. I am sad to note that the foreign policy objectives in the Queen's Speech do not mention that ICI has succumbed to the Arab pressure to boycott Israel at the behest of the Arabs. Companies are doing just that but the Government have failed to intervene; how quickly would they intervene in other matters?

The Queen's Speech does not mention the one foreign occupation about which we could do something practical —we can get invading troops out of northern Cyprus. It is within our power to do just that and it would not cost us a great deal. Is that policy objective proclaimed in the Queen's Speech? It most certainly is not, neither in the general foreign policy objectives nor in the objectives for the European Community. The reason for that is that Cyprus has applied to join the Community. Its application has been accepted in principle, to be examined more closely. While half of Cyprus is occupied, however, it is clear that that application cannot properly proceed. Her Majesty's Government must treat that situation with something approaching urgency even if it is not mentioned in the Queen's Speech.

Earlier the Labour party was rebuked by a Conservative about the way in which we look at the commanding heights of the economy. I am not ashamed that we talk about those commanding heights, because at the moment we are faced with the wretched depths of poverty that have replaced them. It is by tackling those depths of poverty that we will show ourselves to be moral. In that way we will regain family standards and decent standards once more. As long as we tolerate what is happening in Britain today we have no right to demand morality of our people. We certainly have no right to say, "You are all right chaps because of the citizens charter and the fact that someone has got two good behaviour points for the week."

The Queen's Speech states that the Government wish to restore the dynamism of the economy. The one thing that is not mentioned, and is never mentioned, is the poor quality of much of British management. We do not face up to that problem. We do not have training programmes for management but we have a slack and lazy management, unlike that in the continent and in Africa. In general, the managements in those countries and of America, Canada, the far east and Japan outstrip our own. I do not say that there are no good managers in this country. We have some excellent firms and managers but in general our management is extremely poor. It is reaching crisis point and something needs to be done.

For example, we are told—it is clearly implied in the Queen's Speech—that we cannot afford to give workers special social grants. We are told that that is wrong, the cost is becoming unacceptable, and that we should look at the poor old French and Germans, who can no longer do it. That is untrue and controlling politicians to the right of centre in France and Germany have said clearly in the past week that they would not lower their standards.

Our managers have said that they cannot afford those social rights, yet are not the same managers awarding themselves free shares and giving themselves special BUPA privileges? If we study the social benefits that are given to a range of managers, we might begin to analyse some of the difficulties. It is all a question of where one is: if one is at the top one gets more; if one is at the bottom one gets less.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) has already mentioned the nonsense of magistrates courts. What is happening there is indicative of the Government's attitude: this is a quick fix Government. They are like a junky who needs to take out a needle and have a quick syringe. Once they have had the quick syringe they think that things are all right. I could not possibly outline the proposals on the police as effectively as my

[Mr. Enright]

hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South. They are clearly ludicrous and will not deal with the serious problem before us.

The way in which the Child Support Agency has worked is scandalous. I have buckets full of correspondence from desperate people who are not trying to wriggle out of their responsibilities but are keeping up with them and have often taken on other responsibilities. If they live in my area, they are not paid much money because it is a low wage area. Yet because of the Government's quick fix attitude, those people are being targeted. A lady came to see me in April and I referred her to the Child Support Agency because she was just above income support level and her husband was paying her no money. She sent him to the agency but not a single action has been taken. But the people who pay regularly, through the courts or directly to their wives through the court's agreement, are suffering because of the Child Support Agency's actions.

Before I came to the Chamber I had just finished dealing with a young man who, with his new wife, is looking after two children. He must now pay his previous wife so much that he is left below income support level. He should be receiving income support, free meals for his children, and free prescriptions for his asthmatic child but, because the Child Support Agency has taken away his benefits, he has been shoved into abject poverty. Worse still, to pay the debt which the agency says that he has incurred, he must sell his car and will no longer be able to get to Leeds—even if he could afford the petrol—to do his job. Ultimately, he becomes unemployed and two families are then living off the state. That is wrong and should not be allowed to continue.

The Queen's Speech contains proposals to reform the National Union of Students and teacher training. We shall no doubt have a full day's debate on those matters at another time. If we treat the National Union of Students as the Secretary of State suggested in his original statement, we shall do a gross disservice to students. I recall what the NUS did for me when I was a student and it continues to do good work for the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist student bodies. If the Government wish to preserve religious ideals, they must not heedlessly throw aside the tremendous work done by the NUS. We can all mention silly little things which the NUS has done from time to time. Even some hon. Members, when students, may have done things of which they would not be proud now. We are all silly at some time when we are students but, by and large, the NUS has been invaluable in helping to keep smaller groups going in universities and it should not be thrown aside.

Equally, it is a shame that the Gracious Address does not suggest that, if we are to move towards compulsory nursery education, it would be crazy to put in charge of it people who are not trained, which would do more harm than good. That is an argument to be developed on another day but it is indicative of what the Government are about. Too often, they are looking for a quick fix and tomorrow's profit instead of investment over a 20-year-period. That is what is needed to run a country as part of a successful community. We must look not just to tomorrow but to the future of our children and our children's children.

7.26 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on all the issues that he raised, because he covered a large number of subjects, although I may refer to his last point if I have time. May I simply remind him, on his sturdy and quite right battle for the miners in his area, that I served for three months on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. I thought that we came up with a reasonable solution. We recommended, among other things, a £500 million subsidy. We came to a unanimous conclusion and the Committee was admirably chaired by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn). Perhaps the hon. Member for Hemsworth will acquit us of not doing our work properly.

Mr. Enright: I am delighted to give the hon. Gentleman the praise due to him. I admired his work at the time and said so at a Labour party meeting, naming the hon. Gentleman particularly, as well as my friend the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock).

Sir Anthony Grant: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) said what I have said so many times. Year after year in the House, I have heard the Opposition cry, "There is too much ill-digested legislation. We must cut down on it." Immediately they get into Government, legislation is increased. I hope that the Government have not overdone it in this Queen's Speech, because there is a great danger of Ministers saying, "We must not run out of steam." Nowadays, the danger is not of running out of steam but of boiling over. A period of consolidation is often necessary after a great rush of legislation.

All parties are to blame. Ever since the war, politicians have said that people have simply to put a cross on a ballot paper and all will be well. They have said, "Nothing else has to be done, leave it all to us." People have fallen for that and rightly used that awful phrase, "They should do something about it". That puts another nail in the coffin of freedom and is another disappointment because "they" cannot get it done. I do not blame people who say it; I blame politicians who constantly pretend that they can do more than they can. That is true in many sectors, especially the economy. The less power we have, the less able we are to run our economy independently from the rest of the world, which perhaps we could at one time, and the more we pretend that we can achieve something by a stroke of the pen in the House or in the Treasury. One should hesitate before undertaking too much.

The current theme is "back to basics". It depends on how one interprets it, but I view it as the right theme, because it concerns fundamental rights. We always hear about the right to do this or that, about civil rights here and civil rights somewhere else, but there are only two fundamental rights with which the Government should concern themselves: the rights for people to be defended at home and abroad. I was pleased to see that page one of the Queen's Speech states:

"My Government attach the highest importance to national security."

I hope that they mean that, because there is great concern that we have run our defences, especially the poor Army, down to bedrock level. I have expressed my concern

about "Options for Change". The changed situation in the world does not mean that we can abandon all our conventional defences, particularly the armed forces. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) will make a speech on the Adjournment tomorrow on the Territorial Army. I support his views. I hope that Ministers will listen to them carefully. I also hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will carefully heed the views of the Defence Select Committee and, more important, will continue to convey them vigorously and profoundly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I want to comment on the right to be defended at home. The Government are right to give the highest priority in the Queen's Speech to the fight against crime and to the restoration of law and order. Of course, we have to search for the root causes of crime. That is our task and that of the Church and everyone else. One could endlessly debate the reason for the increase in crime. It may be the breakdown in family life, the decline in religious faith or unemployment, but crime has increased inexorably in every country, under Governments of every complexion, amid rises in prosperity and in material standards and amid high and low unemployment. We should remember that.

Crime is not a problem which a Government can solve at the turn of a switch. What they can do is take certain sensible, practical steps to tackle crime. That is why I believe that the Government's policy outlined in the Queen's Speech is correct. The criminal justice Bill and the measures on the police are sensible steps in the right direction.

For many years, the Home Office has displayed what I would loosely call a liberal—with a small or large "L" —sloppy, wishy-washy attitude to crime. We must face up to the fact that, despite all the ideas of the Home Office and of do-gooders everywhere, that policy has failed. Therefore, other steps have to be taken. Thank goodness that the Home Secretary and the Government have grasped the nettle in the matter.

There are many absurdities that we must rectify. For example, there was the nonsense about unitary fines, which we had to correct, and the absurd business of courts not being allowed to consider the previous offences of an accused. We also had the ridiculous system of cautions. I do not reject the idea that a caution is useful, but two cautions are enough. In my constituency, a young man has been cautioned no fewer than seven times. The last time, he simply went into the police and said, "Hurry up, guv, I have not got long. Let's have the caution and get it over and done with." That is nonsense, but I do not blame the police. I have discovered that an extraordinary committee of probation officers, sociologists and oddballs decides about cautions. We should toughen up on that and give the police greater authority.

The two crimes in which there has been a disturbing increase are burglary and theft in rural areas. Some years ago, all the crimes in my constituency were committed in cities. Nowadays, such crime has spread to rural areas, which is of much concern to my constituents.

The principal increase in crime throughout the country has been in car crime. I have said time and again that it is ridiculous to talk about "joyriders" because they are not; they are misery drivers. The stealing of a car often results not in a joyous little zoom around but in the death of other children or ramraiding shops and stores. It is a very serious crime indeed and it must be tackled.

I am not convinced that the Government have been tough enough on the problem. I believe that every new car should be fitted with an immobiliser, which I shall not exhibit in the Chamber, as I once did, because it would be out of order. Many immobilisers and alarm systems are available quite cheaply on the market.

I know that the Home Secretary has discussions and talks with manufacturers, but nothing is done. Car manufacturers would not fit brakes or seat belts to a vehicle without a law on it. It is essential that all vehicles have a proper immobiliser or alarm system.

I discovered an even more absurd situation, which I am investigating. It appears that under our tax system if a company fits an alarm or security system to one of its cars, which might cost about £500 but which companies would undoubtedly be willing to pay to secure their cars and safeguard employees, it faces an extra tax bill of about £50 or £70 a year. That is ludicrous. What sort of incentive is that to install alarms in vehicles? I took this up with the Treasury, which passed it on to the Department of Transport, which passed it on to the Inland Revenue. There the matter rests at the moment, but I am hoping to get an answer soon. If I do not, I shall be very angry indeed. It is another absurd example of saying that this is a serious crime but not doing anything about it.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Schools—if I might have his attention for a moment—is on the Bench and I shall explain why. If we can tackle the problem of crime among young people at a very early stage, it will be of immense benefit in the future.

I was prompted to take that view by an organisation called WATCH—What About The Children. It is a sensible body whose founder member, Sheila Switzer, is a charming lady, a grandmother and one of my constituents. WATCH believes that the break up of the extended family and the fact that many young people have children without having any experience of a stable family life means that many children today stand little chance of leading a moral and law-abiding existence. It says that parenting must be taught. It is not instinctive and it should be part of the school curriculum. That is one of WATCH's themes, which I commend. I shall write to my hon. Friend the Minister about it because I know that the Secretary of State for Health has been alerted and thinks that it is a reasonable idea.

WATCH recommends that there should be nursery education from the age of three. For years, I have kept an open mind about the merits of nursery education but I must tell my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools that I am beginning to realise that it merits serious attention. I believe that the Secretary of State shares that sentiment and, subject to resources, I hope that it moves up the priority list. Nursery education makes a great contribution, and I shall refer the comments of the organisation What About The Children to my hon. Friend the Minister.

All of us have a role to play in tackling the serious problem of crime. The Government are tackling it and have made a good start. If they maintain it as a priority and if they succeed with the proposed measures in demonstrating a decline in crime, they will deserve the gratitude of the people.

7.40 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): In today's Gracious Speech we heard the announcement of the privatisation of British Coal. Of course, it came as no surprise to anybody, because there have been many warnings that the Tory Government were about to privatise the British coal industry. The announcement is the final piece in the Government's sordid little jigsaw puzzle that began in October last year with the announcement of the closure of 31 pits and the throwing of 30,000 miners on to the unemployment heap, not to mention all the other people who will lose their jobs because they are dependent on the mining industry. There was a huge public outcry, but the Government ignored it. They ignored the demonstrations of solidarity among the miners and their families. They ignored demonstrations in the coalfield communities and in the capital city. They ignored the facts and, for the most part, ignored the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. Their minds were clearly set on the privatisation as announced in today's Gracious Speech.

The Government proposed a review of 12 pits based on so-called market testing. Among those 12 pits to be market tested were Bentley and Hatfield collieries in my constituency. Most people knew that it was not a review and said so at the time, but some people believed that the Government were serious about that review procedure and that they would listen to people and take cognisance of what they were saying. Some Tory rebels sincerely believed that their Government would propose something to save some of the collieries, notably the 12 that were up for market testing. Of course we all know now that that was ludicrous. Most of us knew then that the Government were trying to buy time and convince their own Back Benchers to go through the right Lobby at the appropriate time.

In August, after Parliament went into recess, the Government deliberately laid before the House a statutory instrument to scrap the Act that applies to health and safety in mines—the Mines and Quarries Act 1954—and replaced it with some loose codes of conduct. Again, it was all done purposely because they had one goal in mind—the privatisation that has been announced in the Gracious Speech today. Slipping the health and safety regulations through while Parliament was in recess is absolutely disgraceful, but it does not surprise me because it was done by a Government who, on occasions, ignore democracy.

Bentley colliery in my constituency was informed on Monday that it was to close on 3 December. Bentley colliery produces coal at less than £1 a gigajoule, which is cheaper than any imported coal. Before the colliery entered the market testing procedure, there was a market for its coal in the electricity industry. Strangely enough, after March, that market disappeared and the only market for Bentley's coal was to sweeten coal at another nearby colliery. A pit that produces coal at less than £1 per gigajoule was sending its coal to make another pit's coal saleable. The other pit remains open and the coal from Bentley, according to British Coal and, no doubt, Ministers, has no market. There was a wonderful market before March. It is amazing how it suddenly disappeared. How can anybody justify closing a pit that is producing coal at less than imported prices? It is unbelievable. The miners at Bentley colliery did everything in their power to ensure that that pit was producing coal at the right price. Neil Clarke and the British Coal management did absolutely nothing to ensure that that coal was sold.

Hatfield, the other colliery in my constituency, was told by British Coal today that it, too, was to close on 3 December. It is all part of the great scheme to slim down the mining industry for privatisation. What about Hatfield's market for coal? For the most part it does not lie in the electricity industry, but in domestic and industrial fuel. Every day, lorries queue and wait for the coal to come out of the pit. Today the miners at Hatfield are told that there is no market for their coal. The Government have got us into a ludicrous situation all in the interests of privatisation. Our country is built on coal, yet we are importing nuclear power from France, importing coal from the continent and burning the premium fuel gas to generate electricity.

The most nauseating feature of the two meetings that occurred this week to inform the miners in my constituency that after 3 December they will not have jobs is the sheer, outrageous bribery that British Coal have practised on those men. British Coal clearly told the miners that they could have £7,000 each on top of their redundancy payments provided that they did not employ the colliery review procedure. British Coal was clearly trying to bribe miners. British Coal officials have told some men who work at those pits that they may employ the modified colliery review procedure, that they may take that nine months, but that it will make no difference because Frickley, Bentley and Hatfield collieries will close even if the review commission agreed that there was a case to keep them open. Coal board officials have told miners at Bentley and Frickley pits this week that the closure will still go ahead. What is the point of having the review procedure? My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) referred to Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box and saying, tongue in cheek, that the review procedure was genuine. We all know that the review procedure was not genuine and that it was all a sham.

Where has Neil Clarke been? Where has his defence of the mining industry been? He has done absolutely nothing to defend the mining industry. Instead, he has acted like a puppet Tory Ministers, wielding the big axe and shutting collieries. What has British Coal done to win new markets? Absolutely nothing. British Coal has pits that produce coal at less than £1 a gigajoule and it should be able to find a market for that coal. The truth is that British Coal has no intention of trying to find a market. The truth is that the colliery closures have been all about privatisation from start to finish.

It grieves me to think that in the mining town of Doncaster there will be no pits left after 3 December. That is absolutely devastating for an area that has relied on the coal industry for many years. Other businesses in the area which have been built around the mining industry will go bust as well. Unemployment in the Doncaster area is already at 13 per cent. and the colliery closures and the other closures that will follow will undoubtedly increase that figure substantially. What chance do the people in the communities in and around Doncaster have of finding new employment? Many industries and businesses in and around Doncaster are keyed into supplying and servicing the mining industry.

The Government have run riot through our town and through our villages, destroying people's lives, their communities and our local economy. It is clear from the

Gracious Speech that the Government have caused that destruction in the name of their political dogma of privatisation. In so doing, they have destroyed the livelihoods and communities of many of my constituents.

7.52 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes). I have a great deal of sympathy with the problems and plight of his constituents, especially those who have been working in the coalfields. The first seat that I fought was the mining constituency of Normanton in Yorkshire. I have the greatest admiration for the people about whom the hon. Gentleman has talked and a great deal of sympathy with his comments. The Government's policy on energy is to secure the cheapest possible reliable, secure, long-term energy supplies, and that is the way in which the Government will be judged. I hope very much that the Government will achieve what they have set out to achieve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), in an excellent seconding speech, referred to modern fairy tales. Right on cue, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, got up and gave a speech. I am sorry about including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambrideshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) in the same mortar blast. The right hon. Member for Yeovil was very much in favour of nursery education. He probably feels that that would mean more teachers and that more teachers would vote Liberal Democrat.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil made the point, which I think is a fairy tale—it may be right to have more nursery education or it may not be—that people say that there is evidence from all over the world that those who get nursery education commit fewer crimes and do better when they are in education and when they have finished their education. Is it not just possible that the families who send their children to nursery education produce the sort of family background that is more likely to ensure that their children get a better education later and that they are less likely to create crime later in their careers? When one looks at evidence, one must be a little more analytical than the right hon. Member for Yeovil, who tends to think in soundbites.

Sir Anthony Grant: The last thing that I want is for my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) to associate me with the leader of the Liberal Democrat party, of all people. My point was not that it had been proved or otherwise that nursery education would stop crime or anything else. My point was that nursery education deserved the Government's close attention and that is why I wanted my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Schools to consider the matter.

Mr. Marlow: I apologise. I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West that I apologised for associating him with the right hon. Member for Yeovil. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Schools will look at the issue, as he said. He may come down on my side of the argument or on my hon. Friend's side of the argument.

Browsing through the Gracious Speech, I notice the phrase:

"help is concentrated on those most in need".

That worries me a trifle. It has been said by people who are not friendly to the Government that over the past 14 years the Government have picked on their supporters group by group, and have confronted them face on. It is right that the Government have taken on vested interests and they have been courageous to do so. However, I am concerned.

The idea has been part of Government policy for a long period. However, there are people who are supporters of the Government who, through time, feel that they have behaved responsibly. They have looked after themselves and their families. They have secured small pensions and small savings for themselves. Every time there is a problem and every time when, for good reasons, public expenditure has to be looked at, it is the people who have not looked after themselves, who have not looked after their families so effectively, who have not worked so hard, who have not been so enterprising and who are essentially dependent on the state who are looked after. When we put VAT on fuel, for example, their interests are secured. They are compensated, but the others are not. We must be wary of that.

When we look further at VAT on fuel, it will go ill for us as a Conservative party if we do not take account of the people who have done what we asked them to do, and who have been good Conservatives and good citizens. They are not high and mighty people, but people from difficult backgrounds who have looked after themselves and have secured that bit extra to make themselves more content and more comfortable in their more difficult elderly years. It will go ill for us if we do not take account of that factor.

The Gracious Speech says seductively that legislation will be introduced

"to give force to the changes in the European Community's system of own resources following the agreement at the Edinburgh European Council."

Does that mean that something will be done about the boondoggling, fraud and waste? I should be all in favour of that. However, the Gracious Speech refers to

"the agreement at the Edinburgh European Council."

In historical terms, that was some time ago. A lot has happened in Europe since then. Sadly, the Maastricht treaty has been ratified. The exchange rate mechanism has been blown to smithereens. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in an article in *The Economist*, it is Humpty Dumpty and cannot be put back together again.

Why was it agreed at Edinburgh that there should be a change in the own resources system of the European Community? It was to do with monetary union, with cohesion and with convergence. What does "cohesion" mean? It means taking money from the supposedly richer parts of the Community and giving money to the supposedly poorer parts of the Community. It means taking money from my constituents and the constituents of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and making their jobs less economic, and passing that money to Spain, to Portugal, to the Irish Republic and to other parts of Europe that are not doing so well. It means transferring our jobs to other parts of Europe.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) referred to Bolsover, let me put him right. There has been a redistribution of power and wealth from working-class people to rich people during the past 14 years. I have never noticed the hon. Gentleman walking into the Lobby with me to protect the people of Bolsover and the people of Northampton who are at the bottom of the pile. I hope that he will do that.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

The truth is that the hon. Gentleman has walked through the Lobbies recently to shut pits in my constituency, throwing thousands of people out of work, so I hope that he will not use my name in vain. He is a member of the Johannesburg tendency. It just happens that he is obsessed with Maastricht and with the Common Market. He was a Member of Parliament when Lady Thatcher introduced the single market, and he did not squeal and shout then. He has twisted and turned on the Common Market. Throughout the past 20 years, I have voted solidly against it. I do not want lectures from this Johnny-come-lately from Northampton.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I was not lecturing him; I was just pointing out an area where we have some agreement. The hon. Gentleman seems to have been following my career, although he has not been following it closely. I have on many occasions taken a view different from that of a Conservative Government, as he knows.

Mr. Skinner: Not on that issue.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman may say that. If he looks at the Division List—I am afraid that we are taking up the time of the House—he will discover that on every occasion that it was available to me to do so, I voted and spoke against the Single European Act. I have a record of consistently opposing—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. May we have one person at a time?

Mr. Marlow: I was talking about the idea that we were to have a Bill before the House effectively to increase the amount of resources that will be available to the European Community. We shall be transferring resources from our constituents to constituents in other parts of the EC. The argument for that was that we were to have European monetary union. Therefore, we required convergence and we required to lift the prosperity of those areas of the EC which are not as prosperous as Germany, France or Britain. However, that monetary union will not happen. If we are not to have monetary union, why do we need convergence and cohesion? Why must we pass an Act that will take money from this country and from the Chancellor of the Exchequer? We know that there is a major problem with the Budget deficit. Are we to add to that Budget deficit by sending money from this country to far-flung parts of Europe?

There is another vital point. We are concerned about fraud in the EC. One of the Government's objectives is to tighten the controls on how European money is spent. Can we put our hands on our hearts and say that we are ready to send more money to, for example, Greece? Has not there been an election in Greece recently? We should ask the Greeks how they feel about the regime that they have at the moment. Is not the feeling in Greece that the present Prime Minister of that country is a little less than squeaky clean? Was not he almost convicted before a court? Are we really to ask our constituents to forgo various things that could be bought from public expenditure or to pay increased takes so that we can send money to Mr. Papandreou in Greece? Is that what the House is for? I believe not.

I am delighted that the Government are to bring a Bill before the House on law and order. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary gave an effective speech at the Conservative party conference. Opposition Members said that he has produced 27 points to help to deal with the severe and growing problems which are facing this country. It is true to say that, at each of the previous 14 party conferences to which I have been since we have been in government, Home Secretaries have made rousing speeches and had rousing applause from the floor, and still the problems increase.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): They have got worse.

Mr. Marlow: I am sure that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) will acknowledge that the problem has got worse not just in the United Kingdom, but throughout the western world. If he looks across the Atlantic, he will see that the United States has more severe problems than we have. That is not the issue. We are concerned with what is happening in the United Kingdom. I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals are wholly for the good. I think that he is grasping nettles that have not been grasped in the past. However, I believe that we must be more radical.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made an interesting and entertaining, yet serious, speech. He said that what the criminal, and particularly the young criminal, is concerned with is detection. Of course that is true, but even more important than detection is deterrence. Imagine the position of a 14, 15, or 16-year-old hooligan, thug, ramraider, or gang leader. He has a pretty boring existence and does not have a great deal of hope about his life. He gets stimulation, excitement, support, and admiration from his peers—misplaced though it is—the more TWOC-ing he does, or taking a vehicle without the owner's consent.

Sending such a person to prison achieves nothing. I am sorry to a certain extent by the way in which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has concentrated on the aspect of prison. Yes, if people are a threat or danger to society, they should go to prison. I do not believe that prison is right for those young offenders. I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend is to do something about magistrates courts. The essentials of the justice system for that group of people should be: crime on Tuesday, caught on Wednesday, before the courts on Thursday, punished on Friday. It must be swift to be effective and to be a deterrent.

I believe that what those people miss is a deterrent, or any fear or potential threat of humiliation. I know that I will be told that it cannot be done, but we ought to consider the possibility of bringing back some form of corporal punishment. That would be a deterrent. All that is needed is for one young thug, mugger, or hooligan to get a sound thrashing and the rest will slow down, think and change their behaviour pattern. That is needed for one miscreant or one young monster. It is probably not his fault. He may have had a bad background and a bad upbringing.

We must be tough on the causes of crime, but there is no way of saying that we are able to do that overnight. We are all in favour of being tougher on the causes of crime. We should get one of these people and give him some form of humiliation; some modern version of the stocks. It appears absurd that we cannot do it. What we are doing does not work.

I have made these suggestions before and have been told that they are medieval punishments. In some of our urban

areas, the crime situation is just as medieval. We must think the unthinkable and come forward with radical proposals. We cannot do it because we are involved in all sorts of international organisations, institutions and agreements. We are not allowed to govern this country any more. There was a time when one third of the globe was painted red. This country was quite competent and capable of running one third of the world, and now we cannot run our own country.

My daughter visited some friends in Newcastle recently. Her car, of which she was proud, was stolen and was found two hours later a burned frazzle. Elderly ladies —elderly men also—do not dare to open their doors at night for fear of being mugged or having their house ransacked. Are we concerned about those problems or about our international commitments? I know what concerns me most. We need solutions, and we are not getting them.

Other hon. Members wish to speak, so I will make one more point. There has been a lot of controversy recently about the Child Support Agency. Everyone who comes to hon. Members' advice bureaux and surgeries, including fathers, agree that it is right and proper that some parents —fathers mainly—who are not paying enough towards their children who live elsewhere should pay rather than the state or the taxpayer.

That was the principle and that is what the House debated when the Bill was agreed. The devil of the issue comes in the regulations. They were passed not this year but the year before at the fag-end of a Session when no one was here. The proposals were bounced on an unaware House. Look at the regulations and the detail. I was told when I was 16—it is not true so I am not showing off—that my mathematical ability was approaching genius. I do understand formulae and complex issues of that type as much as most people do, but I found the details and the regulations unintelligible. The House had to pass them at the back-end of the Session when there were probably three Members in the Chamber. They had not been properly scrutinised. People say that Government and Parliament are to blame.

I have sent letters about my constituents to Ministers, as has everyone else. The ex-wife of one of my constituents who had been working decided to stop working and start a course of higher education for which her ex-husband had to pay. His livelihood and income are affected by her decision. She might have had a vendetta against him and has decided that she has found a way to make him smart, but there is nothing he can do about it. Her decision is devastating his life.

There are men with second wives and families who have been targeted because they have, to a certain extent, done what they were supposed to do. They may have made a clean break or supported their children from a previous union. They appear on the rolls, lists and registers. They are chased first because they are an easy target. They have second wives and families. If the second wife is working, the man has to pay more to his first wife, who might be sitting at home doing nothing. It is such details of which the House is unaware.

I have letters that hon. Friends and Ministers have signed at the bottom. They are bromides produced by civil servants. Ministers get the blame; the Government are responsible for the measure, but there is another responsibility. The civil servants produce the regulations and write the bromides, but they do not answer the questions posed to them in the letters from my distraught constituents.

In the private sector and industry, if people do not do their jobs properly, are incompetent and hide behind a mass of detail so that one cannot find out what is happening and is given a cloud of fog instead of an answer, they are fired. Some of the civil servants, particularly in relation to the Child Support Agency, are not doing their jobs and should be given their marching orders.

8.12 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am proud of London, particularly its ceremonies. I was pleased to come here today; to participate in one of the great rituals of state is both a pleasure and a privilege. It was a matter of some excitement for me—as for other hon. Members—to come here this morning and go to another place to listen to the Gracious Speech. I hope that there will be many occasions on which I can follow that ritual.

However, I am slight unhappy about our constitutional arrangements because today is the only occasion when ordinary hon. Members, apart from those in government, have a sight of, let alone contact with, the head of state. That is a pity because in all the countries to which one travels around the world—whether they have monarchs or presidents—one encounters the good practice whereby the head of state meets his or her legislators on a regular and informal basis.

I hope that over the coming years those who advise Her Majesty the Queen will suggest that, in addition to the state opening of Parliament, there should be other occasions when she meets Members of Parliament for informal meetings. Garden parties are no substitute. I am not interested in going to garden parties, but I am interested in being able to bend the ear of the head of state—whether monarch or president—on political issues and hear his or her views in an informal setting.

The Gracious Speech reflects another anachronism. It is neither a legislative programme nor a state of the union message. In this regard it is deficient, particularly this year. It would be sensible if each year there was a statement detailing a full list of all the items of legislation that the Government would like Parliament to consider in the coming Session. However, we know that many items were omitted from this Queen's Speech which, in a short time, the Government will present in the form of Bills to the House of Commons.

I think that the reason that at least two such items have been omitted from the Queen's Speech is that they are a source of embarrassment to the Government. Clearly the Government are now discovering omissions, deficiencies and the nonsense of what is now the Railways Act 1993. They will have to repair the botched legislation that they rushed through at the end of the last Session by introducing another Bill. However, they omitted to mention that item in the Queen's Speech.

A number of references have today been made to the Child Support Agency. There is clearly an urgent need for amending legislation to deal with that organisation, which is not only not working, but is hurting many people. I venture to suggest that the majority of those whom it is hurting most voted Conservative at the last general election. However, the Gracious Speech contained nothing about such legislation, because its announcement would be

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an embarrassing U-turn by the Government. Such readjustments are necessary due to the Government's bad handling of the legislative process in the last Session.

I ask any hon. Member who can find in the Queen's Speech any reference to the national health service to raise his or her hand. It is breathtaking that, when there is a major crisis in the running of the health service, the Queen's Speech contains no mention of the funding or restoration of the NHS. That is indicative, partly of the Government's disinterest in something that is greatly valued by the people of this country and partly of the fact that the Government have run out of steam.

The Queen's Speech refers to teacher training and clobbering the National Union of Students, but contains nothing to bolster the morale of teachers and parents who are desperately concerned about the crisis in many of our schools. That crisis has been largely caused by the lack of resources, and the inordinate and unreasonable demands and expectations made of dedicated teachers and professionals. They have to cope with a shortage of resources and a growing education crisis reflecting the failure of society outside the schools. That is a pity.

The Queen's Speech contains no reference to heritage —one of the great areas of state neglected by the House of Commons. The Department of National Heritage has responsibility for matters that can affect all our lives and opportunities for us to enjoy life and live it to the full. However, there is no mention of heritage in the Queen's Speech. If we had the occasional informal meetings with the monarch, I would use one such meeting to say to her that I do not like the idea of charging for admission to Windsor castle, which I consider to be an impudent and unwelcome move.

The speech contains no mention of public transport, which is demonstrably—particularly in our capital city—in crisis. I understand from my colleagues from other parts of the United Kingdom that they and their constituents face the same transport problems in their urban areas. The position is chaotic, and people are finding it more and more difficult and costly to travel around our cities. The only mention of transport in the speech is the Queen's hope that she will be able to go to France in May to join President Mitterrand in the celebrations to mark the opening of the channel tunnel.

Her Majesty the Queen may feel embarrassed by her Government's failure to match the infrastructure exploiting the great engineering achievement of the channel tunnel on the other side of the water. Our infrastructure does not compare well with the great infrastructure built by the French Government. One of the great fiascos of the past 14 years is that one of the most remarkable, exciting and modern rapid transport systems sweeping across north-western Europe will emerge from the channel tunnel at Dover and hit a Victoriana railway system. One of the great tragedies for the United Kingdom is that we shall not be able to exploit, on behalf of our people, industries and commerce, the great advantages that come from the channel tunnel, due to the failure of the Government to fund and plan an environmentally sound but nevertheless efficient and rapid system of linkage from Dover to London and the rest of the United Kingdom.

We heard last week how the Government, for dogmatic reasons, are to defer further the construction of the channel tunnel link. They lack the leadership and are unable to take the bold initiative and make the investment required to get it constructed in the shortest possible time but with minimal environmental disadvantage. The consequences for my constituents in Thurrock, and for many constituents of hon. Members throughout Kent, is one of enormous blight. A great cloud is hanging over them. There is much anxiety about their future due to the indecision, procrastination and foolishness of the Government with regard to the channel tunnel link. When Her Majesty goes to France and joins President Mitterrand for the opening of what is the most remarkable flagship project of our century, I fear that she will have been embarrassed by her Government.

Her Majesty told us also that she looked forward to the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Normandy landings. When I listened to Her Majesty, I thought about the people who fought at Normandy and through northern Europe, many of whom suffered greatly and bore great sacrifice—some still have the emotional and physical scars of the conflict of 1939-45. I reflected that it was that generation who proudly voted for a Labour Government in 1945, which set up our welfare state and provided for our national health service. I believe that the overwhelming majority of the people who fought in that conflict, many of whom will attend the celebrations in June of next year with Her Majesty, were proud of the fact that they created the NHS. They did not mean it to last for only a generation. It was a priceless heirloom that they wanted to hand down to my generation and generations to come. It is something that they wish proudly and jealously to covet as a great achievement for their generation when they elected the Attlee Government.

Many of those veterans, who are now in the evening of their life and need the NHS, are justifiably concerned about its deficiencies and its under-funding as it relates to them. However, because they are not selfish people, because they wished to create a society that was fair and just, and above all else because they wanted a free NHS available to all on the basis of need, they are now deeply concerned that the Government are increasingly depriving their children and grandchildren of the opportunity of having a good and comprehensive NHS, for which they voted in 1945.

There were references in the Gracious Speech to our defence and our armed forces. I noticed yet again that there was the reiteration that the

> "Government attach the highest importance to national security and wish to maintain full support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation."

There is no doubt that there is grave concern—in all walks of life, at all ranks in our armed forces, among journalists who write about these things and among people who are involved in international affairs—that the Government are on the brink of cutting our defence forces without any review of our defence commitments or our resources. Neither is there under way an examination of the fairly immediate effects that such cuts would have on employment among those people involved in industries that supply our armed forces. Those cuts, about which we are likely to hear in the next few weeks, are being brought about through the panic of the Treasury rather than a conscious decision by people involved in our nation's defences and our international commitments. I think that that is wrong.

Although we have had many differences in the House and across the political spectrum about defence, Her

Majesty's Opposition have always been determined to argue that reckless decisions should not be taken about our defence forces. There is a need for a review, but what we are threatened with is a reckless cut, done in panic by Her Majesty's Government because of the economic crisis into which they have led our country. Last week I was at NATO and Shape in Belgium. These anxieties were expressed by many professionals who are deeply concerned at our inability to maintain and fulfil our defence commitments, particularly in relation to international organisations promoting peace, to which this country has had a proud record of contributing.

I took a deep breath when I heard in the Gracious Speech that the Government professes to work to ensure that the European Community is expanded to include those countries which are ready and wish to join the European Community. Implicit in this claim is reference to those countries, particularly those in the Visigard group—Poland, Hungary, the Czech republic and the Slovak republic—which are desperate to join the European Community. The Government are not moving as vigorously as they should, both in the interests, of those countries, and in our own long-term interests, to bring them into the European Community and to the group of western nations. I also think that it is somewhat dishonest, because, for the best part of 50 years, we were taunting people in central and eastern Europe by effectively saying, "Look over the wall. Come and see what the free democratic societies with mixed economies can offer you." Yet when communism failed and the wall came down we would not let them come and join us. That is dishonest and foolhardy in the extreme.

I am not insensitive to the need for us to tread with caution with regard to the reaction of the Russian republic. There may be some anxieties if things move too fast, but our capacity to attract, involve and bring in to the European Community particularly the states to which I referred, and others, is far too slow. I hope that over the coming year the Government will reflect on that and do all they can to facilitate and bolster those fragile democracies and economies which are emerging in central and eastern Europe. I would like to say, Madam Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. He has been most graciously pleased to have given me a rise in rank. I am in fact the Deputy Speaker, not Madam Speaker.

Mr. Mackinlay: For a moment, I thought that I had done something else wrong. I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My complaint against the Government in boasting that they wish to bring the countries of central and eastern Europe into the European Community is that these are merely words. My complaint has now been bolstered by the recent activities of the Secretary of State for Transport who has removed the permit of Lot airlines to land at Heathrow. I thought that this was a spiteful, silly and bullying act by Her Majesty's Government. There are at present no direct flights from Heathrow to Warsaw because Her Majesty's Government seem totally beholden and committed to do the bidding of British Airways, which is a private company. It is quite deplorable.

We are trying to bolster the commerce and enterprise of states such as Poland. However, because British Airways demand an extra slot in its winter schedules to go to Warsaw, and Lot airlines and the Polish Government would not agree, the Secretary of State withdrew Lot's permit to fly to and from Heathrow. We would not do that in relation to many other countries with whom we have relations. That is a bullying act and a way of treating Poland as if it were a third-world country.

Mr. Michael Spicer The hon. Gentleman's argument is extraordinary. He is saying that we should not do things in the interests of our own country. He says that we are bullying a little airline, but effectively we have done exactly the same thing today to American Airlines.

Mr. Mackinlay: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. There is a substantial disagreement between us and the United States, but we would not dare do to United States airlines or carriers what we have done to Lot airlines. My point is that we are treating the Polish Government and Polish airlines differently from the way we would treat partners such as the United States with whom we have relationships. That is the tragedy. We should not have acted in such an overbearing and high-handed manner, particularly when Poland's economy and democracy are so fragile.

I am not suggesting that we should not try to promote our own companies and enterprises. To do so is perfectly correct. Indeed, that is the duty of Government. However, there is a balance to be struck and the Government have behaved in an indefensible way and against the backdrop of proclaiming that they want to do much to promote the fortunes of central and eastern European countries and to bring them into the European Community.

In the Queen's Speech, Her Majesty read the Government's claim that they wish to

"continue with firm financial policies designed to support continuing economic growth and rising employment, based on permanently low inflation."

We obviously welcome the fall in inflation. However, that has been achieved at the ridiculous price of widespread unemployment. Earlier today, the Prime Minister and other Government spokesmen bragged about the fall in the unemployment figures. However, that fall is a fall from a very high level. It is a basic law of physics that what goes up must one day come down. I do not believe that some minor drop in the unemployment figures is a great victory. Any drop is welcome, but there is no sign that there is a trend which will continue unabated. There is no sign that the unemployment figure will plummet.

The unemployment figures are indefensibly high, particularly in the south-east where, outside Greater London, I am one of the few Opposition Members. As I have said before in this Chamber, arguably I represent not thousands, but millions. People in the south-east who voted for the Conservatives at the last general election now feel bitterly betrayed.

Before I came to the Chamber today, I checked the figures with the Library. In November 1989 there were just over 2,000 unemployed people in my constituency. The figures released today show that there are now 5,173. In November 1989 in Basildon there were 2,328 unemployed people. The figure today is 5,900. In Harlow in November 1989 there were 1,562 unemployed people. Today there are 4,950. The November 1989 figure for Medway was 1,613. The figure today is 5,023. The unemployment figure in Gravesham in November 1989 was 1,938. The figure today is 5,379. There were similar rises in Crawley, Slough, Dover, Brighton, the Heathrow travel-to-work area and

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Southend. Throughout the south-east of England, there is a catalogue of unemployment which the Government choose to ignore.

The Government ignore that catalogue of unemployment at their peril. One day the Government will have to face the electorate and the people of south-east England will seek retribution at the ballot box for their great betrayal and that of their families who have endured, and continue to endure, extreme levels of unemployment with the attendant distresses of business failures, loss of homes and family break up. During this Parliament, I will do all I can to charge and point the prosecutor's finger at the Government and the Conservative Members who have supported and sustained that Government whose policies have brought blight and deep recession to the south-east.

The Government have been in office for 14 years. At 14 Conservative party conferences, and in every Queen's Speech over the same period, there have been ritual references to the need to tackle crime and to introduce measures to promote law and order. That is now a very thin and boring claim which convinces no one. The most recent utterances by the latest Conservative Home Secretary have no credence whatsoever.

One of the problems which the Home Secretary and his colleagues fail to address is the congestion of our courts system. Nothing would be worse than to arrest more people, particularly young people, and then to allow even longer periods to elapse before they reach the courts. We know that when people are arrested and are on bail, they often commit similar crimes again before they reach court. It is a priority for the Government to fund and facilitate a proper courts system and to address the universities of crime, which is what our underfunded and Victorian prisons have become.

I was deeply concerned a couple of weeks ago when the Home Secretary came to the House and more or less said that he had abandoned most of the recommendations of the Sheehy inquiry report. People are quite rightly concerned about the Sheehy recommendations which I believe attacked the pay and conditions of service of police officers and which would have also sapped public confidence in the police. I was worried that people may have wrongly assumed, from the Home Secretary's statement, that he had called off the hounds. I was concerned that many people would overlook the White Paper proposals which, according to the Gracious Speech, are to appear in a Bill.

I believe that the proposals are serious and dangerous. They threaten 170-odd years of the unique tradition of British policing. The Government propose that there should be new police authorities which should be chaired by a paid appointee of the Home Secretary. That will threaten the independence of policing and our police traditions.

Until now, there has been a good balance between elected representatives who provide the heads of our current police committees, and the chief constables. However, if there are to be paid appointees of the Home Secretary at the end of the corridor, there will be all the chemistry of clash and division over who is in charge of our police forces. It will not be fair to chief constables or their officers. Their operational decisions will almost certainly be challenged by the Home Secretary's paid nominees. We cannot escape the fact that there would be political appointments.

Even at this stage, I hope that the Government or their supporters will reflect on that dangerous and serious departure. When my colleagues assume office, I hope that we will reverse these moves. I hope that we will not be tempted to install our nominees as paid chairmen of police authorities. Instead, we should restore the independence and involvement of local authorities on the present basis. That would be fair and sensible.

In the Bill on the police, I hope that we will address for the first time the fact that there is no set national standard or control in relation to people who claim or hold the office of constable. For some years I have been deeply concerned about the fact that the names and numbers of many people who hold the office of constable are not known to the Home Secretary. There has been a proliferation of minor police forces. In the Bill on the police, I would like to see a standard laid down for the office of constable so that when non-Home Office police forces appoint constables there is a standard which can be recognised by all police forces in the country.

There are some very professional non-Home Office police forces—for example, the Ministry of Defence police, the Atomic Energy Authority police, the Royal Parks constabulary, and the British Transport police, which is one of our biggest police forces. Those are distinguished police forces, but there are some which are very small and which do not have an acceptable standard, although they may be made up of dedicated men and women who wish to give public service.

In Wandsworth, there is a parks police force in which people hold the office of constable, and in Kensington and Chelsea parks there are people who hold the office of constable. By no stretch of the imagination can they be deemed to be comparable with officers in the other forces to which I have referred. I hope that that will be recognised in the forthcoming Bill.

On the occasion of the Bill coming before the House, Parliament should instruct the Government that there should be no more privatisation of police forces. I am deeply concerned and amazed that the Government propose to privatise the police force at Northern Ireland's international airport. I find that breathtaking. This is an armed police force doing great service in protecting travellers. Its officers are literally at the gate to Northern Ireland, yet the Government intend to privatise them, along with the Northern Ireland airports. I hope that the Government will reflect and pull back from this foolish course.

I now refer to the long-awaited announcement that we will soon have before us legislation to reform the laws relating to Sunday trading. One of the main industries in my constituency is the retail and distributive trade. I have in my constituency Lakeside, and many other stores in and around it, together with the new controversial Costo club or wholesale store. I have a dilemma in respect of the proposed legislation. It really is dreadful that we already have had an extension of Sunday trading despite the fact that what everyone knows to be the law prevented most Sunday trading. Whatever one might ultimately feel about the merits or otherwise of Sunday trading, it is surely wrong that Parliament should have been bounced into the

need to make changes by a flagrant disregard of the law by some big high street names. However, that is what has happened.

My dilemma is that many of my constituents work on Sundays—indeed it is the only employment that some can obtain. I have to reconcile their needs with that of ensuring that there is regard for the law. At the same time, many people have also come to enjoy the facility of shopping on Sundays.

There has been a sorry tale of failure by the Government to address, much earlier than this parliamentary Session, an issue that needed to be resolved. We should have had regulations to bring about a sensible regime for Sunday shopping while ensuring that people who do not wish to work on Sundays are not penalised or disadvantaged. Our much-valued corner stores, which are very vulnerable to the growth of out-of-town shopping centres, also need some protection.

I have not made up my mind about the legislation—we have yet to see the details of the Bill—but I hope that a reasonable compromise can be struck. It really is quite dreadful for the Government to bleat on about law and order, discipline, and regard for others when they have acquiesced by their silence and inaction in allowing large companies to break the law in order to achieve selfish commercial objectives. That is what has happened. It is for Parliament over the next few weeks to try to find a way of creating a settlement which meets the needs of those people who wish to shop on Sundays while balancing this against the needs of those who wish to maintain some special features of Sunday. We must also ensure that people are not made to work on Sundays if they do not wish to do so. I hope that we can reach a settlement that will last for 20 or 30 years before it is reviewed. The current position is a most unsatisfactory state of affairs.

I am sorry to have delayed the House, but the Queen's Speech debate is an occasion when we can reflect upon the Government's stewardship of this country. When I came away from the other place today, I recalled from my youth the famous cover of *Private Eye* which showed Her Majesty the Queen reading the Queen's Speech. On the cover there was a balloon which read, "I hope you don't think that I wrote this rubbish." Today's Queen's Speech represented a failure by the Government. It glibly dismissed the things that are wrong in our country and it produced no alternatives to improve the quality of life. We look forward to a Queen's Speech whose author is my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). We look forward then to hearing from the Throne a speech which will be described as an agenda for a generation and which provides hope for people of all age groups who wish to see the country's commerce expand, its health services promoted and, above all else, full employment restored.

8.46 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): We are forming quite a select band. Perhaps we could huddle up together or even move to a smaller room. The last time I followed the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) was after his maiden speech. I hope that he will not mind if I am not as polite to him on this occasion. He has all the qualities that will make him a great filibusterer.

I suspect that, in large measure, this parliamentary Session will determine the course of British politics until the next general election and, because of that, until the next millennium. It is tempting to suggest that that will hang on the legislative programme outlined in the Gracious Speech. The programme of law-making that we are promised is on the whole admirable. I look forward to doing my bit of tramping through the Lobby in support.

I said "on the whole" because it will come as no surprise to some hon. Members to hear that I am less than totally ecstatic about the prospect of passing a law which will put up taxes in order to supply money to the European Union. As my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) eloquently said, it will pay money to the growers of olive trees in Greece and to mushroom growers in Ireland. It just so happens that I do not represent the Irish, the Greeks, the French or the Germans. I represent the English and the British. To that extent, it worries me that the people whom I represent will have their taxes increased as result of that law.

Of course I wish my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary well for the passage of his legislation to re-establish public confidence in the rule of law. I also very much welcome the proposed Bill to privatise the coal industry. There has been much discussion today about that measure, especially among Opposition Members. My greatest regret when I was Minister for coal and power was that I lost the argument in the Government about privatisating the coal industry at that stage. I felt then, as I feel now, that the combination of access to private capital —more capital—to private expertise and management, and in particular to private expertise in marketing would have stood the industry in very good stead, especially when the electricity industry was being privatised. I had the honour of taking that Bill through Committee. I felt that the two privatisation Bills should have come at about the same time.

One of the problems with the industry at present is the disparity between the privatised electricity industry and the coal industry which is still in the public sector. I faced and lost two arguments at that time. The first argument was that the National Union of Mineworkers would hate it. At that time, once we had got past the rhetoric in public, they took me around the back and asked what they thought was the main question—what will the price of shares be? I hope that the Government will find a way to ensure that employees become shareholders in the privatised industry, whatever shape it takes.

Another argument was that we could not map the industry's reserves in time. I hope that we will quickly find a way through that—I suspect that we will—by franchising excavation rights and overcoming the mapping issue. Certainly, I welcome the proposed Bill because it will put the industry on the right footing in the way that should have been done some time ago.

All that being said, I doubt whether the extent to which public confidence in the Government is restored will depend entirely on the number of wonderful laws that we pass over the next year. There has been some discussion this afternoon about clogging the proposed legislative timetable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) expressed his concerns about not getting Bills into Committee before Christmas. It seems that part of the answer has been found by the Government, and that is not to have too much legislation this Session.

There is also the problem of the new budgetary timetable. I absolutely agree with the concept of producing

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the expenditure side and revenue side at the same time. Every Budget, we were given the excuse that the real answers would come in the expenditure round, and in every expenditure round we were told that the real answers would come in the budgetary round. To bring the two together must be right in terms of accountability. The important question is whether the timing of the Budget in November is right. The point about clogging up the machinery is a fair one. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale will know as much as anyone about the management of legislation in that context.

I am finding that more and more people in industry, especially the retail industry, are saying that there is effectively a blight on industry at present because no one knows what is coming in the Budget as we move towards Christmas. I have been told that industry, especially the retail industry, depends on heavy sales during the Christmas period. There is a blight that has caused part of the present hiccup, if that is what it is, in the retail market in the past two to three weeks. It is absolutely right that the Government have brought the two aspects of the Budget together, but they should rethink the precise timing.

Most of the proposed legislation is fine. However, I suspect that the poor old elector is concerned about results. For example, the matter of more criminal law is fine by me and fine by the electorate. But that is not the end of the matter. The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham), whose speech was passionate and eloquent, made a point about detection. However, he seemed to go slightly over the top when he said that it was simply a matter of putting resources into the police force. He bypassed the point that, although we have put an extra 80 per cent. in resources in real terms into the police force in the past 10 years, the crime rate has gone up during that period. Therefore, there is clearly no direct correlation between extra resources for the police and the crime rate. The hon. Gentleman was also wrong to say that one should not try to get better value for money out of the police force. The Government are absolutely right to do that.

The elector wants more than legislation; he wants the crime rate to come down. Several hon. Members have said that it is not simply a matter of criminal legislation, although that is important. The whole gamut of values and attitudes—the status of the family and the values and the disciplines in that family—must be at the root.

The question whether confidence in the Government is restored will depend not on legislation per se but on whether results will be achieved. There is one policy area where we can clearly produce the goods. We can provide an environment in which more goods and services—growth—can be achieved. In that context, the way ahead seems to be unusually clear. First—this is where I agree with the Queen's Speech—we must press ahead with what have come to be known as economic supply side policies. In the present circumstances, the chief supply side policy must be the maintenance of the objective of low taxation. High taxation and free enterprise are contradictions in terms. If there is no net profit, there is no incentive to invest. If there is no net wage, there is no incentive to work. The Conservative party manifesto at the last election could not have put the matter better. I quote from page 7:

> "A lightly taxed economy generates more economic growth and more revenue. High taxes kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

While on the subject of eggs, there is a chicken and egg problem. Low growth with uncontrolled public expenditure generates the need for higher taxes, and higher taxes generate lower growth. Of course, the problem that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will face in the Budget in two weeks' time is how to break into that circle. Perhaps this is the point at which so-called supply side economics meet the demand side. One of the greatest absurdities of some recent economic debates has been to divide the two and make policies that are apparently exclusive. If one takes the view, as I do, that the fundamental mistake of macro-economic policy over many years—certainly the past 10 years—has been to place exchange rate policy as a priority above interest rates or money supply policy, one is expressing Keynesism under another name. If one wants steady economic growth, on the one hand one must have good industrial relations and low taxation, but on the other hand one must have a rate of interest and a monetary policy which are appropriate to steady growth. "Appropriate" means taking into account the lagged time effects of changes in monetary and interest policy on the economy.

I have been banging on about lagged effects for some time now. As long ago as 28 September 1990, when I was still a Minister, I wrote to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer. I said:

> "I have been asking myself again why it is that the UK continues to suffer worse swings of 'stop-go' economic cycles than any of our competitors, with more serious effects in particular on business confidence.
>
> The answer I believe continues to be that our economic and monetary authorities have less of an appreciation than others of the lags in the economy in particular between changes in interest policy and business investment.
>
> They tend, as they have done for the past fifty years, to respond to the events of the day without projecting forward the effects of their policies for the necessary 18-24 months. These policies are therefore alternately more severe and more lax than is required."

What I think that means in the present context is that whereas interest rates should have been reduced much faster and further two years ago—which some of us were advocating strongly at the time—now, just when it has become fashionable to call for even lower interest rates, may well be the time for them to be stabilised. If we were to reduce interest rates further now, it would be too late to affect the tail end of the recessionary cycle; it would probably be damaging in terms of inflation and the balance of payments when the impact was felt in 18 months' time; and it would look suspiciously like a return to shadowing German interest rates, a policy with a proven disaster record. As a matter of fact, the medium-term trend in interest rates is likely to be not downwards, but upwards. That will certainly happen if we link ourselves back to the deutschmark, with Germany's seemingly unstoppable growth in public borrowing. Interest rates will also increase if public spending in this country continues to outstrip the rate of growth in the economy.

In that context, it seems to me that the most important part of the Government's activities during the next Session will be not legislation, but their fundamental review of public spending. I assume that the fundamental review will begin with the question, "What is Government for?" If that prompts, as I hope it will, a fairly simple answer—defence, law, education, health, the support of those who are unable to support themselves—I assume that the next question

which they ask themselves in the Treasury will be, "Are we fulfilling those narrow activities adequately?" If the answer is a question mark, or even a lemon, I hope that we shall begin to consider the question of how to focus resources again. I cannot see how that can mean anything other than means-testing benefits and allowances, thus making more generous provision——

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Shame.

Mr. Spicer: That has been a standard response, especially of Labour politicians, for many years. I have never been able to understand the morality of it. If the hon. Lady is saying that it is more moral to spread resources across the board so that one is not, in the process, able to focus the resources on those who really need the support, I cannot understand the morality of that position. If any Government waste resources across the board by giving money to people, such as rich old people or rich disabled people, who do not need support, we deprive those who really need the money. Among the people who really need it, I include the pretty needy—those on low incomes who, on the whole, we completely ignore. Either we spread the money across the board, giving it to rich and poor alike, or we focus it on people who do not have earned incomes while ignoring those on low incomes. Certainly, if we do not bring public expenditure into line with economic growth, both are likely to be brought to a grinding halt.

The jigsaw puzzle completes itself: low taxes, wise monetary policy, focused public spending, flexible and probably hardening exchange rates—that point is often missed; people always think that we will have a sinking exchange rate, whereas with a flexible exchange rate we would probably have a hardening one—high productivity, low inflation and high growth. In those circumstances, we shall be in office for ever and we shall deserve to be, my son.

9.4 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I disagree fundamentally with the points that the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) has just made. It is immoral to target benefits and to operate them as economic policies, as he suggested. Universal benefits are provided across the board so that people are not missed. When benefits are targeted under special arrangements many people do not know to what benefits they are entitled. With universal benefits the taxation system should respond by clawing back the money that is not required. In a properly constructed society it should be possible to operate in that way. This fundamental debate should continue.

I wish to raise another fundamental issue. During the speeches of the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) we heard a great deal of discussion about the basic values to which the Prime Minister talks about returning. I suspect that they might include some of those that the hon. Gentleman has just presented. I offer for consideration a basic value that should be at the forefront of our thoughts as Members of this Chamber, considering the battles of the past to base this Chamber on universal suffrage and operating within a climate of democratic rights. That value is democracy.

Our democracy is seriously affected at the starting point of the operation of the franchise. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and other bodies have produced clear evidence that about 4 million people are missing from the electoral registers of the United Kingdom. That is a disgrace. At present the Home Office is involved in a number of reviews and I hope that a matter that it considers as serious as this will find a place in our deliberations. The Gracious Speech states:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

I hope that the Government will propose a measure to overcome the most fundamental democratic deficit that exists. The private Member's Bill that I brought before the House last parliamentary Session, entitled Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, is available. It aimed to produce a rolling register and sought to tackle exactly this problem.

The democratic deficit is not restricted to the number of people who are missing from electoral registers. The Gracious Speech states that the "principle of subsidiarity" is to be

"applied to European Community legislation".

The principle of subsidiarity is a weak philosophical and social notion, which is difficult to put in constitutional and legal terms. All that will happen in European institutions and during scrutiny by this House is that we shall ask whether subsidiarity should apply to the measure under consideration. Whether or not we agree will depend on our attitude to the issue before us and whether we believe that decisions should be made at a European level or by the United Kingdom Parliament. In the end this reminds us of what the tussle and the battle are about, rather than devises any constitutional means by which that distinction can be resolved.

The distinction can be resolved by having two areas of operating authority only when there is a clear distinction between those areas. If Europe had a federal constitution, that could provide considerable authority to the European Parliament and to the individual Parliaments of the nation states that take local decisions. A federal Europe could provide considerable authority for individual Parliaments.

Technical and legal decisions in Europe are currently made by bodies called Councils of Ministers at which representatives of member states traditionally meet in secret. Currently we have no adequate information about what occurs at those meetings. A parliament that virtually meets in secret is a nonsense, because how can people check on what is taking place?

The decisions made at the Heads of Government meetings in Edinburgh in December 1992 and in Brussels in October 1993, that there would be transparency concerning the meetings of the Council of Ministers, that full votes would be held and that decisions taken would be recorded and made available to us, are currently not being implemented. It is essential that the Council of Ministers should respond to the values that have been floated at the meetings of the Heads of Government and that some concrete decisions should be made about publications. At a Council of Ministers foreign affairs meeting, it was agreed that it was possible not to publish the votes if the majority of the people at the meeting so decided. That confounds the principles that were decided at the Heads of Government meeting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) suggested that eastern European countries should be involved in the European Community. The Queen's Speech contained reference to accession agreements with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden. If

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we are to extend the European Community boundaries to include eastern European countries, we should first of all arrange to have proper democratic institutions with which those countries can associate. I believe in the development of the European Community on that basis—and particularly drawing in the emerging eastern European democracies—but we must establish democratic institutions for them.

A subject which one might have thought difficult to discuss, although it is mentioned in the Queen's Speech, is democracy and the striving for a peaceful settlement in the former Yugoslavia. We should be looking for democratic space in the nations that make up the former Yugoslavia. Within Bosnia, it would seem almost impossible to talk about democratic potential, but we should support the notion of United Nations and European Community protectorates being established in Sarajevo and Mostar. We should seek to draw together people from differing cultural backgrounds, who support democratic principles, in order to involve them in the running of those areas. We can then begin to build transitional authorities in Bosnia and the other nations of Yugoslavia that operate on democratic principles and have multicultural respect for each other. We should at least talk to the people in Bosnia and other areas of Yugoslavia who believe in these things.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is my hon. Friend prepared to commit the considerable numbers of British and European troops and the money required to maintain such areas—even were he able to find within the populations those democrats of whom he speaks?

Mr. Barnes: The protection of Sarajevo and Mostar is a modest beginning. It will involve the nurturing of the forces that exist in those areas, so that there is a different pattern from that of paramilitary activity, warlords, excesses and ethnic cleansing. We cannot afford not to make that commitment. At the same time we should try to contact and work with the potential democratic forces that exist in Serbia and Croatia, which may help to build a different future.

Many democratic elements exist in Belgrade. They may represent minorities in the population, but they offer views contrary to those of Milosevic and Seselj, who represents the radical fascists, and we should establish links with those forces and encourage them. I do not believe that the policy of sanctions towards Serbia will help the situation, because it adds to Milosevic's authority. Great dangers and considerable economic tensions exist in Kosovo, but it is covered by the Serbian federation or what the Serbs still call the Yugoslav federation. Similar problems have been created because of the policy towards Iraq, which has also been referred to in the Queen's Speech.

Nearer to home the principle of looking for democratic opportunities exists in Northern Ireland, which was also mentioned in the Queen's Speech. We should look to establishing devolved government and forms of power sharing. Almost anyone who speaks about developments in Northern Ireland also stresses the importance of a Bill of Rights. If talks fail with the different groups of political figures, we should be willing to talk with the people of Northern Ireland. That has already happened through the Opsahl commission, which was chaired by the Norwegian, Professor Opsahl. That commission has interviewed 3,000 people. Unfortunately, its suggestions about the future are never discussed in the House. In fact that commission has been dismissed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who picked on two suggestions that were easy to criticise. He did not attempt to listen to the nature of the commission's investigation.

Possibilities exist in Northern Ireland if we are willing to talk to the people directly. We should also ensure that we always stand and fall by those who are against violence and intimidation. Today there were massive demonstrations which were supported by the Irish Congress of Trades Unions, the equivalent of the Confederation of British Industry. Such demonstrations suggest the line that we should follow. We should stand by those people who represent the democratic force upon which it is necessary to build.

Democracy is not something that was established to create some fine system by which people could have their say. People became involved in the democratic process because that was the means by which they could join the political nation and have their interests listened to and met.

The Chartists of the 19th century were working-class men who were fighting for the vote. What motivated them, and what is included in the preamble to the charter, were the economic conditions in which they found themselves. The vote was seen as the mechanism through which those economic conditions could be improved.

As the franchise was extended, all political parties had to respond to such social concerns. In 1870, the Conservatives enacted the Education Act, which enabled various people to enjoy the benefits of elementary education. In 1910, the Liberals introduced old-age pensions, and from 1945, under Labour, the welfare state and the national health service were established. It is because people want their interests to be respected, some economic well-being so that they can associate with each other, and an element of equality in society, that the franchise and the democratic rights that should go with it are regarded as so important.

The Queen's Speech contains measures that further hit at many of those rights and social gains through deregulation, attacks on health and safety, and the further extension of VAT beyond domestic fuel to books, food and children's clothes. That should not happen in a democracy and if we had a full democracy with those extra 4 million votes, it probably would not happen.

The rights of the House have been considerably eroded by the development of privatisation, which is now in the Queen's Speech in connection with British Coal. At one time we had a Department of Energy, until the Government got rid of it and made it a minor section of the Department of Trade and Industry. By privatising gas, electricity and the whole of the energy market, the Minister was no longer responsible for answering questions on those matters in the House. A host of agencies has been established and the operation of most of them has been disastrous. They include agencies for employment, benefits and child support, which erode those considerable rights.

The Prime Minister should be concerned with the basic value of democracy. Nowhere should it be considered more basic than in this Parliament, although it began by not being particularly democratic and democracy had to be fought for. Although we have it now, it is being nibbled away at and we must return to some of the values of the 19th and early 20th century when people fought for democracy and the extension of the franchise. When we

express those views we achieve the right perspective on economic well-being and the social provisions that should go with it.

9.21 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) called for the creation of democratic institutions for the emerging democracies to join before we consider them as candidates for the European Community. But the Council of Europe, which already exists, is precisely that. As chairman of the Council of Europe committee for non-member countries, I remind him that in the past three years we have let in nine of those newly emerging democracies as full members. We have allowed a further eight that have applied for membership to become special guests. So the institution for which the hon. Gentleman calls has existed since 1949.

I welcome all that is contained in the Gracious Speech and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the robust way in which he introduced it to the House today. I also welcome his "back to basics" theme, reflected throughout much of the proposals. It is the clear lead which so many people have demanded and it exactly catches the nation's mood.

Nowhere do we need to return to basics more than in maintaining law and order and protecting our constituents. Although there may never have been a golden age to which to return, our country has doubtless been a far safer place to live than it is today. Before the 1920s, fewer than 100,000 offences were recorded; by 1950, the rate had soared to 500,000; by 1980, crime had risen fivefold; and today it has doubled yet again to well over 5 million offences. As less than half of all crimes are ever reported, the real figure is much higher. The majority of crimes are committed by young men under the age of 25 and nearly half are drug or drink related. So we already have a clear target to tackle. That was recognised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in the 27 new measures that he announced at the Conservative party conference last month, which will be incorporated in forthcoming legislation.

My constituents welcome all those measures, as do the local police. Their only concern is that the original intent of the legislation will be watered down during its passage through the House and that, like so much previous legislation, it will prove ineffective.

My constituents want further measures so that courts can require those guilty of vandalism and of theft of private property to repair or to replace, through their own efforts, that which they have destroyed. Such a policy should equally apply to those who injure or cause death by driving. In whatever form is appropriate, they should be made to compensate those whose lives they have damaged or destroyed.

This morning, listening to the "Today" programme on Radio 4, I felt ashamed to learn that the United States is pleased that England is now out of the World Cup because fewer of our fans will be tempted to go there next year. We should all be ashamed of the reputation of English fans abroad.

In calling for the restoration of discipline, of respect and of a sense of responsibility, particularly among young people, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister echoes the thoughts of the nation. The unacceptable behaviour of too many young people, in their attitude to authority and in their language, must be addressed, if not in schools and in the home because it is too late, then by others on society's behalf.

I hope that, having put law and order back at the top of the agenda, the Government will keep it there until current trends are reversed—until crime rates are falling instead of rising and detection rates are rising instead of falling. Certainly, after the latest tragedy—the murder of PC Patrick Dunne in Clapham only two and a half weeks ago—the most popular measure that the Government could support is the restoration of the death penalty for the murderers of policemen.

I welcome the commitment better to target the provision of social security to ensure that those who receive benefit are those who need it. I welcome the further crackdown on fraud and abuse of benefit. It is essential that identity cards be introduced, and I hope that the Government will not be put off by recent reports suggesting that the cost of the necessary technology is too high. If we accept, as we should, that the time is long overdue for the introduction of a national identity card system, not only to counter social security abuse but to combat crime, terrorism and illegal immigration, big business and the banks will have an interest in paying for such a system. Millions of credit identity cards are in existence. A national system incorporating the so-called "smart" technologies will threaten nobody's civil liberties.

In concentrating benefit on those most in need, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will aim to increase benefit in real terms to those who need it. Unemployment benefit is too low. It costs about £16 a week for an adult to eat reasonably and healthily, so £44 a week to a single unemployed person is clearly inadequate for the rest of his expenses, which may include keeping up appearances at job interviews and transport costs to those interviews.

Similarly, the value of the basic state retirement pension is too low. I accept that those who rely entirely on it are entitled to additional help, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will appreciate that the lowest interest rates in a generation, which we have today, have led to a dramatic drop in incomes of elderly people. Thus, a real increase of the basic pension would be especially helpful to pensioners now.

In two months' time, a NATO summit will consider the long-term future of the alliance between NATO and Russia. It will need to decide how to respond to a growing number of countries who want to join—the former members of the Warsaw pact. That situation was inconceivable five years ago. NATO has been uniquely successful in defending western civilisation. To extend its security commitments by enlarging its membership now, after nearly half a century of close political co-operation, of integrated command and the transatlantic commitment of conventional nuclear forces for common security would be a grer' mistake.

The way forward for the security of Europe lies, as was suggested in the Queen's Speech, in the devlopment of the Western European Union as the most appropriate collective European security organisation for the new democracies to join. Enlargement of the WEU in that way would not contradict the Maastricht treaty—which sees the WEU as the European defence community of the future and as being independent of the European Union and NATO, but with close links to both. Existing WEU treaties with the United States and Canada would retain the basis

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for transatlantic co-operation. An enlarged WEU would render unnecessary the recent French proposal—the Balladur plan—for the further institutionalisation of Europe in the pursuit of stability. An enlarged WEU seems to comply with all that my right hon. and learned Friend the Defence Secretary said in his recent speech at the Centre for Defence Studies about the WEU's future as a strong European pillar.

As the Council of Europe's rapporteur for Russia's application for full membership of our parliamentary assembly, I look forward to observing the parliamentary elections in the federation in four weekends' time. There is no doubt that if the elections are adjudged to be free and fair, it will hasten the acceptance of Russia's application to be a full member of the Council of Europe—something that we could not have conceived a few weeks ago before President Yeltsin dismantled the present parliament. As desirable as that prospect undoubtedly is, it must not be seen as a result of compromising our high standards of membership. Russia must become a genuine multiparty democracy before we can allow it to join the Council of Europe. It must implement the rule of law and it must fully subscribe to the European convention on human rights. Its citizens must enjoy the same rights of individual petition to the European Court as the rest of us and they should be aware of that unique protection. Russian forces must be removed from the neighbouring former Soviet republics, where their presence is wanted neither by those Governments nor by their people.

Russian hegemony was one of the most dominating and destructive influences on Europe in the past century. Today, Russia's active membership of the Council of Europe and the WEU, for which I have called, are the two biggest initiatives to ensure a peaceful and stable Europe during the next century. I welcome the commitment of the Gracious Speech to provide help for political and economic reform in the states of the former Soviet Union and its integration into the international community.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have a short statement to make.

Speaker's Statement

Madam Speaker: I understand that, while most of us earlier today obeyed the royal command to attend in the House of Lords, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) took advantage of my absence to occupy the Chair—a position to which he is not entitled. I believe, although I was not, of course, able to witness it myself, that for a short time, there was a travesty of the proceedings of this House.

I take the most serious view of this type of horseplay. It is not for the hon. Member for Bolsover to decide to take the Chair, even in a piece of temporary buffoonery, and it is not for other hon. Members of his persuasion to become his accomplices by supporting him in that way. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will regard this sort of behaviour with distaste and contempt, as I do.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): While most hon. Members and you, Madam Speaker, went to witness the pomp and circumstance in the House of Lords, some of us —incidentally, none of the others were named—saw the irony in having a little exercise, in which we took part, in abolishing the House of Lords and the monarchy. Unfortunately, there was a split vote.

You will be pleased to know, Madam Speaker, that on many mornings Tory Members occupy that Chair and demonstrate on many occasions to their crowds of visitors what I did this morning, so it is not unusual. You will be pleased to know that, according to Standing Orders, there must be 40 hon. Members to carry a motion. I did not get the requisite number, including the Tellers.

Madam Speaker: I think that we have heard and seen enough of the hon. Member for Bolsover for one day.

Queen's Speech

Question again proposed.

9.36 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): When we were summoned to the other place earlier today to listen to the Gracious Speech, and Her Majesty the Queen told us that she and her husband looked forward to a tour of Caribbean countries next spring, one or two people, I dare say, might have been envious. I am very proud of our royal family and I thought that today's ceremony was quite magnificent. The procedures that we carry out here demonstrate what each and every one of us believes in—our democracy and the freedom to speak and to elect representatives to argue their case in this Chamber.

I was very pleased when Her Majesty the Queen went on to tell us that she would visit France in May next year to attend, with the President of the French Republic, the ceremony to inaugurate the channel tunnel. The project has been talked about for more than 100 years. It took a Conservative Government, in co-operation with the French Government, to achieve the building of the channel tunnel, which will be open in May. I am very proud that that will happen and I know only too well that my constituency of Basildon will definitely benefit from the increasing trade activities resulting from the opening of the channel tunnel.

The past 18 months have been less than comfortable for the Government in terms of their relations with the electorate. The fact that we have had to spend so much of our time discussing the details of Maastricht, for example, has not been widely appreciated. When I knock on doors in my constituency, people do not say, "What are you doing about that particular protocol? What do you think about Maastricht generally? What is your view on subsidiarity?' There is no doubt that, while we discussed Maastricht, many members of the general public felt that we were not addressing the real problems they faced in their daily lives.

For that reason, I am pleased that the Gracious Speech meets the criticism levelled by so many of our people by setting out a legislative programme designed to benefit the whole country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) said, it is right that law and order are top of the agenda. Today in Basildon there is a district council by-election. Yesterday, I telephoned the home of one of my excellent councillors, Mrs. Carol Coombs, to wish the candidate who is seeking election the best of luck today. I found that Mrs. Coombs did not answer the telephone, but that two other ladies did. Those ladies happened to knock on the door, which was answered by a burglar. Of course, the ladies did not realise that the person was a burglar when the door was answered. He came out with some nonsense that he was doing some odd repairs.

When he was questioned further, he pushed the two ladies aside and ran off. That was at 3.30 in the afternoon. Basildon does not have a high crime record and performs much better than many other parts of the country. The two ladies told me that a young man was stationed in an alley around the corner from Mrs. Coombs' house. He was clearly positioned to indicate whether or not someone was going to knock on the door—obviously he failed in his duty. But the fact that the chap had the effrontery not even to feel anxious as he opened the door and pretended to be engaged in domestic repairs sums up why it is right that the Government have seen law and order as the main part of the Gracious Speech today.

That being said, I congratulate the police on their recent successful drives against burglary and I support the improved powers for police enforcement. I totally support the initiatives of our most able Home Secretary, including the criminal justice Bill. I hope and believe that that Bill will be welcomed throughout the country.

The imbalance between criminals and their victims must be corrected. There is no doubt that the public feel that somehow the law is not working effectively and that crime is beginning to pay. People complain to me time after time that, while they are law-abiding citizens who pay their taxes, others are taking the mickey out of the system and are getting away with crime.

A broad understanding of why crimes are committed is a separate issue from the problem of protecting the overwhelming majority of law-abiding citizens from criminals who, on occasion, can be extremely dangerous. Daily media reports confirm that we seem to have been overwhelmed by terrible incidents.

What about real justice for innocent victims and their possessions? It is an insult for various politicians to suggest that a person who is unemployed is more likely to commit crime. History shows us that that is not the case and that it has never been the case. It is insulting to people who are out of work. The reasons for crime are much deeper and wider. Re-establishing the value of the family and of settled relationships will assist our efforts to combat crime.

I commend also the proposed measures against bail bandits for which I am sure there will be widespread support. Victims and the police will be heartened by the proposals to strengthen police powers in respect of illegal raves and gatherings of new age travellers.

Some of the serious crimes which have been reported recently are far less common than the daily theft of cars which are used for joyriding. What an absurd description for such a senseless activity, which results in death and injury to innocent people and in damage to property. That is quite unacceptable behaviour to the majority of people. I hope that the Government will prioritise that subject for legislation and then for enforcement.

I am glad that the Prime Minister and other Ministers have taken notice of the groundswell of public opinion on the increasing desirability of identity cards to defeat crime. Whether or not the system is run on a voluntary basis, as I suggested in a ten-minute Bill two months ago, I hope that the information to be held, the technology to be used, the cost and a score of other factors are being thoroughly investigated by the appropriate Departments.

We should be proud of the progress made in this country against football match violence and disturbances. I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) said. I am glad that the criminal justice Bill proposes that the unauthorised sale of football tickets on match days should become an offence. Many of us from both sides of the House would like to see some of the effective controls and systems in this country extended to other European countries.

I wish to praise *The Times* for this week highlighting the scope of drug availability in our schools. We must not blame the children; peer pressure is vicious and strong. I question whether, in some respects, parents and teachers could do more to prevent children from carrying out

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criminal activities while under the influence of drugs and so protect vulnerable young people from serious and irreparable physical and mental damage. The difficulty of detecting drugs should not deter us from making a greater effort to eliminate that poisonous trade. We should all think seriously about our own responsibilities.

As for the Bill on Sunday trading, I believe that the subject is in great danger of becoming oversimplified. I remember the debate that we had on the subject in the House in 1986. I have strong and firm views on the issue which will no doubt be unpopular with a range of my constituents. At present I receive letters from constituents representing both sides of the argument. They state that if I do not support their view they will not vote for me in the next general election. We are striving valiantly to come out of an economic downturn and I cannot think of less of an incentive to have everyone trading seven days a week, which will produce extra costs of lighting, security and general management and which will ultimately reduce the overall profit level. The Conservative party has been wise to give Conservative Members a free vote on the subject.

I am becoming increasingly concerned about the so-called high street blight that is fuelled by some of our more aggressive large supermarket chains. I know what is said about jobs, but those chains could be destroying more jobs than they are creating. It is a difficult issue and we should give more attention to the way in which some of our hypermarkets are currently trading. I am alarmed because I believe that we are overtrading in Basildon, probably as a result of lax planning laws. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has decided to be much firmer in planning matters in future.

In Basildon we have a wide range of retail outlets. I am proud that next year we shall begin the completion of covering our shopping centre. We shall then have the largest covered shopping centre in Europe. What about the little shops, the little trading centres that have been in the town since it was built in 1952? Those traders have been there for 30 years or more. They have invested in their trading activities. They have been supported by their families and have offered local residents an excellent service. All of a sudden, through laxity in planning laws, the whole pattern of trade is changing, with bigger stores and convenience foods. There is no way in which the small shopkeeper can possibly compete with some of the prices being offered at the hypermarkets at the moment. One has only to look at the huge advertisements that are being taken out now in our national newspapers to see that a price war is going on.

As a Conservative who supports a free market, I know that the consumer will initially benefit from that, but I worry greatly about the viability of the small shopkeeper. I hope that when hon. Members consider the question of Sunday trading, they will have regard to the impact that it might have on the small shopkeeper.

A further matter that increasingly concerns me is the way in which some of our hypermarkets, before they have even opened their stores, open a petrol station. The idea is that the petrol station offers cut-price petrol, normally at between 8p to 10p cheaper than the majority of petrol stations are able to offer it. Quite how they are able to do that I do not know, but I understand that, often, such petrol does not use detergents. Yes, it conforms to British standards, but often petrol at the cut-price rate does not have any mix of detergents. As a result, engines deteriorate.

Over recent times garages have not offered a de-coke facility but, increasingly, unless the general public appreciate the matter of detergents, there will be a real issue about the quality of petrol that one buys. Of course, Conservatives believe in choice and encourage it, but consumers must always choose wisely. When supermarkets offer their cut-price petrol, I hope that they make it clear to consumers whether or not their petrol contains detergent.

I shall move on to the forthcoming Bill to set up the environment agencies. I shall be most interested to see how socialist-controlled Essex county council behaves in that regard. When I spoke in the summer Adjournment debate, I brought to the attention of the House the behaviour of that council since May. I wondered whether the House had the power to impeach a number of county councillors. From what I can see, since May they have clearly broken their election promises. We do not have the time to go into too much detail about the election promises that they have broken, but I shall mention some of them.

Before the election, county councillors tried to alarm my constituents and a wider population in Essex about Pitsea tip, which is where rubbish is dumped from London and surrounding areas. I should add that the dump was there long before I became the Member of Parliament for Basildon, and before my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East was the candidate there.

Since the county council elections in May, Essex county council has gone very quiet about Pitsea tip. It has been investigated by the Environment Select Committee. However, nothing has been said about closing Pitsea tip. I ask the House to consider why the socialists on Essex county council have gone quiet about the promises that they made before the May election to close that tip.

In its election literature, Essex county council said that it wanted to deliver nursery education to people throughout Essex. The council enunciated in great detail the value of nursery education. It was not so keen on playgroups. However, since May we have not heard a peep from the council about nursery education. The hypocrisy in terms of the council's broken promises was clearly demonstrated in a key vote in respect of which a further £4 million could have been spent on education. The Conservatives were in favour of the proposal, but the two socialist parties—Labour and the alliance—voted against it.

The biggest embarrassment for Essex county council involved the recent issue of literature on education. The council issued a glossy brochure in which it exhorted the Government to provide more money for the council to spend on education. In that glossy brochure, the council spelt government "goverment". The letter "n" was left out. What an embarrassment for socialist-controlled Essex county council. When I and others brought that spelling mistake to the council's attention, the leaflet was withdrawn and more money had to be spent on it. We in Essex will never forget how the socialists have already let us down since May.

I welcome the forthcoming deregulation Bill which will remove obstacles to contracting out in local and central government. Time after time, businesses in Basildon say to me, "We're struggling to make some sort of profit. We are weighed down with all the burdens and filling in forms when we employ only two, three or four people. When is

your Government going to do something about deregulation?" In our excellent Minister, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, I have great faith that we have just the man—as he demonstrated at the Conservative party conference—to do something about deregulation.

It is a shame that, against the constructive proposals in the Gracious Speech relating to the European Community, the two socialist parties in the House should continue to threaten employment prospects with their short-sighted adherence to the social charter and to European socialist manifestos which will adversely affect their own supporters. What a shambles it was when they gathered to launch the proposals on which they will fight the European elections.

Next June, there will be a clear choice for the country. The Conservative party wants us to be at the heart of Europe, but it will in no way sell out the interests of this country. We have now learnt that the two socialist parties in the House are prepared to sell this country down the river. We understand that their socialist plan is to have one Government and one currency. What is the good of any of us fighting the next general election to keep our seats in this place? The general public will have a real choice next June.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East referred to crime and said that the peak age for offending was 15. In Basildon over a weekend next June, a member of the royal family will open a festival of youth. Over two days, we will demonstrate all the wonderful qualities and achievements of young people. That will be a glorious celebration of the good side of so many of our young people.

I conclude by referring to the economy. Despite all the exhortations in the Gracious Speech, unless we have a sound economy, none of those goals can be achieved. I was delighted with the trade figures. Unemployment is down by 49,000, the biggest drop for four and a half years. In Basildon, there has been a further fall of 2·2 per cent. and 6·6 per cent. compared with June 1986. Yes, we all remember when the socialists had inflation up to 25 per cent. It has now fallen to 1·4 per cent. and it is the best figure for 25 years. We can be very proud of our economic performance. I have no doubt that our Budget on 30 November will assure the markets that we can finance the public sector borrowing requirement.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Leighton Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Two important headlines appeared in the papers today. One was in *The Daily Telegraph,* which is not a noticeably socialist publication, and it states that the

"first three years of reforms saw 30,000 new managers and clerks —and 26,000 fewer nurses."

The other headline was in my local paper; it was "Health jobs to go." That, I am afraid, is a reality which is coming ever closer to us in the Crewe and Nantwich area.

It is very important to understand that, when the Government sought to "reorganise" the national health service, what they had in mind was not improving the service, reintegrating the service, or actually providing better cover, but setting down machinery that in due course could mean that the health service will be divided first into trusts and then into individual paying units. Therefore, it is very important for us to look closely at what has happened.

I now feel justified in saying that within the Crewe area we have reached what is in effect a crisis point. I normally hesitate to use the word "crisis" because hon. Members frequently talk about crises in the national health service; but if a very large district general hospital which covers a very important group of constituents and which has numbers that are growing all the time—we have the advantage of being the part of Cheshire which is attracting a population—and is also, unfortunately from the point of view of the health service, taking in more and more elderly people, one begins to understand that what happens to the health service is a matter of grave concern to everyone.

Some years ago, we were told that Leighton hospital, which is now part of the Mid Cheshire group, would find itself able to cope very efficiently under the new system because it would begin to organise, to cut unnecessary administration and to change the ways in which it operated. The reality, of course, was very different. The hospital has been underfunded for a very long time. As the Under-Secretary of State for Health knows, I have raised this subject more than once on the Floor of the House, precisely because Leighton's constant underfunding was not being met either by the region or by any support from the district health authorties.

When it became clear that there would be a general election, however, a certain number of bridging loans mysteriously appeared for Leighton They have now come to an end and we now face a forecast deficit of £3 million. Frankly, anyone who knows what it costs to run a district general hospital will know that to take £3 million out of it is, in effect, to push it close to the point at which it can no longer be viable and to destroy the very basis on which the hospital operates.

It is important to understand that the assessment was not produced by a finance officer within the hospital. It is the result of independent assessments by outside auditors. Because the DGH was so worried about its finances, they were asked to look at the way in which the hospital was operating and to give their own assessment. They produced not one report but two. I quote from one of the reports:

"the underfunding over many years (although hidden by non-recurrent factors)"

would lead to

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

"i. a forecast 'deficit' of £2·1 million for the year to 31 March 1994,
ii. a backlog maintenance"
—remembering that this is not an old hospital—
"of £15 million,
iii. a worsening 'deficit' rising to £8·4 million in 2005 as the revenue effect of the backlog maintenance expenditure exceeds the growth in revenues."

The auditors went on to outline what they saw as the continuing problems. I quote:

"In 1992-93 the underlying deficit was hidden by a reduction in the depreciation provisions (arising from a revaluaton of assets)"—

that is something that cannot happen again; certainly it accounted for £1·4 million.

"In 1993-94 a similar adjustment of £2·6 million is hiding the Coopers and Lybrand forecast deficit of £2·4 million."

In March 1993, the hospital was so concerned that it held talks with both the Mersey regional health authority and the Crewe district health authority in an attempt to achieve a wider understanding of the reports and to look for a means of improving funding. One report stated:

"No agreement was reached for additional recurrent funding and the Trust was asked to produce further cost savings totalling £700k immediately with a further £1·4 million identified by 30th September . . . In addition, activity targets"—

the Secretary of State for Health is constantly hymning the ability of the Conservative party to deliver those targets—

"were set at almost 5 per cent. above the 1992-93 levels. Half of this increase accommodated a backlog in minor procedures, and to maintain activity levels in 1994-95 major and costly procedure will have to be performed."

The report went into considerable detail about the sorts of things that could be done. First and foremost, it suggested that, although the activity targets incorporated the increase over the previous year and worsening waiting lists would result from that difficulty, nevertheless there would be some gains, such as tighter controls and a difference in the accounting policy.

When one looks at the way in which it is hoped to make money, one discovers that one of the items that the report is talking about is more than £1 million for a huge incinerator which will be built to deal with clinical waste. The incinerator will attract great opprobrium because it will not only triple and quadruple the amount of lorries that move on a small road but produce considerable difficulties for the people who live in the area.

The reality is that a district general hospital—the only one within a considerable distance—will be expected to find a cost saving of an immensity that no business would be able to sustain in the period that has been set down without going bankrupt, yet the Government pretend that they are the Government of business men. There is absolutely no conceivable way that any major hospital could find £3 million out of its budget, with the return on assets involved, within the time scale and in the manner in which it has been asked to do so and continue to provide a wide range of services.

We must understand that the report is talking about activity increases which will

"impact on costs at a greater rate than revenues and the deficit therefore worsens."

I quote:

"this is likely to be significantly understated in view of the capital investment required in the immediate future to make inroads into the backlog maintenance book and the associated revenue effects"

Mid Cheshire hospitals trust has a recurrent shortfall—not one, but a recurrent shortfall—against target return of at least £3 million against a background of ever-increasing demand for services and its large maintenance bill.

We then come to the practical means which are being suggested for dealing with some of the problems. We discover that my constituents, who have already seen a number of ward closures at that hospital, will be told that more wards will be shut, that there will be consolidation —which is a Conservative word for ensuring that not as many people are cared for as were before—and that there will be such cuts in clinical services that in my view the orthopaedic services will be rendered virtually non-existent.

I could give the House a list; it does not mean anything to hon. Members, but it will mean a great deal to my patients and constituents. In order to meet the strategic directional changes, we shall integrate in-patient facilities for ENT and ophthalmology, merge wards 18 and 19, close down wards 9 and 10 and form them into a single unit, close ward 19A altogether and develop day care services —of course, but at what cost? Can one always provide the same level of care through day care services that one can with in-patient care? Of course not. We are going to merge wards 13 and 15 into a unit with a vascular interest, which is a nice way of putting it. Ward 14 will be closed, and the proposal says:

"NB six beds are also used for Gynaecology."

We will notice, because that is a result of a previous alteration.

I am sure that the Minister will give us his normal calm recitation of facts that have been supplied to him by those who are now adept at covering up the truth of what is really happening in the national health service. He will probably say that the hon. Lady is exaggerating; she does not understand it; she does not know anything about it. Let me, therefore, give him some more facts.

The implications of the changes are a net reduction of 39 beds and very high occupancy levels in remaining wards. Availability of beds is currently not a constraint, the document says, but there is no doubt in my mind that there will be considerable constraints if we lose that number of beds. It is said that there will be serious consequences for handling emergency medical overflow. It is said that no additional developments in hospital services can be generated by cost savings, and although it is thought that the establishment will be held at average in-post levels, any future initiatives to increase patient activity could not be at marginal cost.

There is no suggestion that what is being imposed on the hospital is being done in order to improve its efficiency. Not even the regional health authority—which will itself be cut so that it will not be capable of understanding statistics that are given to it about the need for proper patient care and for services—argues that what is being imposed is in the interests of the patient. Something very different is being imposed. It is the kind of brutal attack on funding for the national health service that is the reality of Conservative health care—not all the simple, rather beautifully phrased, careful terms that somehow hide the reality. That is what will happen in my constituency.

Already the atmosphere in the hospital is worrying. I feel that it is important that I should come here and say these things tonight because one of the things which the Government have done, and for which the Minister has never taken credit, is to frighten health service workers so

that they do not dare to speak openly about what is happening to their jobs and their hospital. They are worried. Many of them know that they have already been earmarked for redundancy. All right, they are told now that those will be non-medical jobs, but tomorrow they will be medical jobs. Today they are told of voluntary reductions; tomorrow the reductions will be compulsory.

The Government also tell us that the unit is highly efficient. Not only do Ministers praise the administration of Leighton hospital, but they give it awards. They say how well run it is by everyone concerned and that it is part of the Government's quality initiative. The hospital even had a visit in the past three weeks—naturally, one of which I was not notified—by a Minister who told the hospital how brilliantly it was operating.

Some measures will have a direct impact. It is stated that the service in accident and emergency departments will be improved through nurse practitioners. Nurse practitioners, we are told, are

"experienced nurses who have taken a course on the diagnosis and management of common injuries"

and who

"are able to practise in their own right".

Fine. Let me tell the Minister after a lifetime of living in hospitals that trained doctors, even at consultant level, know that the real problem with accident and emergency work is that a number of people present their injuries in such a way that those injuries can be missed even by people with considerable training. Any major hospital can provide the Minister with cases of people who left the accident and emergency department, sat on the steps and were afterwards readmitted, if they were lucky, or suffered because their condition was missed.

If the Minister is simply about to tell us that the hospital is run efficiently, is treating more people, has a faster input —that the peas are running faster through the pea factory —and that that is the only way that he will estimate how good health care is, he might as well save his breath to cool his porridge. We know that that is nonsense.

We know that many more people are going to that district general hospital than previously and that the staff are doing a good job in enormously difficult circumstances. However, we also know that the staff are demoralised and frightened for their future. We know that the administrators expect to close basic services in a number of wards. We know that it is inconceivable that £3 million can be found in the time available.

The effect will be to deprive my constituents of what was an efficient, if underfunded, desperately important hospital. There is no way that the Government will get away with this constant fairy tale about not worrying because the hospital is bound to be able to cope. We have reached the point where consultants and nurses are directly affected by the regrading of sisters, by shoving various specialties together in some wards to close others, by closing wards at weekends and by the refusal to refill vacancies, all of which is having and will continue to have a direct effect on patient care. The situation is dangerous.

Unless the Government are prepared to be if not realistic, then at least to listen to those who know what they are talking about, my constituents will have a valid argument for saying to the Government, who are keen on treating health care as a business, "You would not ask any business in the world to find a £3 million cut in the time available. You are prepared to wreck the NHS and to exclaim how efficient you are by getting rid of top level administrators." What the Government have done is indefensible and what they are about to do is appalling. In no circumstances whatever will the Minister escape blame if this goes ahead.

10.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Tom Sackville): After the statesmanlike intervention of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in an earlier debate on the problems of eastern Europe, I am disappointed by what she has just said. She descended from a sensible beginning to an unforgivable piece of depressing rhetoric about the health service, which will do no good at all. What sort of impression does the hon. Lady think that phrases like "bankruptcy", "crisis" and " a dangerous situation" will have on the patients, staff and the people trying to manage the difficult situation in her local hospital?

The hon. Lady need not hold up headlines from the press. The health service is not about headlines but about —and I choose my words carefully—one of the great benevolent and beneficent organisations in the world. It does an extraordinary job and it does not need politics and rhetoric flying around.

I would not be so starry eyed as to say that I am relaxed about the situation at the hospital, as the hon. Lady accused me of being. I am not. There has clearly been a continued overspend. We are relying on managements at hospitals around the country to set budgets and to keep to them. That has not happened in this case, and there are financial problems which have to be addressed. That is an unsatisfactory situation, but we agree that we have to face it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: If there have been continual problems of overspend that need to be dealt with, why has the previous executive not moved outside the national health service but gone elsewhere within it? If his financial management was so lacking, why has he been appointed to another NHS unit?

Mr. Sackville: If another trust or unit wishes to hire that person, it is its affair; he is no longer at the Leighton hospital. I think that the hon. Lady will agree that the management there is first-rate, realistic and will try to tackle this problem.

Let me put the matter in context. The hon. Lady knows that there have been a number of favourable developments at her local hospital, and I hope that she will give credit for that. She mentioned that my noble colleague Lady Cumberlege was at the hospital recently to open a new unit. The hon. Lady will know that a new day surgery case unit was opened in April of this year. She will know that on 5 November—on the visit to which I referred—Lady Cumberlege opened a new endoscopy unit. The hon. Lady will also know that the funding required to renew the roof, about which we spoke in an earlier debate this year, has now been approved. She will know that work is in progress on a £2 million rehabilitation unit for elderly people which will provide accommodation of a high quality, improve discharge times and be of great service. She will know that £800,000 has just been spent on a CAT scanner and its associated equipment. She will also know that the necessary action has been taken to reduce junior doctors' hours six months ahead of the national target.

[Mr. Sackville]

Those are all things of which the people who work at the hospital can be proud. It is good news, which should be put on the record after the hon. Lady's litany of doom and gloom.

There is a deficit that has to be tackled. I agree that actions taken in the past were quite clearly not realistic about the future funding. When it was clear that actions needed to be taken further to improve efficiency at the Leighton hospital, such actions were not taken, and those things must be faced up to.

The hospital continues effectively and viably. Activity, as the hon. Lady knows, has continued upwards. The description of the hospital being in crisis does not begin to paint a proper picture of what is happening.

The hon. Lady will be aware that in-patient activity rose in the past year and that the number of out-patients treated went up by another 6 per cent. to reach 149,000. She will also be aware that the number of patients seen during the past year was above the level at which the trust had contracted to provide. Leighton continues to be an effective hospital.

How is the deficit to be faced? The hon. Lady gave one version which I do not recognise. My information is that a number of measures will be taken, including the transfer of surgical patients to a day-case basis. That is not only good for patients, but it represents the way in which to treat more patients more effectively. It also reduces the number of acute in-patient beds. I am sure that the hon. Lady will acknowledge that that process is going on in hospitals in Britain and around the world. It is a necessary procedure and it probably should have been adopted earlier at Leighton with the establishment of the new day-case unit.

The combination of various wards with out-patient facilities will go ahead without any detriment to patient care. I have already mentioned the rehabilitation service, which will improve discharge times and thus efficiency. There is no doubt about the fact that a number of management posts will need to be revised and that is one of the more painful actions that will have to be taken.

Consideration will also be given to the way in which support services and the so-called hotel services are provided. More market testing will take place to ensure that any costs that can be contained are contained. Investigations will also be instigated to consider how private-sector finance can be introduced in some areas. That is central to our policy. Those studies will identify the circumstances in which capital and outside expertise can be supplied by the private sector.

Income-generation schemes will continue to be sought to provide more revenue to the trust. A selective freezing of vacancies will be operated in an effort to ensure that there is a proper use of manpower. Such matters as the billing for ECRs—extra-contractual referrals—for patients coming from other districts will also be considered, as it represents a way in which the financial management of the hospital can be improved.

A sensible and sensitive programme of cost containment is under way. It is not sensible for the hon. Lady to tell her constituents and the rest of the public that her local hospital is in crisis. That will not help anyone. The hon. Lady must realise that she has an excellent local hospital. She should encourage the staff and management who are continuing to manage and run an excellent hospital in difficult circumstances.

The problems at Leighton hospital are surmountable, but that will not be possible if we adopt the style of approach that the hon. Lady displayed this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 November 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Nursery Education

9.34 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I beg leave to present a petition on national nursery education. The petition was initiated by three Newham parents—Sylvia Pack, Terence Burns and Alan Clark—and has been supported by 106,676 citizens of the United Kingdom, 16,000 of whom come from Scotland. It is supported by prominent Members of all three major parties on both sides of the House, by the national campaign for nursery education, the campaign for state education, the national child care campaign and the Fawcett Society. The petition reads:

Whereas there is a widespread acceptance of the value of early learning for all children under five, particularly through proven methods of Nursery Education, as a means of improving social and educational standards; that nevertheless there is a widespread national concern at the shortage of resources available for this public provision, consequent upon recent changes in the funding of national education, which is now reducing the quality range and effect of this vital service;

That there is now urgent necessity for a statutory duty to be laid upon all Local Education Authorities to provide sufficient places to meet the demand for nursery education, which by using resources at the most critical and cost-effective time can further the objective of Her Majesty's Government to provide all the nation's children with a firm basis for later educational success and social responsibility;

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House urge Her Majesty's Government to ensure that all necessary resources are made available to education authorities to enable the Government and your Honourable House to discharge their responsibilities to both parents and children of today, and to the citizens of tomorrow.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

SUNDAY TRADING

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Hunt and Mr. Peter Lloyd, presented a Bill to reform the law of England and Wales relating to Sunday trading; to make provision as to the rights of shop workers under the law of England and Wales in relation to Sunday working; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Defence

9.37 am

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I apologise to the House because I have to leave before the debate concludes as I have commitments in the north that would be hard to break.

In following the international news, all right hon. and hon. Members face the difficulty that the kaleidoscope shifts week by week and we are asked to make decisions and, in some cases, comment on each fresh turn of events in a disordered world. Governments in particular are asked daily to condemn actions or promise remedies and are themselves condemned if they hold back for a day or two.

Compared to other countries, because of our parliamentary system, British Ministers must declare their hands almost daily and are thus almost more exposed than most. Words come back to haunt us if we cannot live up to the promise that they contain. We must be able to deliver what we undertake and not to undertake what we cannot deliver. On the Conservative Benches, we have tried to follow that principle. It produces some modest and hard-fought advances and it means that we try to avoid posturing and rhetoric. It means that we are cautious in setting our hand to any enterprise, but, when we do so, we seek to carry it forward with full energy with our friends and allies. I shall give a range of examples across the world. I am sure that the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) would chide me for leaving out important issues, although he would probably chide me anyway. I shall do my best to cover matters that are of interest to the House.

I turn first to the middle east. We have worked quietly for many years for dialogue in the middle east, especially between Israel and her neighbours. The Americans have worked strenuously in recent times. When, earlier this year, the Israelis and the Palestinians achieved their breakthrough in negotiations, it was certainly a blow against pessimism everywhere. That breakthrough must now be followed through.

There is progress in the discussions between Israel and Jordan. However, the peace will not be complete and will not last without a successful outcome to all the strands of negotiation, including those with Syria and with Lebanon.

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

I believe that the parties want to reach a settlement. It is clear that delay is damaging, and I hope that the opportunities will be seized before they drain away.

In recent years, Britain's role has deliberately been patient and supportive. We stood back once we were convinced that the Americans were serious about the peace process. Now that the deadlock has been broken, our involvement can go into a rather different gear. We are talking more visibly now to those involved in the negotiations and we are encouraging them towards a comprehensive settlement.

As the House knows, I went to Syria last month. My talks with President Assad and Foreign Minister Shara'a were helpful. Next month, Mr. Arafat and the Prime Minister of Lebanon will come here. I hope to visit Israel, Jordan and the occupied territories in January. The European Community has pledged substantial financial help for the process—about £69 million this year and a further package of support over the next five years. The Government are looking at ways in which to help the Palestinians to set up the institutions of self-government.

Elsewhere in the middle east, the going is harder. The House broadly supports our policy towards Iraq; I need not go into it in detail. We will not relax the pressure on Iraq unless it complies fully with all the Security Council resolutions. The Security Council is reviewing sanctions again today and I believe that it will, once again, determine that the circumstances do not exist in which sanctions can be lifted. We are, for example, following carefully the United Nations investigations into the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Iraqi regime in the southern marshes.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Why is it taking so long for the west to establish whether chemical weapons have been used against the Shia Muslims in the marshes? What are our intelligence services doing? What are people in the United Nations doing if we are unable to verify, several weeks after the allegations were first made, whether Saddam Hussein has once again used horrendous weapons against his own people?

Mr. Hurd: I have every sympathy with the right hon. Gentleman's point. As he has raised it, I will try to ensure that the examination is concluded as soon as possible. It must, of course, be thorough if it is to be persuasive. It is not a job which can be rushed simply because of a timetable. Whether the allegations are true or not, the situation in the marshes is especially horrifying. The Prince of Wales has pointed that out and my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) has been tireless in bringing the plight of the marsh Arabs to the world's attention.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that although I and my group have knowledge of two victims in the marshes, samples from the victims' bodies are required by the chemical weapons team. If we release information about where the victims are, they will be killed immediately.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend points out some of the real difficulties. She may catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. She and others would like us to act in the south as we did in the north, by creating safe havens. I ask the House to accept that the situation is very different. In the north, there was a momentary vacuum as Saddam Hussein had withdrawn his troops. We were able to move in and to give some help to the Kurds. No such situation exists in the south, so the military and practical hazards of such an operation would be great.

What we can do we must do well. We shall continue to maintain the no-fly zone over southern Iraq which was set up in August 1992 to monitor Saddam Hussein's activities. We continue to help the organisations that work in the area. We shall continue, as the House is doing this morning, to keep up the pressure on this tragic subject.

Three British prisoners are being held in Baghdad. They have been given grotesque sentences for technical offences; if there were offences, they were minor and technical. I have no doubt that they are being held for a political purpose and their plight, like that of the marsh Arabs, reminds us of the realities behind the somewhat softer words used by spokesmen of the Iraqi regime in New York.

Another longer-standing dispute, which is of great interest to many hon. Members, is the dispute in Cyprus. The Commonwealth summit was held there this month and, while I was there, I gave lunch to the leaders of both communities, President Clerides and Mr. Denktash. The two leaders studied together and were part of the Cypriot legal fraternity under colonial rule. They belong to a generation for whom the division of the island is a personal as well as a political tragedy. Over that meal in the Ledra Palace hotel, I felt that the two men understood each other well. I found some cause for hope there, but not hope that will last indefinitely.

We have a particular interest and a particular role there, not just because of the sovereign base areas, although they are important, but because we are one of the guarantor powers in Cyprus. We must press ahead towards a solution while the present generation of Cypriot leaders remain in office. It gets harder each year to find people who have a history of working together, and that is true of both communities. We must do all that we can to secure the intercommunal dialogue when it starts again after the elections in northern Cyprus on 12 December.

A particular responsibility at this time rests on the Government of Turkey. They have accepted the Secretary-General's proposal for confidence-building measures, including the reopening of Varosha. However, the Turkish Cypriot authorities have so far refused. We are friends of Turkey. We have gone out of our way in the past year repeatedly to ensure that Turkey's importance is understood and that its views on international matters are heard and heeded. I hope that from that background, the Turkish Government will accept our sincerity and our good sense when we urge them now to use all their influence on the Turkish Cypriots to bring about agreement, first on confidence-building mesures, including Varosha, and then on an ultimate agreement in Cyprus.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): The Foreign Secretary knows from our correspondence on the issue of the difficulties arising during the annual general meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference which was held recently in Cyprus, and of the concern expressed over the comments made by the Minister for Overseas Development. He also knows of the concern shared by all political parties, including those that make up the coalition Government in Cyprus, about the role of British representatives in Cyprus.

Will the Foreign Secretary clarify not only for the House, but for the large Cypriot community in this country, for the political parties in Cyprus and for the Cypriot people exactly what Britain is committed to? Is Britain committed to the Secretary-General's confidence-building measures and to the United Nations Security Council resolutions, or to something else?

Mr. Hurd: The record shows clearly that we support the Secretary-General's set of ideas, which we believe is the basis for an eventual full settlement, and, meanwhile, the confidence-building measures that he has proposed. That has been made abundantly clear many times by myself, by the Prime Minister and by others during the Commonwealth summit, during the Queen's visit before that and repeatedly afterwards. I do not think that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus are in any doubt about that. We believe in one country, one Cyprus, one Government, two communities.

I now turn to the situation in Russia. Our support for President Yeltsin is support for Yeltsin the reformer. He has asked us to send observers to the election in Russia on 15 December. We have agreed and a British team will travel there next month. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) for agreeing to chair the group and to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) who will be deputy chair. Other hon. Members from both sides of the House will take part. We are supporting the preparations for the elections. Two senior BBC editors and producers, experienced in covering elections, have just come back from an advisory visit to Moscow. The Government have launched the £500,000 British Programme for Democracy under the know-how fund to support the institutions which will emerge after the elections, particularly the new Parliament.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Did the BBC and Government report about what is going on in Russia have anything to say about the overwhelming Government control of the media there, and the lack of access for Opposition parties to the television and printed media? Surely such access is a precursor to a fair and democratic election.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman might be consistent on this matter, but the degree of liberality and openness of comment in publications in Russia is very great. It never ceases to amaze people who, only a few years ago, lived under a very different system. One can always produce examples of where it has not gone far enough, but the extent to which it has gone is remarkable.

I believe that the know-how fund is making a real difference to the process of reform, both in Russia and more widely. A few days ago, I met some of those in the private sector who are helping to make the fund work, in order to find out how they thought it was going. They were certainly enthusiastic about it. I take pride, for example, in the bread project. It sounds a simple thing, but, under the know-how fund, Sainsburys, Tesco and Marks and Spencer have helped the Russians to establish the necessary links that we take for granted—between the farmer who grows the grain, the person who transports it, the wholesaler, the baker and the retailer. That reflects the demands of the customers, and means that Moscow now has a better supply and greater choice of bread in the shops.

One of the regional governors in Russia, commenting on the know-how fund, said:

"Many people come here and talk a lot, but do little; the know-how fund talks little but does a lot."

I am content with that as a verdict.

The European Union, using the common foreign security part of the Maastricht treaty, will be taking part in monitoring the elections in Russia. That makes sense, and is one example of the point that we often discussed during the debate on the Maastricht Bill. Where there is no need for a common policy, or where agreement cannot be reached among the 12, we will act independently. Where agreement can be reached, as in the business of helping the elections in Russia, it makes sense to act together and we will do so. We will seek to make our joint actions successful and effective.

The former Yugoslavia is an area where co-ordinated action is necessary. Since the situation in Bosnia was last debated in the House, the prospects for a peace settlement have receded. We have to continue the double effort of the peace process and the humanitarian task, and past disappointments do not excuse us from persevering.

The responsibility for ending the fighting lies with those doing it. Outsiders can help bring the leaders together, and produce ideas for a settlement; outsiders can help keep Bosnians alive, which is what we, the French and others are doing; but only the Bosnian communities can end the war.

The Foreign Ministers of the European Union will meet again in Luxembourg on Monday, with David Owen and General Cot to consider ways of restarting the Bosnian political process. We are working to develop the ideas of David Owen and Thorvald Stoltenberg for discussion at that meeting, and we are in close touch with the Americans, but, without a political settlement, there is a real risk of a humanitarian disaster this winter.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hurd: Let me get on a bit, and then I will give way to my hon. Friend.

We have helped to staunch the wounds. British troops have escorted more than 1,500 convoys and got 70,000 tonnes of aid through; the RAF Hercules airlift to Sarajevo has brought in nearly 12,000 tonnes of aid; and Britain has contributed over £150 million in aid, half bilaterally and half through the European Community.

We must try to keep open the roads that carry that aid. I have a detailed account, but I will spare the House the details. In particular, we want to open up the route between Metkovic and Split into central Bosnia, which is the area where our forces are operating. I will now give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Jenkin: Can I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the Belgian presidency conclusions? The European Council, after its meeting at the end of October, issued guidelines to the Council of Ministers. On implementation, those guidelines could form the first part of the legal process, under article J of the treaty on European Union, for moves towards qualified majority voting or majority voting. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that there will be no move towards majority voting on foreign policy issues with regard to Bosnia without a further vote in the House?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend surprises me. We are talking about what is happening in Bosnia and what we can do to help. My hon. Friend is on a very arid point. There

[Mr. Hurd]

is no suggestion in the European Council conclusions of anything to do with qualified majority voting. There has been no suggestion in the Councils we have had since then that any of this should be dealt with by qualified majority voting; it simply would not be appropriate or suitable, and we would not agree to it. The circumstances in which qualified majority voting can be used are set out in the treaty. There is no suggestion that it should be applied in this case.

Getting back to the question of Bosnia, we need a big push this winter if the present political vacuum and lack of co-operation persist. The parties cannot expect the humanitarian commitment that many of us undertake to continue indefinitely. It is unrealistic to expect that the convoys and the troops escorting them can go on for ever, when we are not receiving local co-operation and when there is no progress towards a political settlement.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hurd: Let me get on a bit and then I will give way to my hon. Friend.

The onus is now on the Serbs to make further territorial concessions to meet Muslim demands in the Geneva talks. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) knows, Belgrade faces a bleak and sanctions-ridden winter. If a Bosnian settlement is agreed and is being implemented, those sanctions could and should be progressively lifted.

Mr. Faber: I am very heartened to hear what my right hon. Friend has said. When the EC Foreign Ministers meet next week, will my right hon. Friend again raise the issue of such sanctions against Croatia? Given that as many as 15,000 regular Croat army troops are currently in Bosnia, continuing to commit atrocities, apparently without punishment, under the very noses of British troops; given that British troops in Bosnia acknowledge that they are at greatest risk from Croat soldiers; and given the mindless acts of vandalism, such as the destruction of the bridge in Mostar, it seems incredible to some of us that the issue of sanctions against Croatia is still not on the negotiating table.

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure that introducing sanctions against Croatia would help remedy those matters. As my hon. Friend knows, the sanctions were originally introduced against Serbia and Montenegro because the Security Council believed, and we agreed, that the main responsibility for starting and sustaining the war at that time rested with the Serbs and Montenegrans. The Croats later joined in, but it does not necessarily follow that sanctions against Croatia—even if they were agreed—would bring these evils to an end. Sanctions cannot be ruled out, and President Tudjman is aware of that. Whether there could be agreement about the use of applying them at this time needs to be discussed, but a decision on that is not likely to be taken on Monday.

Turning briefly to the world economic scene, the next few weeks in the Uruguay round negotiations will be, I believe, the last few weeks. A breakthrough on market access was achieved at Tokyo in July, but it has not been translated into immediate results in Geneva. Progress has been painfully slow—partly because of the nature of the negotiations; nobody wants to make concessions until the last moment.

Some of our major partners have special reasons to be cautious. The United States has waited until the voting on the North American Free Trade Agreement was completed in Congress. I congratulate the President on the success of that vote, and I hope that the United States can now give much-needed momentum to the Uruguay round and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

A successful outcome, however, will depend on more than that. It will require enormous efforts from the negotiators and brave decisions from the political leaders, including those in the European Community, between now and the deadline of 15 December. I believe, however, that the House accepts our view that we cannot afford not to reach agreement.

The best advertisement for the benefits of the free market and an open trading system is, of course, Hong Kong. It combines a clean and efficient administration with a system of values based on the rule of law: together, those factors have made Hong Kong special—in my view, unique—and successful over the years. If Hong Kong is to remain attractive to business men and investors, and to its citizens and their children, those assets must be preserved.

Our talks with China on constitutional changes in Hong Kong are not about whether there should be a growth in democracy—whether democratic arrangements should operate now and after 1997. That principle is agreed by both Governments. The argument is about whether the final round of elections to be held under British sovereignty —some will take place next year, and some in 1995—will be fair, open and acceptable to the people of Hong Kong.

We have agreed with the Chinese that the content of the continuing talks should be confidential, but our approach has been persistent; we have continued to look for an agreement. It has also been flexible, within the framework laid down by—among others—the Governor of Hong Kong, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and me. I have discussed these matters with my Chinese colleague, the Chinese Foreign Minister, twice in the past four months. We are resolved to intensify our efforts in the talks, focusing first on the more easily soluble issues in a first-stage agreement. We will work strenuously for such an agreement—indeed, we are already doing so—but not at any price. We have made major moves to meet Chinese concerns. Now they know, as we do, that time is running short; we look to the Government in Peking to work with us in bridging the remaining gap.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does not the Foreign Secretary agree that the time for whittling away the limited democratic proposals advanced by the Governor a few months ago has come to an end? Is not there a serious danger of a complete capitulation to the Chinese position, which will undermine the morale of all who believe in progress towards greater democracy in Hong Kong—which has now been established in, for example, Taiwan? Is it not time that Parliament took a strong stand and said, "We believe in democracy worldwide, including in Hong Kong and, ultimately, China"?

Mr. Hurd: The arrangements for the elections in Hong Kong in 1994 and 1995 will be decided by the Legislative Council there. Before too long, the Governor will have to put proposals to the council, but it is the council which will

decide. We should prefer the Governor to be in a position to put proposals that had been agreed with the Chinese. We do not yet know whether that is possible, but it is clearly desirable, as it would enable those elected in 1995 to know that they will be able to serve on the "through train" through 1997.

Some time is left in which to establish whether such an agreement can be reached. The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), who follows these matters carefully, will know the guidelines that we have set ourselves—the tests of fairness, openness and acceptability. We are following those guidelines, and the Governor keeps in close touch with the Executive Council and with opinion in Hong Kong. We are following the principled line which he has laid down, and which he constantly explains and defends. The Chinese know that as well. Within weeks, we shall know whether it is possible to reach an agreement, or whether we shall have to discharge our responsibilities for 1994 and 1995 without one.

Hong Kong sits in the middle of one of the most dynamic regions in the world. The expansion and prosperity of Asia have struck everyone's imagination over the past year; that is why Asia needs to receive, and will receive, higher priority in the Government's efforts and policies. This is partly a commercial matter. Exports to Thailand so far this year are up 43 per cent. on last year's; exports to Malaysia are up 35 per cent., and there are comparable increases in other countries in the region. It is not entirely commercial, however. The political weight of the area is growing, as this week's Seattle summit simply serves to illustrate. We in Britain—as politicians, business men and professional people—will need to pay more attention to the Asian countries in the next few years.

In India earlier this week, I saw vividly how this can work in practice. More than 100 British companies were represented in Bombay, marking the first anniversary of the Indo-British partnership initiative launched in January by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Indian Prime Minister. On Tuesday, on board the royal yacht Britannia, I watched contracts worth £500 million being signed. New business since the launch of the initiative is worth £1 billion. Two-way trade with India is already worth £2 billion a year, and has grown by 20 per cent. this year. British investment stands at £2 billion, but there is room for more.

I have cited those figures to demonstrate that there is no crisis in India—just steady progress, and the steady building up of a British position in a country that we once ruled, but which, after a time, we may have tended rather to forget. British entrepreneurship and energy, helped and encouraged by the Government, are now moving back to rebuild a strong position. We should sometimes mention such processes, which are part of the business of fortifying our position in the world.

Such encouragement of trade and investment is just as much my Department's job as is working out resolutions in the Security Council, on which we are cross-examined in the House. It is part of the underlying effort to buttress our presence, not just in Asia but elsewhere.

In building our friendship with India, we must remember the continuing dispute—indeed, tragedy—in Kashmir. Preparations are in hand for discussion between India and the new Government in Pakistan. My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, was in Pakistan while I was in India, and we both discussed the matter. The preparations for that dialogue are as complex as ever.

I sought to set out again the three factors that we in Britain—as friends of both countries, anxious about the present position—believe are needed. They are a genuine dialogue between India and Pakistan, as envisaged more than 20 years ago in the Simla agreement; an improvement in human rights in Kashmir while the Indians look for credible Kashmiri interlocutors in the internal political process, which is clearly necessary; and a clear end to external support for violence within Kashmir. Those three principles need to be pursued. They are widely accepted; if they were implemented in practice, it would be a big step forward. We have no blueprint, but, as friends of both countries, we will do anything that we can to help.

The need for real democracy, and the importance of the rule of law, are of course abiding themes in South Africa. We warmly welcome the success of the multi-party negotiations there. The first fully democratic elections take place next April, and we hope that all political groups will participate. We plan to help with election monitoring and observation.

The difficulties are very real; watching the news night after night, we sometimes feel that the whole process is pockmarked with setbacks and difficulties. However, the underlying current is dramatic, as has been illustrated by the joint award of the Nobel peace prize to Mr. Mandela and President de Klerk. We have given every support to the transition process. As the House will recall, we pressed constantly—as did the Opposition—for the crucial first steps: the release of political prisoners, "unbanning" the ANC and starting the process of negotiation. We have kept an open door here to all the main participants in the negotiations. For seven years, we have provided training and practical support for community leaders, and for many who will help to run the new South Africa. We initiated the sending of observers to help to curb the awful violence.

It is a direct British interest that South Africa should come through the sometimes dark tunnel of transition safely. Our dealings with the country are returning to a healthier normality: trade missions are in progress, investment is being encouraged and a British defence attaché is now being sent back to our embassy in Pretoria. We want South Africa to become an area of prosperity and stability once more, after being a source of dissension and disturbance for too long.

It is all the more tragic that, in the same week that progress has been made in South Africa, there has been a significant step backwards in Nigeria. We deplore the decision of the Nigerian military to take back power and to dissolve all democratically elected institutions. There was a time when it seemed in a way understandable for the military to take over in countries with such problems as exist in Nigeria, Pakistan or elsewhere. However, experience has shown that that is not a way forward. It is a cul-de-sac, as Nigeria has found several times in the past.

We have consistently supported a peaceful transition to a democratic civilian government. General Abacha, the soldier in charge of Nigeria, has appealed to the international community to suspend judgment on the military takeover. That is not reasonable. We have already shown patience towards Nigeria during the past 10 years and also in recent months. We must judge the new regime by its actions, but it is clear that military rule cannot be a viable solution. I urge those who are in charge to move

[Mr. Hurd]

rapidly back to an accountable, democratic, civilian Government. Measures aimed at the Nigerian military which have been in place will remain in force. We are consulting our international partners on the further steps that may be needed in response to that backward step.

I know that hon. and right hon. Members wish to speak about our aid programme. In many of the areas to which I have referred, our efforts towards peace and stability are much more effective because they are buttressed by development aid. Last year, our aid programme was the sixth largest in the world. There are constraints on it, and not just the constraints from the public spending round that is now in course. Not the least of those is the amount of money that we are committed to contribute through the multilateral agencies. Over 20 per cent. of our aid goes through the EC and another slice goes through the United Nations and its agencies. Only 53 per cent. of our aid goes bilaterally. We are adapting to those realities.

I hope that the House will agree that British aid is now rarely spent on big infrastructure projects such as dams and power generation projects, which the international and multilateral aid organisations are often better equipped to cover. Our bilateral programme focuses increasingly on encouraging good governance and economic liberalism.

Of course, we will go on giving down-to-earth, quick, and effective help to the victims of poverty and disaster. We have just committed £10 million to help those who are in need in Angola. The third British flight in as many weeks has arrived in Luanda carrying food, tents, and blankets. Our team of 10 nurses in Angola has this week completed a programme of immunisation for children who are most at risk of disease.

I have touched only sketchily—although I have spoken for nearly 40 minutes—on some of the troubles of the world and I have set out what we are trying to achieve. We have to identify and use our assets; the primacy of our language and our broadcasters, our respected aid programme, our financial skills, our diplomatic service, and our highly professional armed forces. We shall continue to deploy those assets and to make use of those in which we are strongest to protect and advance the interests of Britain and to strengthen the alliances and international institutions on which our wealth and safety depend.

10.14 am

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I begin by reassuring the Foreign Secretary that, whatever else I may chide him about in the next 30 minutes, it will not be for his refusal to make a 30 or 40 minute speech of 40 one-sentence, one-line issues. The House will recognise that that would not have been a sensible way to proceed, although it would have been eminently possible given the major issues which affect the world.

We could, for example, have a whole day's debate on Hong Kong, and I ask the right hon. Gentleman to discuss with the Leader of the House whether we could have a debate on that subject before the final and perhaps irrevocable steps are taken by the Governor in terms of presenting legislation in Hong Kong.

The Queen's Speech sets out the broad statement of the Government's foreign policy objectives at the beginning of the Session. It is interesting to compare and contrast yesterday's Gracious Speech with the one that was made on 6 May 1992. The speeches must have come from the same disk and the same word processor.

The single but important exception is the Government's announcement that they intend to introduce legislation to place the Secret Intelligence Service and the Government communications headquarters on a statutory basis. The first two pages of the speeches 18 months ago and yesterday are virtually identical. It is opportune for us to look ahead to what will present problems and challenges to Her Majesty's Government during the current Session. It is also reasonable for us to look back to the objectives that were set out by the right hon. Gentleman 18 months ago and to measure the Government's performance in that period against those objectives.

I expect that hon. Members of all parties will welcome warmly the decision in respect of the SIS and GCHQ. The decision that they should be put on a statutory basis is long overdue. I also welcome the decision to make provision for the oversight and accountability of those organisations, as well as the Security Service, MI5. We welcome that in principle, but we will reserve judgment on the proposals for oversight and scrutiny until they have been published. We will want to examine the legislation in some detail.

I feel strongly that powers should exist in the House, perhaps under a special Committee, for such oversight and scrutiny. I want to emphasise also, although it is a slightly separate issue, that we feel strongly that the Government are long overdue in restoring the right to belong to democratic and free trade unions to the people who are employed at GCHQ.

The rest of the Queen's Speech is largely a repetition of what we heard 18 months ago. How has the Government's performance matched up to what the right hon. Gentleman said when he spoke in the similar debate on 8 May 1992? During that debate, he talked about Cyprus and Turkey, about Libya and Iraq, about the European Community, about Government policy on Hong Kong, and several other important issues.

Effective foreign policy should be based on consistency and coherence, on trust in the international community, on —inevitably—economic strength, on fairness, and on respect for countries' actions and decisions. As the right hon. Gentleman acknowledged—at least in part—it should also be based on an effective and generous overseas aid programme.

I wish to refer to Europe and the decisions made at the most recent meeting under the Belgian presidency in Brussels on 29 October this year. The right hon. Gentleman and the European Community have been involved in discussions on the situation in the former Yugoslavia for 18 months. In that time, what changes have occurred? Has progress been made? Have things improved? They have not improved in terms of the brutal conflict. I share the belief of the right hon. Gentleman in the culpability of the political leaders of all parties who have continued to fight when they have had endless opportunities to reach agreement. That view is common. The reality is that in terms of Her Majesty's Government acting on their own or together with their European partners, the situation has not improved.

The declaration on the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina was issued several weeks ago now—on 29 October. That declaration, in common with other declarations made by the European Union, as it now is, and with resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council, may

change little: such declarations and resolutions are rarely, if ever, implemented. I do not believe that, in reality, the way in which we and our partners approach the tragedy in Bosnia is materially different now that that statement has been made. The airlift has not been stepped up. Aid has not been increased. No more troops have been made available to the United Nations force since the declaration was issued.

Today, Mr. Stoltenberg has again called for the deployment of more troops to assist the aid programme —and, as always, I commend without reservation the commitment and dedication of our own forces; that view is common to us all. Similarly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has again drawn attention to the imminent tragedy in Bosnia and has called for $80 million more to finance essential winter aid. In his speech today, the Foreign Secretary made no response to either of those requests. He did not even mention them. It should be possible for an organisation as powerful and wealthy as the European Union to do much more than it is doing.

The Foreign Secretary always accuses me of being a member of the "something must be done" club. He seems to be a member of the "something must be said" club: lots must be said, but nothing new must be done. I share the view expressed in an intervention by the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), who spoke of sanctions against Croatia. How much longer can we tolerate the aggression of Croatia without taking some action in response? I suspect that sanctions are not being imposed, not because the Foreign Secretary would not like that to be done but because he cannot persuade Chancellor Kohl that that is the appropriate action to take. Once again, therefore, we see the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany asserting his authority over policy in the Community, to the detriment of the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina and to the shame of the Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Hurd: One could argue the point about sanctions against Croatia, but the right hon. Gentleman's earlier point was not right. I gave facts and figures not in relation to what we are saying but in relation to what we are doing to keep people alive. We are continuing that effort. I left out of my speech a rather technical passage about roads which are closed and which we hope to open. We want to open Tuzla airport. There is a great deal of practical activity, including an agreement concluded yesterday. We shall have to see whether it works, but I should not like the right hon. Gentleman to believe that we are doing nothing. We are doing a great deal. We are doing as much as any other country, and that is a lot.

Dr. Cunningham: I would give the Foreign Secretary credit and say that we are doing more than many other countries, but that is not my point. I am asking what has changed. What additional activity has flowed from the declaration made in Brussels some weeks ago? There is little point in placing a high profile on common foreign and security policy and on the need to act together coherently with our partners if, in reality, nothing new happens following such discussions.

It is worth remembering the aims and objectives of a common foreign and security policy as set out in chapter 4 of the declaration:

"to develop active policy in pursuit of interests of the Union; unity and consistency in its external actions; inclusion of all matters related to the security of the Union; decisions of the Union committing member states; unity in presentation of the Union's policy; efficiency in the decision-making procedure."

Was there any discussion with the Foreign Secretary's counterpart in the Federal Republic of Germany before that country joined in intelligence discussions with the Iranians? Was that decision consistent with the aims and objectives of the common foreign and security policy of the Union? Was there any discussion about the enforcement of existing Union and United Nations decisions in the former Yugoslavia?

Can we expect an agreement on GATT to emerge as a result of the setting of those aims and objectives of the Union's common foreign and security policy? The President of the United States has seen off the protectionists in respect of the NAFTA decision. Will we be able to see off the protectionists in Europe—principally, I suspect, the French—or will Prime Minister Balladur win on that issue, too? Will one of our powerful European partners get its way once again, to the disadvantage of the rest of us—to say nothing of the other 100 or so countries around the world that are so very keen on a GATT agreement? Does the Foreign Secretary share the view of the Secretary of State for Social Security, who, in his disgraceful speech at the Conservative party conference, was so insulting about our European partners—about the Germans, the French and the Italians? Does the Foreign Secretary really think that such speeches advance the cause of co-operation and coherence in European policy?

As we all now know courtesy of the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Social Security is a member of the well-know B team. As Shakespeare wrote in "King Lear",

"Now, gods, stand up for bastards!"

The Tory party conference stood up for each one of them in turn. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will stand up to them when he comes to write his party's manifesto for the European elections next year. Or perhaps that task is to be conceded to the Secretary of State for Wales, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Social Security. Who will hold the ring between them and the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), and the existing Conservative Members of the European Parliament? It will be an interesting few months as that process unfolds.

Mr. Faber: The right hon. Gentleman has chosen to introduce party politics into this foreign affairs debate. Would he like to tell us a little about the socialist manifesto for Europe, as it strikes us that many members of the Labour party are embarrassed by that document?

Dr. Cunningham: On the contrary, I am happy to debate any aspect of our manifesto—which is published, unlike those of the Conservative party and its confederates in the European People's party, many of whom are out-in-the-open federalists. We look forward to the debate in the run-up to the European parliamentary elections and will be quite happy to discuss the matter in full, because we believe that we have an excellent manifesto which seeks to address the issues of economic regeneration in Europe and the fact that Europe is heading for a disastrous unemployment figure of almost 20 million.

A few moments ago I quoted "King Lear". Perhaps a more appropriate quote is one from one of Shakespeare's sonnets;

"Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

[Dr. Cunningham]

There is a lot of festering going on in the Cabinet in relation to our attitude and approach to the European Community and consequently to the effectiveness of foreign policy in the wider world.

The Foreign Secretary touched on trade. I endorse what he said about the importance of our trading relationship with the Republic of India. I also share his views on the situation in Kashmir. We must remember, however, that Britain is running trade deficits with the 10 richest countries in the world and trade surpluses with the 10 most impoverished nations of the world. That cannot be right in terms of economic policy and it cannot be right in terms of foreign policy. We should not be running beggar-our-neighbour policies with the 10 poorest nations of the world and we should be doing much better with the more powerful economies.

That situation, sadly, is being replicated in terms of our trade with eastern Europe and Russia, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) pointed out during Question Time just a few weeks ago. Although there may be little spots of good news here and there in respect of India, our trade and our aid programmes generally are far from being matters for praise and congratulation. I very much hope that, in respect of those matters and GATT, the right hon. Gentleman will stand up for more enlightened policies, and particularly that he will not be pushed aside by the French. I hope that he will insist on meeting the deadline of 15 December for a final agreement.

In last year's autumn statement, the Government announced a small increase in the budget of the Overseas Development Administration. But the reality is that they also said that the aid budget would be frozen and that it would be frozen for the next two years. In those circumstances, the aid budget, at 0·26 per cent. of gross national product, will be frozen at its lowest ever level. Those are the stark facts of our aid budget and, however much the right hon. Gentleman seeks to gloss over them, it is another example of the Government, during the election, making a commitment in their election manifesto to the United Nations' target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP—that commitment was repeated by the Prime Minister at the Rio earth summit last year—but the reality is that, in practice, the Government have no intention of keeping those promises or meeting those commitments. The right hon. Gentleman cannot disguise those facts.

When we look at our relations with the poorest nations of the world, whether in trade, aid or other respects, we see that those relations are poor indeed. They are not only poor, but deteriorating. That does not enhance Britain's reputation in international affairs; nor does it enable us to say that we can hold up our heads as a country with the people who have the best and most enlightened trade and aid programmes. It does not do that at all, and the right hon. Gentleman, in his heart of hearts, knows that well.

If the excuse that the Foreign Secretary might advance is that money is short, why did he insist, against the advice of his accounting officer, on squandering millions on the Pergau hydro-electric project in Malaysia? It is worth reminding the House what the accounting officer had to say about that project. In paragraph 56 of the National Audit Office report, he says:

"the chosen method of implementation would cost the UK £56 million more than it might otherwise have done."

Having ignored the recommendation of his accounting officer, who said that the project was not economic, the right hon. Gentleman went on to approve a method of financing that squandered an additional £56 million from a desperately short aid programme. We are looking at the £56 million man.

If a councillor in any of a number of authorities that I could name around the country ignored the advice of his or her accounting officer, they would be liable to surcharge and disqualification, perhaps even bankruptcy, and the Government have not been slow to enforce such an approach. Yet just because, I believe, Baroness Thatcher insisted that he had to do it—it is not clear from his parliamentary answers, of course—that money was paid.

The right hon. Gentleman said that it was promised at the highest authority. What can that mean? There was only one higher authority than him in that matter, and that was Baroness Thatcher. When it suits her purpose, British taxpayers' money can be squandered in that way, yet we cannot expand the aid programme. When it suits the right hon. Gentleman's purpose, he just keels over to the right hon. and noble Lady, in the face of all the arguments and evidence, and squanders £56 million.

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that this is the place to debate the NAO report on this. [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] Because there are other opportunities to do that. I would simply say that a promise had been given. It seemed to me important that it should be honoured.

Dr. Cunningham: It is extremely odd, Madam Deputy Speaker, to say that a promise had been given. After all, all this happened two years ago, although it has just come to the attention of the House now. A promise had been given, in spite of the advice of the accounting officer, in spite of the fact that the project was described as uneconomic, in spite of the fact that we are told that the right hon. Gentleman was advised that the method of financing that he was approving would needlessly cost the taxpayer another £56 million. Is that reasonable? Do people outside the House think that that is reasonable? I am sure that they do not. I am sure that people who are interested in our aid programme do not think so either.

I want to draw the attention of the House to some other aspects of the Queen's Speech that are worthy of comment. It is quite cynical of the Government to say, as they did yesterday in the Queen's Speech:

"My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme to promote sustainable development and good Government."

In view of their record, that is just pure political cynicism. It is not in any way justified by what has been happening. In another passage in the Gracious Speech yesterday the Government pledge to

"encourage international responsibility in conventional arms transfers."

What is emerging from the Scott inquiry shows us that, far from being responsible in conventional arms exchanges, the Government have a most abysmal and dishonest record. The reality is that a scene is unfolding where Ministers are contradicting civil servants and civil servants are contradicting Ministers. There is a complete lack of candour and honesty, which has been demonstrated in terms of relations with the House of Commons and the Select Committee, yet the Government have the appalling nerve to say that they want to encourage,

"international responsibility in conventional arms transfers."

The Government ought to set a far better example in their own record before they start making platitudinous comments about other people's conduct. I suspect that the reality is that we shall never know the whole truth about what has been going on in terms of arming Iraq. There is probably another promise given by Baroness Thatcher, in conjuction with President Bush, to Saddam Hussein so that the underhand arms programme could proceed.

Such conduct or behaviour does not enable Britain to stand up in the international community, hold its head high and say, "Yes, we are setting examples that we believe other people in the world should follow." Far from it. It is the most appalling example of deception that we have come across in recent times.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my right hon. Friend put on record his support for the ending of all arms sales to Indonesia in view of the use of British planes, weapons and vehicles to kill the people of East Timor in order to maintain the Indonesian illegal occupation of that part of the world?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend asks a question which I have already pursued with the right hon. Gentleman in seeking the assurances, which, apparently, were given. I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the Hawk aircraft contract to Indonesia, which we are still pursuing. I was not convinced by the reply that I received from the Foreign Secretary—I do not have it with me, or I would quote it—about the nature of the assurances that had been sought, let alone received, from the Indonesian Government about what exactly would be the purpose and use of the aeroplanes. There may be another question as to whether the planes will be built in this country or under licence in Indonesia. We will continue to pursue that point. My hon. Friend is right to raise it.

I deal now with Turkey and Cyprus. Eighteen months ago, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"I have come to the conclusion that we in western Europe must build a new and stronger relationship with Turkey . . . It is in our interests that Turkey, a stalwart member of NATO, should build a new relationship with the European Community".—[*Official Report*, 8 May 1992; Vol. 207, c. 282-83.]

That is fine—at least in theory, but what about in practice? What are we going to say and do about the fact that Turkey has 30,000 troops in Cyprus which is an independent member of the Commonwealth? What are we going to do about the fact that Turkey is pursuing a policy of taking settlers from eastern Turkey and putting them in Cyprus? Those settlers have no connection with Cyprus. They are not Turkish Cypriots or their relatives. They are complete newcomers to the island. It is said that they will soon outnumber the declining population of Turkish Cypriots, some of whom have left the island.

What are we going to do to support the United Nations Secretary-General's proposals to try to resolve the problem in Cyprus? What are we going to do about the Turkish prosecution of the Kurdish people? What are we going to do about human rights in Turkey? What are we going to do about ministerial visits to Cyprus?

Thanks to a document leaked from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office southern European department in August 1993, we know that

"Since Turkish Cypriot UDI, there have been no bilateral ministerial visits to Cyprus although we have normal representation including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary at Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings."

The Foreign Secretary has placed an embargo on ministerial visits to Cyprus and that is confirmed in an internal document from his Department. We cannot say that we are going to work towards normalising relationships with Turkey on those issues or to encourage Turkey to believe that it will have our support in respect of membership of the European Community while that totally unacceptable situation obtains in Cyprus.

What are we going to do about the disgraceful treatment by Turkish police of Manchester United supporters at the recent football match? Are we making any protests? Will the Foreign Secretary meet a deputation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), the shadow spokesman on sport, which will make a protest? I have written to the Foreign Secretary about a constituent of mine who was dragged from his hotel in the middle of the night when he was asleep. He was arrested and lost all his cash and his passport. He was thrown out of the country. He was simply picked on by the Turkish police. Are we going to do anything about that? Are any representations going to be made?

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that, in respect of the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, he is being somewhat partisan in the picture that he presents? Does not he recognise that Turkey had a proper responsibility to intervene when the Turkish Cypriots were being slaughtered by the Greek Cypriots? Does he accept that there would be no Turkish troops in northern Cyprus if the Greeks did not continue to arm the Greek Cypriots totally beyond what is required and if they would stop sending the Greek army into the southern part of the island?

Dr. Cunningham: I was working in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with Lord Callaghan of Cardiff when those events unfolded. In the political sense, I lived through all those events, including the peace talks at the United Nations in Geneva and subsequently. I am very familiar with the background. However, all that was 19 years ago. I am not saying that the blame lay all on one side. Those of us who were here at the time denounced the regime of the Greek colonels and their attitude to Cyprus. I do not resile from that denunciation for a moment. However, we are talking about the situation now and about attempts by the UN Secretary-General to finally reach a settlement. We are talking about what Her Majesty's Government should or should not be doing to try to bring that about.

I share the Foreign Secretary's views about the circumstances in Russia. Russia is a very important country with between 150 million and 160 million people. The developments towards democracy are welcome and quite astonishing in some respects. However, as I have said in correspondence with the Foreign Secretary, we should insist that democratic reform must go hand in hand with economic reform in Russia. It is a matter of concern to see some political opponents banned in that country. It is a matter of concern to see draconian controls over some sections of the media. It is also a matter of concern to ensure that the elections and the whole evolution of democracy in Russia are open, free and fair.

Our support for economic regeneration in that important country should be based on the acceptance of those full democratic reforms. I made that clear to Foreign Minister Kozyrev when he was in this country and I hope that the Foreign Secretary has done so as well.

[Dr. Cunningham]

We have discussed briefly the problems of Iraq and Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. There should be no relaxation of the United Nations approach to Iraq, especially in view of the apparent recent evidence of further atrocities against the Shia Muslims. I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary believes that we can do no more than we are doing at the moment. I ask him to think again about that.

I am also sorry that there is not time to deal as fully as one would like with the brutality of the war in Angola. Of course, aid and assistance are welcome. That war is perhaps the worst of many conflicts in the world at the moment. I urge the Foreign Secretary to improve and increase his diplomatic efforts which I know he is making and for which I do not criticise him and to increase the aid and support to the democratically elected Government of Angola.

There was a United Nations-arranged election in Angola and a Government were elected. That election has been usurped by UNITA, although there is currently a ceasefire. Our support and commitment should be directed towards the democratic process and the legitimate victors in that process. I hope that the Government will redouble their efforts in that regard.

In a world which often seems completely swamped by bad news, there has been some good news in the past 18 months. That includes the developments in the middle east and the developments in South Africa. Who would have said, and certainly some Conservative Members not only would not have said, but would not have accepted, that white supremacy in South Africa should end, let alone could end, in the way that it has?

Mr. Faber: Stupid.

Dr. Cunningham: If the hon. Member for Westbury had been here over the past 10 or 20 years when we debated the circumstances in South Africa, he would have heard plenty of Conservative Members defend the despicable regime in that country. I am not saying that the hon. Member for Westbury would do that and, to their credit, there were Conservative Members who denounced that regime. The Opposition have never been in doubt about the rightness of the cause of black people in South Africa. That may be an uncomfortable reminder for the hon. Member for Westbury, but it is the truth.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Will the right hon. Gentleman name one Conservative Member who has ever defended the abominable practice of apartheid? Even those of us who stood up and spoke in favour of reforms in the Republic of South Africa of whatever sort have always condemned apartheid. The examples that we have used of parts of South Africa which have buried apartheid once and for all have been used. However, the right hon. Gentleman must name names or he must withdraw his statement.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is aware of the apologists for the Bantustans and for the programmes of separate development in South Africa. Why does he not go to the Library and ask? I am sure that the Librarians would be more than keen to remind him of who the apologists are. They were Conservative Members, and I make no apology for reminding the House of that.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): If the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), who requested information from my right hon. Friend, would care to look at the Register of Members' Interests, he would find something that has been of great interest over the past 10 years.

Dr. Cunningham: I warmly welcome those developments in South Africa and I applaud the great courage of the State President, Mr. de Klerk, and Nelson Mandela. Of course it is a matter of great joy that they have jointly been awarded the Nobel peace prize, but they are going to need tremendous international support in a much more sustained way, perhaps, than support has been given to other emerging democracies in the past, and on a much wider scale. As Nelson Mandela has made clear to us on several occasions, they are expected to make the transition from apartheid to democracy in a very short time. It took centuries for democracy to evolve in this country. South Africans are expected to organise free and fair elections in rural communities where millions of illiterate people live. That is going to be an enormous challenge not only to them but to those of us who want to see a proper conclusion to that process. The Foreign Secretary should redouble his efforts to increase support and ensure that the international community joins him in doing so.

In the middle east, the courage of chairman Arafat and the whole Israeli Labour Government deserve our applause and our commitment. I want to see the European Community in particular play a much more active role in the regeneration of the occupied territories in bringing support in terms of infrastructure investment and commercial developments and, along the lines that the right hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted, helping people to develop the simple basics of governing themselves, setting up councils, developing free trade unions, and helping to develop a more effective education process for the hundreds of thousands of children in the territories who so desperately need it.

I chose deliberately to end on those issues of good news and hope in a world which has so much bad news and so many difficulties for us to confront, not least because on those two issues, if not on some of the others, there is broad agreement in the House about the way forward.

10.52 am

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I should like to speak briefly on two aspects of the debate: first, overseas aid policy and, secondly, the situation on the Korean peninsula which has ramifications much wider than that geographical area.

In most debates over the past few years, the central issues on overseas aid have been seen in terms of the amount of expenditure on overseas aid, the quantum of overseas aid, and the quality of our overseas aid programme. But I believe that there is now another dimension which so far has not received much attention in the House and which deserves much more intense scrutiny. I refer to the control being exercised over our aid programme. It was referred to very briefly by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in his opening remarks. The issue which now faces us is whether it is acceptable to the House that a growing and accelerating share of our overseas aid programme should be transferred from the control of the House, from the control of the British

Government and administration by our bilateral programme, to international situations where we lose control and any real measure of accountability.

What is happening is extremely well set out in the paper that the Overseas Development Administration submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee during the previous Session and which is reproduced in the fourth report of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Session 1992-93. The relevant figures are set out on pages 30 to 31 of the paper in question. They show that the bilateral aid programme in 1991-92 represented 55 per cent. of our total overseas aid programme. This year, as my right hon. Friend said, that figure has fallen to 53 per cent.

What is significant from the projections that the ODA has now given and which are published in the report is that in just two years—that is, in the financial year 1995-96—the bilateral aid programme will have fallen from 53 per cent. this year to just 45 per cent. The multilateral aid programme is going the other way in terms of its share. In 1991-92, it took 45 per cent. of our overall aid programme. This year, the figure is 47 per cent. In 1995-96, it will represent 55 per cent.

If we look at the overall increases, we see that the multilateral programme will increase between the present financial year and 1995-96. The multilateral programme will be increased by 23 per cent. in cash terms while, over the same period, the bilateral programme will be reduced by 12 per cent. in cash terms. That assumes that the present aid figures are kept unchanged in the forthcoming public expenditure White Paper. If there are further cuts in cash terms over the next two years, the reduction of the bilateral programme will be still greater than the 12 per cent. figure in cash terms, which of course would represent an even greater percentage cut in real terms. That is a significant development which requires extremely close attention in the House.

If we take those projections forward, it would appear that, certainly within, say, five to seven years, our bilateral aid programme will be down to probably not more than one third of our total aid programme. It woud appear that, within a decade, our bilateral aid programme will be barely, or possibly significantly less than, a quarter of the total amount of overseas aid that we are making available.

The House needs to consider whether it is concerned about that trend. Some hon. Members might consider that it does not really matter whether the British overseas aid programme is to be dispensed by multilateral agencies, for example, by branches of the United Nations and of the World bank or by EC institutions. But in my view that would be a very retrograde step for the British interest and, indeed, British value for money in the use of our aid budget. I should like to argue three grounds on which it is essential to maintain a significant share of our overall aid budget going out through the bilateral programme.

First, there is the quality of our programme and the value for money that we are securing. In the ODA, among the European Governments, we have a group of civil servants who have had long experience in the technical matter of administering overseas aid, particularly in the poorest communities of the world. One can criticise certain aspects of the aid programme. The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) had fun in relation to the project in Malaysia, but I am referring to the generality of the aid programme. We can be extremely proud of the value for money that we secure from our aid programme which, in quality terms, is second to none.

The feedback that I receive from those in a position to know is that we are getting, and are likely to continue to get, very much less value for money if the same funds are dispersed through the international bureaucracy in Brussels which, in terms of experience and staff, is immeasurably less well-equipped than our Overseas Development Administration. Therefore, the multilateral approach means a qualitative reduction in the British taxpayer's value for money from the overall aid budget.

Secondly, the transfer has and will continue to have a significant impact on British non-governmental organisations involved in overseas aid. It is common ground among hon. Members that British overseas aid NGOs are the most experienced, the best diversified and best equipped of any in the European Community. I am privileged to serve as a trustee of Action Aid and I know that many other hon. Members of all parties are directly connected with one or more NGOs involved in overseas development. It is inescapable that the transfer of our available aid funding from the bilateral to the multilateral will circumscribe the effectiveness of British NGOs working overseas. If they have to go through the Brussels bureaucracy, they will not have the same access to funds or be able to do their job nearly as well as they do now.

The third reason why it is critical to hang on to a significant share of our available aid money for the bilateral programme is one to which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred. He said, rightly, that overseas aid is a significant adjunct of foreign policy. However, it is a significant adjunct only when coupled with bilateral expenditure and when it can reinforce our bilateral foreign policy relations with certain countries. Indeed, I think that my right hon. Friend will probably agree that, especially among the smaller and economically less well-endowed countries, our aid programme is probably the single most important element, in foreign policy terms, of our bilateral relations with them. For those reasons, we must resist the current trend.

When referring to the escalating percentage of our aid programme spent on the multilateral programme, my right hon. Friend said that we must adapt to reality. However, that adaptation to reality will mean the emasculation of our bilateral aid programme, which will become a very small part of the total. That would be deeply regrettable.

Clearly, we have obligations to the EC and to multilateral agencies. We should say that, as a matter of policy, there is to be a 50-50 split. I am sure that all hon. Members would regard that as a reasonable division between our bilateral needs and requirements and funds for multilateral agencies, but, unless we review immediately the dissipation of funds from our bilateral aid programme, in a few years we shall end up with a bilateral programme involving only a small residue of the total funds available.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is making an extremely shrewd and well-informed speech. I share his reservations about the current trend, as I made clear. He will understand that only a very small proportion of the process is voluntary. We contribute voluntarily to only a small percentage of the funds; the overwhelming majority of our contributions are in the nature of subscriptions. One belongs to an organisation and makes a subscription which is fixed each year. One can withdraw from an organisation, as we did from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation—my right hon. Friend will know the arguments for and against that particular case

[Mr. Hurd]

—but I do not think that he would recommend withdrawing on a substantial scale from organisations, whether United Nations or EC.

There are three issues to bear in mind. The first is the need to keep a lid, as far as possible, on the spending of international organisations. The second is to improve their quality and we are hard at work on that. The third is to ensure that our bilateral aid programme goes where it will produce the best results. As I said, the time is passing when it is right to fund huge projects bilaterally. They should now be funded multilaterally and bilateral aid should be concentrated on the objectives set out by my right hon. Friend.

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for responding to that issue, as I know that he cannot be here at the end of the debate. From what he said, it appears that he does not differ from the thrust of my argument and the numerical direction in which I am heading.

My right hon. Friend might also reflect on the wisdom of some of the ratchet agreements into which we have entered, especially that with the European Community. We may have received a great deal in return, but I believe that we have given way too lightly on the question of the share of our overseas aid that we can hold on to bilaterally. I have a horrible feeling that it was thrown away as something of a make-weight in earlier negotiations. If so, that is regrettable. If we must continue to pay subscriptions, I urge my right hon. Friend to play a tougher hand and to reduce the diversion, especially to the EC, which appears to be on the cards.

Finally, I wish to speak about the Korean peninsula, which has received considerable publicity in the past week or so. As the House may know, I am the chairman of the Britain-Korea parliamentary group and, in that capacity, I spent last week in Korea with the vice-chairman of the group, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). The House will appreciate that North Korea is one of the most uncertain and unstable countries, politically and possibly militarily, in the world. It is not replicated by any other. It has an aging communist dictator, Kim Il Sung, and an uncertain successor, Kim Jong Il, about whom very little is known, although his personal attributes have been the subject of colourful media speculation, which may or may not be correct.

North Korea has been hermetically sealed for many years and to a much greater extent than any other country. The Government have, with considerable success, been able to deny their people access to the free world's media, whether radio or television. They have also been able to filter every form of communication, including telephone and post. The country allows only limited access to foreign visitors and always under very carefully controlled conditions. In the past year, it has decided to play the nuclear card by withdrawing from the non-proliferation treaty and refusing to grant proper inspection rights to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The potential instability and anxiety in the Korean peninsula cannot be confined to the peninsula. The significance of the position in North Korea is that, on the nuclear side at least, it is bound to give further impetus to China's already burgeoning nuclear programme and—perhaps even more worrying—if North Korea appeared to be getting in range of developing a credible nuclear delivery capability the Japanese would find that extremely difficult to ignore.

In a dangerous and uncertain world, one of the encouraging features is that the two major belligerents in the last world war have both, so far, imposed upon themselves self-denying ordinances in relation to nuclear weapons. We all profoundly wish that to continue. The last thing that we need is for any impetus to be given inside the Japanese political system to that country changing policy and having to say that it will be obliged, as a result of threats from a country such as North Korea, to consider giving itself a nuclear capability.

It is, therefore, a matter of great international importance that every possible pressure is exercised on the North Korean Government to conform with their non-proliferation obligations and to their obligations towards the International Atomic Energy Agency. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to give us the assurance that the British Government are doing everything in their power to ensure North Korea's compliance with those obligations.

If a resolution comes before the Security Council of the United Nations about sanctions in relation to North Korea, I hope that the British Government will be strongly supportive, because unless we can lance that potential nuclear boil it has the capacity to grow into something infinitely more ominous and infinitely more serious, of worldwide international concern.

11.11 am

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has done the House a service by mentioning two important subjects. First, I entirely agree with what he said about the two Koreas and I hope that the Government will take his words seriously. Second, however, while I think that he was right to draw the important analysis of overseas aid to the attention of the House, I have reached slightly different conclusions from his own, which I will mention later.

It is inevitable that in these foreign affairs debates we flit from one subject to another in a rather miscellaneous way. I hope that I am not alone in regretting that we continue to combine foreign affairs and defence in one full day. Although the two subjects are interrelated, it means that the wind-up speeches are made on defence subjects and that there is no proper answer to the debate. We have the statutory defence debates scattered throughout the year, but we get few opportunities to debate foreign affairs. I wish that we could end the current practice and separate the two subjects in future years.

As we have to combine both subjects in one day, let me say a word about defence before I turn to my remarks on foreign affairs. At the most recent general election, there were some differences between the parties on defence policy, which were clearly set out in the manifestos. I want to acknowledge, therefore, that in the past week or two there has been a change in relation to two matters on the Government side, which my party warmly welcomes. One is the commitment in the short run to maintain the British independent nuclear deterrent with the Trident system at no greater firepower than the existing Polaris system. That is

something which we argued for at the last election and about which there was no agreement from the Conservative party. There now is and we are grateful.

The second issue is the statement in the Queen's Speech that the Government will work towards full participation in the comprehensive test ban treaty—another new development, which it is only right to acknowledge and welcome.

Turning to the wider framework of foreign policy, I shall be as guilty as anyone else of flitting from one subject to another, but I shall try to set my remarks in the context of what I conceive to be a proper framework of a forward-looking foreign policy for the country.

I take the House back to the atmosphere of three or four years ago—the ending of the cold war and the dismantling of the Berlin wall—because that period ushered in what appeared to be a victory for freedom and a new era of hope for the planet. The phrase "the new world order" fell from everyone's lips. It has not so far been mentioned in today's debate. The MAD age of preparing for mutually assured destruction appeared to be over and we thought that we could look forward at last to turning swords into ploughshares, with reduced military spending and greater efforts to raise the living standards of the poorer parts of the globe.

It has not worked out like that. In fact, in the past five years the United Nations Organisation has launched more peacekeeping operations than in the previous 43 years of its history. We have to recognise that some of the hopes and aspirations that we had, just that short time ago, have not been fulfilled. It should be the main object of our foreign policy to try to put them back on course.

The obvious starting point is that we want to see a world in which there are regional arrangements and agreements for common security, starting with Europe. I admit that I have at times felt some sympathy for some of the American criticism of us Europeans on the subject of former Yugoslavia. That is primarily a European interest, not an American one, and we cannot say that we have covered ourselves with glory in the way that we have treated former Yugoslavia.

The Maastricht treaty clearly foreshadows the development of a common security policy in Europe and that should be the pattern for regional security arrangements right round the globe. Yet—here I agree with the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) —there is still massive schizophrenia on the European question inside the Government, not just inside the Conservative party but inside the Cabinet. That is deeply worrying.

The Foreign Secretary had some fun, in a previous debate, at the expense of my leader and my party on the ground—and he was very amusing on the subject—of our allegedly saying different things in different places, but no sin in my party has compared what we have seen in the past few weeks in the contrast between the atmosphere at the Conservative party conference and the atmosphere at the Confederation of British Industry. We cannot have members of the Cabinet appealing to the worst form of xenophobia, inward-looking nationalism, at the Conservative party conference while other members of the Cabinet go to the CBI and try to endorse the Prime Minister's line of being at the heart of Europe.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have a primary duty to stamp their authority on the rest of the Cabinet and tell them that we are not going to have any more of it, and that our commitment to making the European Union work in the way that was foreshadowed in the treaty to which we have put our signature has to be one of the starting points of our foreign policy.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The right hon. Gentleman might know that this morning's *Financial Times* indicates that the Foreign Secretary is doing just that tonight in the north in a speech to the CBI, in which he will make it clear that the Conservative party has no problems with its European idealism. It objects to socialism in some of the measures in the European Community, which is a very different point.

Sir David Steel: I am not going to get on to the side track of the social chapter. I am complaining about one set of speeches to the CBI and another set of speeches to the Conservative party. That has to stop if there is to be any coherence in the Government's foreign policy.

Turning away from Europe to the wider subject of the end of the cold war and the way in which it has affected our foreign policy, on the one hand the end of cold war super-power rivalry has in some cases created peace, for example in south-west Africa, in the shape of the new Namibia, and indeed, as has already been referred to by both Front-Bench spokesmen, in the new settlement in the middle east. On the other hand, the end of the cold war super-power rivalry has brought to an end the kind of forced discipline and restraint which was imposed by the super-powers, and that has unleashed tragedies of the kind most graphically seen in Bosnia today.

In October 1995—not all that far away—we shall celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Organisation. It is time to take a good look at that organisation, and to accept that something that was created in the aftermath of the second world war, and which has remained fundamentally unchanged since, is wholly inadequate for the needs of the different world of the 21st century.

My party starts from the basic assumption that the strengthening of the United Nations and all its agencies must be the cornerstone of this country's future foreign policy, and must not simply be tacked on as a pious afterthought in the course of protecting British interests.

We must develop the United Nations peacekeeping and peacemaking machinery—the Queen's Speech contains a reference to that—as outlined in the Secretary-General's agenda for peace. The military staff committee needs to be reactivated to provide planning, co-ordination and training of troops. Member states must earmark standby forces for that purpose—perhaps to a total of between 50,000 and 100,000 men. We could play a particular role in that activity because of our expertise in training and the availability of facilities here. We should be taking a lead in turning the "Agenda for Peace" proposals into a reality.

Such an integrated force should be able to move swiftly to discourage aggression, to re-establish order in countries where governmental authority has collapsed and to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. We must, in turn, ensure that the United Nations becomes fully accountable for its actions or inactions. Surely something has gone badly wrong when helicopter gunships fire on women and children, or on hospitals, in the name of the United Nations. Such episodes undermine the organisation's moral and political authority.

I would therefore argue that the Secretary-General and his representatives should be much more accountable to the

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Security Council. Just as that council acts on behalf of United Nations members, the General Assembly should also press for measures of accountability for the national Governments within the Security Council. For example, the new American Administration must draw a clearer distinction between American and United Nations interests. In the case of Somalia, they have gone wrong; they have muddled the two as to whether it is an American operation or American participation in a United Nations operation.

In future, we must also avoid belated gestures which are dictated by the prick of the television camera on the world's conscience. The shadow Foreign Secretary was right to draw our attention to Angola, where television has not been particularly active, unlike Somalia. If we simply react to the day-to-day pictures on television, or if we choose operations solely because of the strategic interests of the greater powers, we will not be contributing to a real new world order. I remind the House that well over 100,000 Somalis had starved to death before the first UN force reached the country. Belated humanity is not humanity at all.

The type of peacekeeping forces that I advocate need not involve extra expenditure, but would certainly mean timely expenditure. It is salutary to note that this year only 10 per cent. of the 180 member states of the United Nations paid their dues by the deadline of 31 January and that, following the Reagan legacy, the United States of America is among the largest debtors to the organisation.

I follow the comments of the shadow Foreign Secretary on Angola because I was there during that ill-fated election. Margaret Anstee, the UN representative, who is British, told me at the time, and has since gone graphically public, about the tragic lack of resources for the job that the UN was sent to do. She said:

"We had 350 unarmed military observers, 126 unarmed police and 100 election officers to cover a ravaged country as large as France, Germany and Spain combined."

Even after the civil war resumed, she was unable to secure a ceasefire because no troops could be made available to her for another six to nine months. She also said:

"We had been given a jumbo 747 to fly but fuel only for a DC3."

And so the carnage continues.

In this House, we must say loudly and clearly to every international statesman who talks of the United Nations inadequacies that they must put their money where their mouth is if the organisation is to become effective.

The growing problem that the UN organisation must grapple with is not so much conflict between member states as conflict between ethnic or religious groupings within them. That is why we cannot avoid looking afresh at the UN charter's emphasis on respect for national sovereignty. We have to accept that the charter needs to be modified in favour of the later universal declaration of human rights, which made it clear that people have basic rights under any state and that the international community has a role in protecting those.

That is why, instead of ad hoc arrangements, we need to consider the establishment of an international criminal court to bring to justice those guilty of crimes against their fellow citizens—Iraq is the most obvious recent case—and the establishment of a human rights commissioner, with the same international standing as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

I have set that out as a long-term objective, because we must ensure that the UN's authority is seen to overlay all the progress that we are making in some of the brighter spots in the world. Here, I must return to the middle east. Mr. Rabin and Mr. Arafat are to be congratulated on the progress that they have made so far. We look forward to welcoming the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Yasser Arafat, here in Britain next month, when he will address a meeting of Members of both Houses. However, that process has to be followed through and they desperately need encouragement. They both have to deal with rejectionists, and the international community must ensure that not only is the Gaza-Jericho plan fully supported, but the other component parts of a future middle east peace settlement are also encouraged. I very much welcomed the Foreign Secretary's visit to Syria.

There is a parallel in what is happening in South Africa, because President de Klerk and Mr. Mandela have shown the same imagination and, with the transition to democracy in South Africa, one can envisage that precisely the sort of regional security arrangement that I mentioned might come about in southern Africa.

The Gracious Speech refers to the Government's commitment to assist democratisation in South Africa. I hope that the Foreign Office will study the report that has just come from the International Commission of Jurists on what is required in the electoral process in South Africa between now and the end of April. The requirements are substantial and it is not merely a question of packing off a few Commonwealth, European Community or parliamentary observers. A lot of ground work must be done and it will require a great deal of resources.

I watched the splendid operation during the election in Namibia, but the scale of that operation—for 1 million people—will have to be multiplied if we are to make it effective in South Africa. I fully endorse the words in the Gracious Speech, but I hope that they will be translated into action and resources.

I have always fully supported what the Foreign Secretary has said in his speeches in recent years about good governance. I very much welcome the efforts that British and other Governments are making to promote it throughout the globe. However, one must admit that, especially in Africa, one is always coming across the counter argument that, "You didn't show much interest during the cold war." I am afraid it is true that, in general, the west was happy to prop up anyone who happened to be on the anti-communist side in Africa. We have a legacy to live down, which is not easy, and it is not easy to make a transition.

We have also had setbacks and failures. The Foreign Secretary was right to dwell on the setback in Nigeria during the past couple of days. I must also mention Burundi, a much less strategically important country, where there has also been a tragic setback in the march towards good governance and democracy. We must press on with those objectives and we must judge carefully when we resume aid programmes that were stopped because of the lack of good governance.

It is important to tell our friends in the Kenyan Government, for example, that good governance is a matter not just of holding a multi-party election and winning it, but of securing the independence of the judiciary and

broadcasting networks and of ensuring that arbitrary measures such as declaration of security zones are open, supervised and temporary. We must tell our friends in Malawi, to whom we are beginning to resume aid, that while it is fine that a referendum has been held, agreements made between that country's Government and Opposition parties on constitutional changes have not yet been put in place. We must be careful that, by resuming aid programmes, we do not give the wrong impression to the people in those countries that everything in the garden is now lovely and that their Governments are back to full international respectability. Those issues are difficult to judge, but I hope that the Goverment will be cautious in resuming aid programmes in pursuit of good governance.

The requirement for good governance certainly applies in the negotiations over Hong Kong. The House should fully support what the Governor there is attempting to achieve. We must tell the Chinese Government that they will be judged by the way in which they accept the development of Hong Kong's economy in accordance with the wishes of the people of Hong Kong, to which the Chinese Government subscribed in the joint agreement.

Good governance applies also to the situation in western Sahara. I hope that the British Government will do more to lean on the Moroccan Government, to ensure that the long-awaited referendum takes place. It has been constantly delayed and Britain has now withdrawn its small component part of the UN force there.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling made the perfectly valid point that more and more of our aid programme is being pre-empted by international agencies, but I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about European Community figures. In my experience, its aid programmes are extremely effective. It is too easy to make jibes about Brussels bureaucracy. I know of no case where that criticism applies to European aid projects. There is more doubt about the effectiveness and efficiency of some UN agencies, and we must pay more attention to reforming the United Nations and streamlining its organisation, as I have said.

What concerns me about the pre-emption of so much of our aid budget multilaterally is not the principle of a large section of that aid going multilaterally—here again, I disagree with the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling—but that the tail end of it, in the form of the bilateral aid programme, is suffering the squeeze. The United Kingdom's contribution continues to fall while the Conservative manifesto and the Prime Minister at Rio reiterated that we are supposed to be moving towards the UN target of 0·7 per cent. of gross national product. There is a gap between Government utterances and statements and their actions. They should be ashamed of our overseas aid budget.

A couple of weeks ago, I was in Canada, naturally sharing in the rejoicing of the defeat of that country's Conservative Government. I met Mr. Chrétien on the eve of his taking over as Prime Minister. The Liberal Government told me that, even under the Conservatives, Canada had a good record on overseas aid and that they are determined to push back towards the target of 1 per cent. of GNP. That is something of which to be proud. There is a glaring contrast between the Canadian Government, who have already achieved the UN target and are moving beyond it, and the British Government, who are paying lip service to the UN target but are failing to reach even half of it.

Incidentally, one must pay tribute to the Canadian Conservatives for achieving something that no political party in this House and certainly not Labour's shadow Cabinet have achieved, which is equality of representation. The Conservatives have two Members of Parliament in the new Canadian House of Commons—one man and one woman. However, that is an irreverent aside.

I can compliment the British Government on their efforts in respect of debt relief. I commend the Minister for Overseas Development, Lady Chalker, and the Prime Minister for their efforts—but we have not yet succeeded in translating into effect the G7 summit declarations made at Tokyo. I hope that the Government will continue to pressure the Japanese, in particular, and the International Monetary Fund and World bank to engage in greater measures of debt relief in accordance with Government statements.

I will conclude with a reference to the Gracious speech and its inadequate sentence on the arms trade:

"My Government will . . . encourage international responsibility in conventional arms transfers."

That is an extremely limited objective. From my travels over the past two or three years, I am more and more convinced that, in the aftermath of the cold war, controlling the arms trade must take far higher priority in international debate and in our own foreign policy. The world is now awash with expensive and lethal weaponry. Next year, there will be an official review of the operation of the UN register of conventional arms.

The ending of the cold war created large stocks of unused conventional weaponry and unwanted manufacturing capacity. In particular, huge supplies of arms are coming from the former states of the Soviet Union. The United States and ourselves have also led the way in supplying arms to developing countries. Some of the most surprising nations, such as Hungary and South Africa, eager to acquire foreign exchange, have been reckless with their arms exports.

The growing number of international arms dealers, ever-ready to cash in on human strife, is a moral disgrace. We cannot acquit arms-producing states such as our own —with our official defence sales agencies and exhibitions —from complicity in that money-making aggravation of global misery and suffering. The five permanent members of the Security Council, who include Britain, supply 80 per cent. of the world's armaments.

I cite two worrying examples of why that issue is so important and how we are completely failing to tackle it. In the past few years, South Africa—because of its isolationist policies—has been building up its own arms industry and exporting armaments for anyone who would buy them from the old South African regime. Sadly, there is every indication that the transitional Government—and the African National Congress itself were it to come to govern in the future—will continue using South Africa's arms supply capacity for foreign exchange purposes. Even worse, there are indications that the ANC is being courted by arms sales organisations, including those in Britain, to buy expensive items of weaponry such as submarines and aircraft for the new South Africa. That is most dispiriting. There are other priorities for the new South Africa.

In the middle east, the United Arab Emirates—a country and Government which I greatly admire—have said that they will contribute $25 million to the Gaza-Jericho development. We all applaud that and say

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thank you very much—but, in the same year, the UAE will spend $3·5 billion on purchasing tanks. One questions the right priorities in the middle east situation.

I am aware that the cessation of arms manufacturing would have a devastating effect on unemployment in the developed world. We must engage in arms employment conversion programmes so that we may move towards international discussion on controlling the arms race and arms trade. Britain should be taking a lead by closing its own arms sales agencies. If that is not done, all the talk about peacekeeping and peacemaking only means that we intend to spend the next decade rushing around the world putting out bush fires that we ourselves helped to light. That is not a sensible policy.

11.39 am

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said at the beginning of the debate, the foreign policy scene is indeed kaleidoscopic. Identifying Britain's interests and how they are defended around the world has never been more diverse and difficult. One continues to marvel at my right hon. Friend's capacities to keep abreast and on top of the vast variety of issues with the skill, determination and clarity that he does.

I wish to concentrate on three foreign policy issues that are raised in the Gracious Speech—relations with the Republic of Ireland, relations with the rest of the European Union, which are crucial and which are emerging as the central issue, as they have been in the debate about our place in the world, and relations, through Hong Kong, with the People's Republic of China.

As one of the two hon. Members now left who took part in trying to put together the power-sharing agreement of 1973-74, I am temperamentally in favour of any talks and dialogue to bring stability, prosperity and the good life to Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. I am pleased indeed to hear that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is putting his personal commitment and time into trying to inch forward progress on this horrific issue, with which we have all struggled over the years.

It is worth remembering that the power-sharing participants were all parties that, enthusiastically or otherwise, accepted what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister yesterday called the cast-iron constitutional agreement: that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, as decided in a referendum, the legislation for which I took through the House.

When one hears ideas of new talks with different parties, one must ask exactly what the aim of the talks would be and what the conditions and assumptions behind them are. One hopes that they are to further peace and stability in Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. To my mind, that is the cast-iron constitutional guarantee and it was the starting point for the power-sharing talks. Not every party may have liked it, but they all agreed to it and that is how we made progress, although for reasons that I do not have time to go into now it came apart and we were back to square one.

It is important to bear that in mind and not to let the idea of talks in general, because talks are better than killing, carry us away and make us lose sight of the key objective within the cast-iron constitutional guarantee.

The talks on the power-sharing agreement and the brief talks between the Government, of whom I was a part although I was not physically involved in the talks, and the leaders of the Provisional IRA proved one thing to me beyond peradventure: talks with people such as the IRA or those who had nothing but contempt for any guarantees of Northern Ireland's position, were a waste of time. That is what we and my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Whitelaw concluded clearly. In a way, that was the point of showing the world that they would be a waste of time.

No talks, however well intentioned, even the power-sharing talks, will travel without, at the same time and on a separate track, the utmost dedication—not to the compromise of terrorism, or to hoping that it will go away if talks progress, but to the defeat of terrorism. That is a matter to which I know my right hon. and hon. Friends and leading members of the Dublin Government are dedicated. I urge them to vastly greater efforts in an attempt to do what is necessary to control and defeat terrorist movements and, although it will be difficult, to capture and secure convictions for the godfathers of terrorism—the brains. We can arrest people in active service units. One can go against the loyalist terrorists who react to the latest horrors in a hideous ding-dong of revenge, but the ultimate task of defeating terrorism, as experience shows in every country where there has been effective control of terrorist movements, is to capture the big fish. I have always regarded that as crucial—relying on close co-operation between the Dublin Government and the British Government and on an intensity of activity possibly greater than we have been told about in the House, although I hope that it is going on.

With modern technology, we could do more to prevent the intimidation of witnesses, to secure convictions and to protect those who are trying to administer the law in the Republic of Ireland or in the United Kingdom. I commend to hon. Members who desperately want the Northern Ireland situation to be settled, with Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom under its cast-iron guarantee, a fascinating document by Professor Paul Wilkinson, Professor of International Studies at the University of St. Andrews, which appeared in the August edition of the independent magazine, *Parliamentary Brief*, which is circulated to Members. It sets out a range of ways in which a far more determined strategy might be pursued and I hope that it is being pursued, between Dublin and London, to net the godfathers, the brains and organisers of the system.

MI5's involvement in the intelligence side of Irish terrorism is a great improvement—and, incidentally, if we develop different methods of scrutinising MI5 and the Secret Intelligence Service, as proposed in the Gracious Speech, I hope that we do not make too much of a meal of it. They are meant to be secret services, operating in secrecy. They cannot do their work if accountability, which is perfectly proper, is carried to a degree of intensive intrusion. I do not know whether the arrangement will be decided between the Front Benches, the usual channels or the House authorities, but I hope that it will be of a light and sensible kind and not of a kind that will cause so much accountability to be applied that the very purpose and functions of the agencies will be undermined.

That is all that I want to say on relations with the Republic of Ireland and the Irish question, except to repeat my convinced experience from 20 years ago when we tried power sharing: there are no alternatives. There is no way of defeating terrorism through talks. There must be a twin

track: dialogue and going against terrorism with the aim of defeating it, using every possible resource in Dublin, London and Belfast to do so.

I now turn to the European Union, which is the centre of our considerations. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote an article in *The Economist* a few weeks ago which, frankly, I found exhilarating and excellent. Not all of my colleagues may have so found it, but I did. He said that we need a new agenda and that we cannot go on with the stale agenda of constantly calling for greater political and monetary union when so many new burning issues at the top of the Europe's agenda must be addressed —for example, the recession and the 18 million or 19 million unemployed people in Europe. European industry is becoming grossly uncompetitive because it is overloaded with social costs, which is becoming very serious indeed. The European Union is growing in size and questions are now being raised about huge new institutional developments. We must deal with the chaos of Russia. There is a feeling—and it is not a minority feeling any more—among European peoples, which has been shown strongly, that we are moving to an age when we do not need the concentration of power, acquis communautaire and competences at the centre that were needed in the 1960s and 1970s. Decentralisation and the subsidiarisation and repatriation of a vast range of competences and activities should now be considered by much more rigorous constitutional means to reassure people throughout Europe that we are not in a situation of creeping centralisation.

We indeed need a new agenda. I urge my right hon. Friends to say, as they rightly said, not only that the old agenda and reiteration of constant prayers and mantras, as I think my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described them, for political and monetary union are not good enough for the people of Europe but that we should clearly set out a new agenda. We should make the point that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister almost made in his article in *The Economist*, but which I am prepared to make: the constant obsession of policy makers of moving towards fixed exchange rates and a single currency is undermining every credible attempt at monetary co-operation and the prevention of volatility in the currency markets of Europe. Any expert who operates in the currency markets will tell politicians that once it is believed that a country has committed itself to the fixed-rate goal, it becomes easy prey for speculators, and time and again all the efforts at monetary co-operation will be undermined by the obsession of going for a single currency or a single bank. That is a bad aim for Europe and it undermines our hopes for prosperity and co-operation in the new European Union. In the language that we use, I wish us to tread a middle path between the super-federalists who want complete unity in a superstate and those who will be hostile to any kind of European co-operation, which will lead to anarchy. We need to develop our view of the European Union with great confidence and set out a positive agenda so that we can carry forward the European Union to prevent it from running into real disillusion and unsaleability, as it is now doing. Currently, it is not a popular concept among the people of Europe.

Finally, on the question of Hong Kong and China, it is worth noting that the Chinese economy is roaring ahead. The latest International Monetary Fund and World bank figures suggest that the size of the Chinese economy has been under-estimated by between four and five times and may well already be the third-largest economy in the world, moving forward at a great rate. China is also one of the few nations that is currently increasing its defence spending. All that leads me to the view, which I suspect is shared by most of my hon. Friends, that we must maintain an effective and good relationship with that giant. It is no use trying to box against it and trade insults. We must have good Sino-British relations in the long term for our interests in Asia, for our business and because China is increasingly significant in the equation of global stability. Therefore, we must somehow ensure that we manage the problem of Hong Kong in ways which do not undermine that longer-term aim. Having said that, I am in absolutely no doubt at all, and totally agree with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), that we must back to the hilt the extremely modest political reform package being put forward by the Governor of Hong Kong as the basis on which the British administer the territory up to 1997.

There are plenty of people in Hong Kong such as some in the business community, as my hon. Friends and members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee who have just visited the place know, who are prepared to bad mouth the whole reform package. They wonder why we should quarrel with the Chinese now, when in three and a half years they will be able to do anything they like and could take anyone off the "through train". They wonder why we should quarrel about changes, not in the move towards the development of democracy, because that principle is accepted by everybody, but in the democratic arrangements of the 1994 local elections and the 1995 LegCo elections.

It is not as easy as that. If the business people of Hong Kong think that they can advance safely with a democratic system that is rotten, that is not based on true and straightforward democratic procedures, and still keep the rule of law intact—a commercial law on which their prosperity depends—they are living in a world of illusion. It is absolutely vital that the principles are upheld by Governor Patten, by the British Government and by all those who support what he is trying to do to organise straightforward, unrigged democratic elections. It is true that even if Governor Patten goes ahead with all his aims and receives the backing of LegCo, which I hope that he will, the Chinese could say in three and a half years that they do not like any of the changes and could throw the whole thing over. Let us at least ensure that the threshold against that is raised high. The Chinese have a major interest in the world by integrating their economy with the global economy. The whole Chinese communist party system needs steady growth rather like oxygen to survive and remain in office. It needs to join GATT and international institutions and not to be branded in the way in which it was after the Tiananmen square incident. On taking over Hong Kong, the Chinese certainly should avoid committing all sorts of ruthlessly brutal and crude acts. That would once again immediately condemn them in the eyes of the world. They must be discouraged from dismantling the arrangements that Governor Patten is trying to put in place in Hong Kong as part of Britain's proper administrative duties, under the joint declaration, under the Basic Law of the National Peoples Congress Standing Committee and under the exchange of letters between Foreign Ministers.

The Foreign Affairs Select Committee has heard a good deal about how the British Government are violating the

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Basic Law and the joint declaration. From the evidence of independent experts and from all our inquiries that is not our conclusion. On the contrary, we fear that the Chinese, by seeking to deliberately frustrate the work of the British Government and the Hong Kong Government to slow down the necessary process of transition towards the handover in 1997, may be coming near to breaking the spirit and letter of the joint declaration that requires the Government of the People's Republic of China to co-operate with the British authorities and Hong Kong in all necessary handover arrangements in a constructive way. So we need not be in any way defensive—or offensive, in the narrow sense—about backing the Patten proposals for Hong Kong, because they are vital to achieving adherence to the systems of democracy and rule of law as based on the British legal system. To press forward is important throughout Asia and not just in Hong Kong.

I apologise if I have spoken for too long, but we should concentrate carefully on those three matters in the coming months. We have the opportunity to pursue not a selfish foreign policy but an individual one of power and influence. I am not happy to see our foreign policy affairs submerged in a Euro blur. I know that foreign policy is part of the Maastricht treatuy and let us work together where we can. But in many areas, we have a unique interest to pursue and a unique contribution to make and I know that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is uniquely qualified to pursue those opportunities, as he has done so vigorously in the past.

11.57 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): There were parts of the speech by the Secretary of State with which I was in absolute agreement, and I turn first to Cyprus. Anyone who was in Cyprus over the summer and who learned of the discussions and the conflicting reports coming from the various Government delegations must have been not only surprised but pleased by the Foreign Secretary's comments. All the political parties in Cyprus and the Cypriot people throughout the island will be glad to hear and to read the right hon. Gentleman's comments, which were clear and specific. The Foreign Secretary said that in the Government's view Cyprus was one country and one Government—one Cyprus. I am sure that that will be very good news for the people in Cyprus who were beginning to believe that Britain sought to change its position on Cyprus.

I also agreed entirely with the Foreign Secretary's comments about the military takeover in Nigeria. He said that military rule was not acceptable—a comment which found favour on both sides of the House. The message that must go out today from the House to the people of Nigeria, who have once again seen democracy pushed aside by a military cabal, is that we are determined, as the Foreign Secretary made clear, that military rule will not be acceptable and that pressure will be maintained so that democracy can return to that land.

In looking for hope in a period of darkness, we need do no more than remind the Nigerian people of the experience of the people of Bangladesh. For many years they struggled against continuing authoritarian and military rule; yet the military President eventually ended up in gaol. Democracy has returned to Bangladesh. We cannot offer much to the Nigerian people, but we can offer the lesson of history and our continued support for that sad country.

I now turn to the parts of the Foreign Secretary's speech with which I was less pleased. Listening to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), I thought that he and I must have exchanged notes before we came into the Chamber. Like him, I was concerned about the real lack of content on the United Nations in the Foreign Secretary's speech. I am especially concerned about the lack of reference to the "Agenda for Peace" document which was launched by the Secretary-General on 17 June 1992. Where are we with the "Agenda for Peace"? How is Britain helping the Secretary-General to reform the UN so that it can move forward with the "Agenda for Peace"? As the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale said, and as other hon. Members have said on numerous occasions in the House, many areas of the "Agenda for Peace" would be of use not only to this country but to the world in trying to resolve the many conflicts.

In our debate on 21 January 1993, at column 553, I referred specifically to the "Agenda for Peace" and especially to paragraph 82. It raised the prospect of the world's concern if the principles of the charter were not seen to be applied consistently—if they were seen to be applied selectively—and how that might in some way lead to a lack of support, especially from the emerging countries, for the United Nations role in helping them to resolve their disputes.

More importantly, I also asked the Foreign Secretary a number of questions about this country's former representative to the United Nations, Sir Anthony Parsons, who referred to the decision to impose a no-fly zone in the north of Iraq. At that time, Russia and China had abstained. I asked then, and I ask now, whether we are any nearer to defining our position in terms of the question posed by Sir Anthony Parsons when he commented on United Nations Security Council resolution 688. Can the Secretary of State for Defence tell us whether China and Russia, which abstained on that occasion on resolution 688, now accept our interpretation and our subsequent action based on that interpretation in both the north and the south of Iraq? It is important that we understand that. If we are, as paragraph 82 of the "Agenda for Peace" says, to apply international law, it must be applied universally rather than specifically, as and when particular countries believe it is important for their interpretation or their concerns in a particular area of the world. I would appreciate a response from the Secretary of State.

On the same theme, I refer to the comments made yesterday by the UN mediator on Bosnia, Thorvald Stoltenberg, when he called for 3,000 extra troops. He said that there was a shortage of basic equipment and communications facilities. Many hon. Members have argued that point in the House and have referred to the need for a military staffs committee. We have observed that when the UN is trying to deal with particular problems, such as Yugoslavia and Somalia, where different nations have supplied forces to the UN, there is clearly a need for a military staffs committee to control the operation. The participants in UN peacekeeping activities are clearly unable to communicate with each other.

As I said in a debate earlier this year, the example of Yugoslavia

"cries out for a centralised structure as part of the United Nations peacekeeping effort based around a major signals unit and expanding to take in infantry, medical and supplies units". —*[Official Report,* 23 February 1993; Vol. *219,* c. *813.]*

The UN mediator in Bosnia has identified a difficulty with communications, as have hon. Members. Will the Secretary of State for Defence tell us if we are anywhere near establishing a centalised major signals unit to take care of this communications problem?

There has been a great debate, on both sides of the House, about the whys, the wherefores, the rights and the wrongs of the Yugoslavian and the Bosnian conflict. More than ever, the public want to see a specific position taken by Britain. Whether people support Croatia, Serbia or the Muslim population in Bosnia-Herzogovina, they are looking for Britain to take some action, some lead.

We could adopt a slightly different position from that which has been urged. Given our experience in Bosnia, a course that we might consider as an alternative to the present situation is contained in international law which, if such a tragedy ever occurred in the future, we might be able to use as a starting point. The laws of war—the various rules and conventions that regulate armed conflict, whether internal or international—provide clear guidelines for the action to be taken by parties involved in the conflict and the role of third-party states. The Geneva convention fosters the right atmosphere and provides the best chance, on an equal footing, for all parties to the conflict to mitigate many of the horrors of the current war, while maintaining Britain's attitude of international legality and impartiality towards the conflict.

If we had tried using international law, it might well have worked because, in a series of meetings convened under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross between 1991 and 1992, the various parties involved in the current conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia agreed to be bound by the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law. The combatants involved in the conflict accepted the principle that certain international recognised standards of behaviour could be maintained.

Although part of international humanitarian law, the war crimes tribunal established by the Security Council of the United Nations, in the absence of any other action taken in accordance with the convention, reflects a policy of despair on the part of the west. The implication is that the international community must wait for the war to run its terrible course before any international remedy can be offered.

The laws of war were conceived to find a legitimate and neutral role for parties and states not involved in the conflict while the fighting is ongoing. Not to attempt to prevent terrible violations against innocent civilians, and not to use the positive deterrent effect of protecting powers against all parties to the conflict—without discrimination —is a needless failure about which many in the media, in public meetings and in the Chamber have railed against the Government and the Opposition. I urge the Foreign Secretary to consider the possibility of using protecting powers as a means of finding some way forward. That would seek to deal with the conflict as it develops and, if used properly, would give more protection to the population on the ground.

I welcome what was said by both the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about progress in the middle east. I am sure that all hon. Members will send their best wishes to the Palestinian and Israeli negotiators—whether they meet in Taba or elsewhere—and will wish their deliberations every success.

Clearly, there are still hurdles to be overcome. From the viewpoint of those on the outside looking in and wishing to put pressure on the negotiators one of those hurdles is the holding of 11,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli gaols. It is a continuing, gnawing problem. I hope that when the Foreign Secretary visits the occupied territories in January to talk to both sides—as he suggested that he would—he will reinforce the need for the Israeli Government to perceive the benefit of releasing the prisoners as quickly as possible, and continuing to allow those who have been removed from the west bank and Gaza to return there as quickly as possible.

Both Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat face tremendous difficulties. They are not helped by the actions of Israeli settlers, or those of the militant Palestinians who are killing them. None the less, we must surely welcome Prime Minister Rabin's forthright statement about the settlers. He said that the Oslo accords

"have enemies from the Palestinians who murdered a Jew merely because he was a Jew, and opponents from amongst the Jews who rioted and burnt the cars of Arabs merely because they were Arabs."

We should also welcome last week's public condemnation by Yasser Arafat—the first ever—of the killing of an Israeli settler by Palestinians on the west bank.

Both these individuals are taking a courageous stand for peace, and they deserve our support. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's comments and hope that the Government will continue to press for peace in the middle east; however —as many hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out—peace will not come until the other parts of the jigsaw fall into place. One of those pieces, often referred to in the House, is the need to remove the Arab boycott.

As the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale pointed out, there are parallels to be drawn. I suggest that one can be drawn between the need for a lifting of the Arab boycott and the not too dissimilar situation that we have watched developing in South Africa, culminating in yesterday's successful conclusion of arrangements for a new constitution. It is not just a question of the Arab boycott, however: the peace process itself cannot move forward without movement on the Syrian-Israeli conflict.

President Assad of Syria has made it clear that he intends to stand firmly behind the Madrid conference's principle of complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab land, according to United Nations resolutions 242 and 338. While President Assad stands firm, there is little likelihood that the Government of Lebanon will be prepared to move on either the peace talks or the Arab boycott.

The international community has clearly linked the gradual lifting of sanctions on South Africa to internal progress achieved through dialogue—against a background of daily violence—on a range of political and humanitarian issues. That is the context in which we should discuss the Arab boycott. As the dialogue proceeds between Israelis and Syrians—and, most important, between Israelis and Lebanese, Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Jordanians—and as the various humanitarian and political pressures are relieved, it is more

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likely that other Arab countries will be willing to lift the boycott. Before I leave the subject of the middle east, may I say that all hon. Members must be pleased with the results of the recent elections in Jordan. Those have given King Hussein a stable background to re-enter the peace process which will be helpful to the final outcome in the middle east.

I will conclude by raising an issue that has not been raised so far in the debate. It is an issue that does not often get a mention in the House, but one on which the Foreign Office must spend more time in the coming Session to try to see how we can help. It is the subject of Cuba.

Recently, the all-party group on Cuba was addressed by Madame Isobel Allende, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Cuba. She outlined to the group a series of changes that were taking place in Cuba against the background of an economic boycott imposed by the United States. That boycott is expected to cost $800 million this year, as a burden on the Cuban economy. She spoke about an emergency plan for the economy, the opening up of Cuba to foreign investment, the relaxation of currency controls, allowing Cubans to spend foreign currency that they have earned, allowing self-employment in Cuba, leasing land for co-operatives, and decentralising decision-making, along with tax reforms.

I know that many hon. Members will still talk about the commitment of Cuba to maintaining its independence, sovereignty and socialist principles as being an obstacle which has to be overcome. Unless we start to talk to the Cubans and recognise that there is movement on the ground, we cannot claim to be doing as much as we can. I would recommend to the Foreign Office, and specifically to the Foreign Secretary, that an even greater interest be taken in Cuba so that we may help that process along. When we come to the Queen's Speech next year, we may then be able to say that we have helped the democratisation of Cuba and helped the people of that country to move forward. We may be able to say that that has helped peace in that part of the world.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I will say that there are still a number of hon. Members who wish to speak. I hope that those whom I call in a short time will bear that in mind, so that all hon. Members may be able to speak.

12.17 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). He is the chairman of the Labour party foreign affairs committee, and hence is my counterpart. I could not say that I agreed with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said this morning. There have been other moments of discord in the House as hon. Members disagree across it, but I think that this is the place to have disagreements on issues which concern foreign affairs and defence. As we all know, it is important that when we go abroad to visit the countries that we are debating today we speak with one voice, and that that one voice is for Britain.

I was interested in the speech of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), and I hope that the Boundary Commission finds a shorter name for his constituency following its reforms. I disagree with him on his request for specific debates on both foreign affairs and defence on the Queen's Speech.

I have made the point for some time that I think our debates on defence matters—I am sorry that defence has taken so little time this morning, as hon. Members have concentrated on foreign affairs—should be opened by the Foreign Secretary. Today, we have an almost unique opportunity to hear first from the Foreign Secretary about the international scene and the identification of Britain's international interests. During the winding-up speech, we will hear from the Secretary of State for Defence, who will no doubt tell us how the United Kingdom will fulfil its obligations as set out by the Foreign Secretary.

I was delighted to read in the Gracious Speech that Her Majesty's Government attach the highest importance to national security, to maintaining full support for NATO, to securing NATO's adaptation to the changing security environment and to continuing to develop the operational role of the Western European Union. Let me sound a note of caution, though. It is most important that we do not try to see in the development of the WEU an alternative to NATO. It has been suggested that the WEU might try to duplicate or replicate what NATO is already doing. The North Atlantic Alliance is fundamental to this nation's security and it is important that nothing should be done to undermine it, especially bearing in mind the current tendency of the United States to adopt a slightly isolationist stance. If the WEU is to develop, it is important that it should develop as the European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance; that is the right way forward.

I also welcome the suggestion in the Queen's Speech that we should widen rather than deepen the European Community. It is extremely interesting that countries in eastern Europe, which were for so long under the yoke of communism or of imperial powers such as the Austro-Hungarian empire and which have fought for so long for their independence and freedom, now find that independence rather discomfiting. It is cold outside, and they want to come back in under the shelter of some supranational power. That is why they are keen to join the European Community. They are experiencing the cold realisation that independence means additional responsibility and that it is very uncomfortable to be alone in such a disordered world. They cannot wait to surrender some of their new-found sovereignty in order to gain security.

I welcome the Government's pledge to play a constructive role in strengthening the United Nations capacity to undertake peacekeeping and preventive action —in other words, to assist in implementing the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Peace". The United Nations is at last fulfilling the role for which it was designed in 1945, and a very difficult task that will be. There are 26 conflicts going on in the world—admittedly most of them civil wars rather than wars between states —and there are a further 47 flashpoints at which conflagrations could break out at any time. The other day, I saw a map of the world with an overlay identifying those places. It showed that the areas where there is conflict and the risk of conflict coincide precisely with areas of overpopulation. During this debate alone, the world's population of 5 billion will undergo a net increase of some 60,000.

A second overlay showed that the areas of conflict and where war is likely are areas that are short of water. We

have heard much about the ways in which we can diversify and turn swords into ploughshares, so, taken to its logical conclusion, that means that, logically, we ought to halve our defence expenditure and spend all our money saved on boreholes, water purification plants and condoms. We would probably do more to promote world peace if we did that than we would by spending money on bullets and bombs. That is the logical conclusion, but I am afraid that things just do not work like that.

We must do both: we must continue to maintain our defence expenditure and, hence, our ability to fulfil our obligations as set out in the defence White Paper, but we must not forget that we have an obligation to maintain our ODA funding because overseas aid also has important security implications. I was pleased, therefore, that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary opened the debate and set out our obligations world wide.

As a leader of the free world and as a member of the United Nations Security Council, we have important obligations. We are a trading nation, and the Foreign Secretary gave some examples world wide where our trade is increasing rapidly. He mentioned India and the far east. There is a steady worldwide build-up in our trade. That must be protected. We are also an ex-colonial power and, therefore, we understand world affairs, probably better than any other country. We are good at diplomacy and, as we have seen from the activities of our troops in the former Yugoslavia, we are particularly good at fulfilling the military roles that the United Nations is identifying for us. We must ensure that we continue to fulfil those roles world wide.

The defence White Paper, which we debated on our first two days back after the summer recess, set out our security objectives in the form of three roles: first, the defence of the homeland and our dependent territories; secondly, our obligations to our allies within, for instance, NATO and the Western European Union; and thirdly our wider security tasks—in other words operations under the UN banner.

Unfortunately, we set aside no resources in terms of equipment and manpower to fulfil role 3. If we want to undertake any of those roles, and I think that I am quoting correctly the words of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, we must not undertake what we cannot deliver. There will be times when we shall want to do things and we shall have to take troops and equipment from elsewhere. At the moment, we can only fulfil role 3 in the wider world by taking resources and manpower from roles 1 and 2. I do not think that that is right, because, as we know, fulfilling roles 1 and 2 is already leaving our armed forces over-stretched.

I do not think that we shall see any further reinstatement of cuts in Army manpower; such reinstatement as there has been was extremely welcome. But what we could see is another way of creating greater flexibility in our armed forces so that we can find the manpower and resources necessary at short notice to meet international obligations under role 3. I refer, of course, to our reserve forces.

There are more than a quarter of a million men and women in the Army reserves—some 190,000 are Army regular reserves, and 68,000 are in the Territorial Army. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) who has the Adjournment debate, which is to follow. If I can catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that I can intervene briefly towards the end of his speech.

Regular reservists are individuals and are ex-enlisted personnel. The Territorial Army has 58 units and that is a fundamental difference. On the whole, the regular reserves do not train. There is an obligation on some of them to do so, but that is rarely enforced. On the other hand, the Territorial Army regularly train. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), when Secretary of State for Defence, published in 1992 a White Paper entitled "The Future of Britain's Reserve Forces", which showed the extremely complex system of regular reserves that we have at present. He proposed a new category—he called them "ever-ready" reservists—to reinforce the regular Army when required. I think that the two-tier structure that he was outlining was far too complicated. I was also interested to note that in that document he hardly ever mentioned the Territorial Army.

I am pleased to say that, in October this year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State published a further document, entitled "Britain's Reserve Forces: A Framework for the Future" in which he saw a greater role for the development of reserves both in war and peacetime. He envisaged a higher readiness reserve—HRR—of between 3,000 and 5,000 men.

The problem is that some individual reservists, as these will be, are meant to train, but they do not. The TA should therefore be our first line of reserve and not the last line. Members of the TA are better trained. As a rule, they are up to date, properly equipped and are in units instead of being individuals. One cannot over-emphasise the importance of the cap badge in maintaining morale.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): To underline my hon. Friend's point about the TA, it comprises units. The fundamental difference between the system that works so well for the national guard in America and in Australia is that the call out for their reserves is by unit. Our concept of the higher readiness reserve of selected individual volunteers—cherry picking as the Americans call it—undermines the structure of territorial organisations.

Mr. Colvin: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. This is going to look like a double act before we finish today. I hope that it does not become that. However, I believe that there is a large measure of support in the House for what I have said today.

The TA gives us extremely good value. It costs one sixth of the cost of a regular soldier to maintain a TA soldier. The TA has already faced considerable cuts. I know that the Secretary of State tried to be even handed, but he was not. The TA is down 30 per cent., while the regular Army has decreased by only 25 per cent. I believe that there is a very good case for saying that if we are to cut the regular Army, we should increase the TA and not cut it.

The regular Army is also facing a recruitment problem. That problem is not dictated by the Treasury or the Secretary of State. It is dictated largely by morale. As a result of emergency tours in Northern Ireland, the impact of having to go to Northern Ireland for six months every year—six months on tour, six months off and then six months back—is having a marked effect on the morale of soldiers. That is not because they do not want to go. They enjoy it. My son served in Northern Ireland and I know that he enjoyed it. However, such tours have an impact on

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wives, families and loved ones back home and that immediately has a depressing effect on morale. That is something we must overcome.

It is also interesting to note how the TA is prepared to undertake operations abroad. Some operations have been to the former Yugoslavia. I was very interested to see the Canadian troops in Cyprus when I visited that country with the Defence Select Committee earlier this year. The Canadians have taken part in 24 of the 25 UN peacekeeping operations since the end of the second world war. Many of the Canadian troops in Cyprus were the equivalent of our TA. That proves that TA personnel can be sent abroad if the organisation is right.

The thrust of my argument is that the TA should provide the first line of reserves for the Army. Those who once served as regulars and have retired or have been made redundant but are still on the books should be the second line of reserve. Those people are often difficult to find if they are required for call up. They probably need to be forced to rejoin the colours and that makes them very reluctant reservists.

I have always had a special interest in the Brigade of Guards, as I served as a Grenadier guardsman. The Brigade of Guards has never had a TA battalion. There have been bogus arguments that the Household brigades are not TA regiments. However, what are the Welsh Guards if they are not a territorial regiment? The Welsh Guards are based on part of the geography of this country. The Welsh Guards were originally the 6th battalion of the Grenadier Guards. They were recruited from the miners of south Wales. During the first world war, the Prince of Wales decided that there should be a regiment of Welsh guards, so the 6th battalion of the Grenadier Guards took their grenades from their caps and put on leeks instead. What are the Scots Guards if they are not a geographically national regiment? The argument that the Brigade of Guards are not territorial in the geographical sense is totally bogus.

The Brigade of Guards now faces cuts. Three battalions are to go. The Scots Guards, Grenadier Guards and the Coldstream Guards each lose a battalion. Those battalions will then go into what is known as suspended animation. I do not understand why those three battalions could not become territorial battalions based in London and therefore also available to do public duties.

At the Queen's birthday parade this year, we saw the impact of reducing the number of guards from eight to five. I dare say that if I were marched on to the Horseguards Parade now I would remember what to do. I might not remember all the words of command, but sword drill has not changed in the same way as rifle drill has changed. There would be no difficulty in finding territorials within the Brigade of Guards to take part in the Queen's birthday parade and other ceremonials, and they would enjoy doing so.

Another brigade is facing the axe, and that is the Gurkhas. They have been halved from six to three battalions. Those Nepalese soldiers are superb in peace and war. They are loyal to a distant sovereign power, they are friendly, they are apolitical and they are very reliable—in fact, they are mercenaries. What better battalions to act as United Nations peacekeeping forces? They have been in operation on behalf of the United Nations in Cyprus and in Cambodia where they have done extremely well.

What is the Government's response to calls by Sir Philip Goodhart, a former hon. Member for Beckenham, and Field Marshal Lord Bramall to give the Gurkhas a worldwide role rather than cutting their strength in half? If a United Nations force is required, either a standing army or a standby army, why not designate to the United Nations the three remaining Gurkha battalions, and why not resurrect the other three Gurkha battalions as a standby force?

I readily support this refreshingly short Queen's Speech —less government, I am afraid without lower taxes, but that is the price of a world recession. No doubt taxes will come down still further in due course. I welcome Britain's continuing international commitments and the Government's priority to the defence of the realm and to our interests at home and abroad. To meet those security commitments, we need greater flexibility in our armed forces. I have suggested how some of that might be achieved in the Army in spite of cuts in the regular establishment. I very much look forward to hearing the response of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

12.37 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) for his helpful response to my intervention regarding the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus. I hope that Her Majesty's Government will continue to increase their recognition of the sterling efforts being made by the Government of the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, particularly by President Denktash, to make progress towards an honourable settlement of the difficulties of that island.

Recent ministerial contacts with Mr. Denktash have been helpful. I hope that Her Majesty's Government and others will recognise that the Greek Government and the Greek Cypriot administration could do more to alleviate Turkish Cypriots' fear that they are still under the real threat of violence from powerful and well-equipped Greek Cypriot forces backed up by Greek regulars who are in the south of the island in considerable numbers. The onus to make progress must not be placed solely on the minority community who have suffered greatly in the past.

The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) was too simplistic when he asserted without qualification the single island thesis. One cannot ignore the present de facto position or the justifiable concerns of the minority, and I hope that the Government will not be tempted to do so.

I deal now with another island, one that I know a great deal better. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) articulated an undeniable and common-sense case for the defeat of terrorism. His enunciation of a two-track approach to the difficulties facing Northern Ireland was most welcome. He expressed the hope that London and Dublin were concentrating on how the godfathers could be brought to book. I regret to have to tell him that that subject does not occupy much of the discussion between the two Governments. The question of the long-serving godfathers —the command and control structure of paramilitary organisations—must be dealt with sooner or later, but I believe that it can be dealt with only by the implementation of executive detention.

During the first day's debate on the Queen's Speech, the Prime Minister outlined at some length what the

Government's response would be in the event of the Provisional IRA whole-heartedly repudiating violence. He also reiterated that there can be no place in the democratic process for those who indulge in or espouse political terrorism. Ulster Unionists welcome the clarity of that message. As the Prime Minister prepares for his meeting with Mr. Albert Reynolds in Dublin on 3 December, it is important that those ground rules are carefully understood and adhered to rigidly. One cannot—one dare not—compromise the essential principles on which democracy survives, irrespective of what might appear to be the short-term repercussions in respect of propaganda.

The Ulster Unionist party is fully aware of what the political reality of peace would be. It is now generally acknowledged that our submissions to the 1992 talks process and our subsequent search for stability and progress in Northern Ireland have been constructive and conciliatory. Of course there is concern in some quarters that our frank and forthright approach to the problem might send out the wrong signal, that our constructive participation in the debate might be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness. I can understand that, but I believe that the Prime Minister and the Government know better. In the past, we have witnessed the folly of the Government accepting words at face value, and we shall not allow that to happen again. Within Ulster Unionism, there is steely resolve that we cannot ever again allow the type of betrayal enshrined in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. We cannot forget, for example, that article 1 of the agreement—which promised that the "status" of Northern Ireland could not be changed but by the wish of the people of Northern Ireland—is now a topic of some mirth in the Irish Republic.

I was in the Dublin supreme court when senior counsel in the McGimpsey and McGimpsey *v.* Ireland case uttered the following unforgettable words:

"Now, Mr. O'Flaherty referred to Article 1, My Lord, headed "The Status of Northern Ireland". When one reads that Article, one looks at the status of Northern Ireland, it is not defined at all. It is carefully not defined, My Lord, carefully not defined."

That is the sort of thing that the Prime Minister will have to guard against on 3 December when the word "peace" will be tossed about with gay abandon. One would wish that it were otherwise, but experience convinces one that the Provisional IRA has not the slightest intention of delivering a permanent ceasefire. Rather, it is the intention of the extreme Republican to package and offer as peace only that which is designed to thwart the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. It would be so easy to be enticed by pleasant generalisations and oft-repeated platitudes, but those of us who participated in the 1992 talks process and who went—as the Prime Minister will—to meet the Irish Republic's delegation in Dublin, still await one single substantive gesture from that source, in our search for political progress.

It is now fully eight weeks since the Adams-Hume liaison was, amid great publicity and mystery, temporarily suspended. The people of Northern Ireland and Members of the House have still to hear from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) what all the excitement was about. We have, however, heard the President of Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA say of that process:

"It is not aimed, as some commentators and sections of the media are suggesting, at bringing an end to the IRA's campaign."

Mr. Adams goes on, in relation to any political settlement, to state:

"Peace cannot be a prerequisite for such a process."

It is against that background of confusion and double-speak that the Prime Minister will have to make his judgments. He will be encouraged by Dublin to define a set of criteria within which some grand plan can be constructed for the future of Northern Ireland. He must not contemplate such a step while the Irish Republic's irredentist and aggressive territorial claim remains in place.

The people of Northern Ireland must be the arbiters of what is ultimately acceptable politically and the Dublin Government must not be given a pre-emptive veto. It is crucial that the people of Northern Ireland know that. The Prime Minister should resist pressure to try to agree what will be called "a framework for agreement" with the Irish Government. That would inhibit rather than help progress. It would be taken as a signal by the Provisional IRA—as was the Anglo-Irish Agreement—that it was making steady progress through its efforts to bomb and shoot its way to the conference table.

The Prime Minister will not be unaware that no group of people would welcome peace more than those who serve in the Army and the police in Northern Ireland and who, for almost 25 years, have placed themselves at tremendous personal cost between the law-abiding community and the terrorists. The security services will still have to bear the brunt if anything is done which gives a new legitimacy to the men of violence.

The Prime Minister goes to Dublin armed with the knowledge that he and the Ulster Unionists have both spelt out clearly what is on offer to those who eschew political violence. It is that which must be underpinned. Although he must insist on the co-operation of the Irish Republic's Government, nothing can take precedence over the clarification of the terms which would dictate that a permanent ceasefire has come about. In that respect, it must be established that members of Sinn Fein cannot come directly, with mud on their boots and blood on their hands, to any negotiating table, but that a significant period of time has to elapse during which their repudiation of violence is proven beyond doubt. Mr. Reynolds and the Dublin Government must be left in no doubt about the terms on which men of violence will be deemed to have fully recanted.

A stringent verification programme must be established, which will guarantee the permanency of any arrangement to stand down personnel and surrender all arms and explosives, and any arrangement for Sinn Fein—or whatever that organisation may ultimately be called—to submit a totally new manifesto, repudiating violence, for the will of the electorate at the ballot box. Therein lies the acid test of good will and of tangible evidence of the desire for peace and active co-operation which Dublin professes, and therein will lie the principal responsibility of the Prime Minister on 3 December.

12.49 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The Gracious Speech debate gives us an opportunity to cover a wide area, but first we should remark on the good news about what has been happening recently. Developments in South Africa are extremely encouraging, although considerable risks still lie ahead during the process towards democracy.

Obviously, there is good news in Russia, in the sense that there will be elections, but it will be a rocky road towards democracy. The Foreign Secretary was right to say that our support for President Yeltsin is as a reformer, as

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opposed to anything else. I have been to Russia more than once, so I know that words tend to have a different meaning there.

In the middle east, we have had the excellent news that the Israelis and Palestinians are talking to each other. When I was in the area in 1991, I was struck by the fact that the Israelis seemed to be acting against their security interests by their policy towards the Palestinians. It is clear that my view seems to have prevailed among the Israeli Government.

Those are the three pieces of good news. Sadly, they are surrounded by many worrying signs of instability and evidence of nuclear proliferation, which underline the view in the *Daily Telegraph* this week that we need

"a thorough-going review of the assumptions underpinning Britain's foreign and defence policies."

We can do that in this debate. The Secretary of State has been forthright in his contribution to a wide-ranging discussion.

The assumptions must be considered carefully. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was right to say that we should not promise things that we cannot deliver. That is very wise. However, we should not rely on what may not be forthcoming. The House must, for example, consider carefully the changes that are taking place within the United States of America. We must rely not on what we believe to be a special relationship, but on much more solidly based assessment of mutual interest.

When I was in America in September, I was struck by the fact that their views on the role and status of Europe are changing. Their perspectives are moving much more towards Asia, as we can see even as we speak. Inasmuch as a change has resulted because of the end of the cold war, The American perspective of Europe has been downgraded, as Secretary of State Warren Christopher remarked a few weeks ago, when he said that Europe was not the most important area of the world. That does not mean to say that we cannot still work with the Americans in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which is such an important insititutional framework for them as well.

However, elsewhere we need to draw other conclusions. The certainties of foreign and defence policy are based not merely on diplomacy and military might but on economic relationships. We can stress to the Americans the importance of their trade with the European Community —the figures are quite striking. That interdependence of interest needs to be underlined—25 per cent. of American exports are to the European Community and trade flows between the Community and the USA constitute 7·5 per cent. of world trade.

We should consider also the fact that American investment in the Community has disproportionately come to this country. Britain is an important part of American interest. In the EC as a whole, some 2·5 million Europeans are employed by American companies—many of them in this country. It is in our interest to ensure that Britain plays a full and active part in the single market that attracted outside investors. The Confederation of British Industry was right last weekend to pressure the Government to continue to be positive in their policies towards the European Community.

We tend to forget that the single market established in recent years is dynamic, and can therefore move backwards as well as forwards. Currency instability between Community member states will tend to increase the sense of protectionism and, in that regard, could undermine the single market. If there were moves towards a single currency in the rest of the Community, Britain would be disadvantaged. There is no use saying that a single currency is not on our agenda, because we must discuss that issue if other member states still have it on their agenda. That is not a recommendation that we should immediately commit ourselves to signing up to a single currency, the nature of which we still do not know. In that, I differ from members of Labour's Front Bench, who have made that commitment. I am arguing that discussions on matters such as how Britain should move towards any single currency and on how it should work with the European monetary institute are in the interests of British industry, British jobs and, ultimately, of the security of the British nation. We cannot simply decide that we will opt out of that discussion for domestic political reasons.

The importance of the European Community and of the economic strength that we need to develop together should be emphasised to our partners when it comes to considering the Community's competitive edge, which is sadly declining. It is now a serious situation when one compares its declining productivity levels with those of Japan and America. Over the past 10 years, there has been a total transformation in European Community unit labour costs which have risen by comparison with those of America and Japan. This is having a serious effect on job exports from the Community to America.

When I was in America in September, the one topic of conversation wherever I went in the south was whether Mercedes would open its new plant in a particular state, creating 1,500 jobs. The final choice was a state that I did not visit—Alabama. Concerns about declining productivity and competitiveness in the Community must be right at the top of the agenda.

We sometimes forget that our arguments have already been winning in the Community. The German Government's paper on competitiveness submitted to the Commission has many similarities with the British Government's own stance. We welcome that, and I hope that the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will continue to put positive pressure on other Community members to ensure that the strength of the Community will not only encourage new jobs into it but will enable it to sell Community-made products to the rest of the world.

On the wider military aspect, I am profoundly concerned with what is happening in Russia. The events concerning whether there will be a new elective body after 15 December are interesting, but if one considers the breakdown of order in Russia, a different picture emerges. One realises that its democratic institutions are only part of the story. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has time in his wind-up speech, I shall be interested to hear his comments on the reforms in the Russian army. Not only within Russia, which stretches to the Japanese seas, but externally, tensions will continue until matters have been resolved, and there is knowledge of where power actually lies and of the trade-off that President Yeltsin reached with the Russian army last summer.

There are 30 million Russians outside Russia. The Russian army regards it as part of its role to protect Russian citizens outside Russia—a policing job that, if thought of quickly, is not so dangerous, but, as we are seeing in some

territories, it goes beyond protecting Russians. That is merely the excuse to take action. I do not know where that will lead.

We must be careful, because instabilities on the periphery of the former Soviet Union will have knock-on effects in the middle east. The Foreign Secretary rightly spoke of India, but the Indian sub-continent and China are also affected by events in the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Brazier: I strongly support my hon. Friend's remarks. Does he agree that what he is describing is what happened in Russia in the two centuries before 1917? Russia is now reverting to the very unstable situation vis-á-vis its middle eastern neighbours that prevailed before 1917. The Soviet military today is led in many cases by the grandfathers of the Tsarist generals.

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am not sure whether he meant grandfathers or grandsons! Thinking quickly on one's feet, one tends to reverse relationships.

We must go back into Russian history. I debated with a member of the Russian Parliament whether St. Petersburg or Moscow is the determinant of influence. That is very relevant because if Moscow dominates, which is much more eastward looking than St. Petersburg, it may act in ways about which we shall be less than happy.

Washington is much more Moscowcentric than we should be. We have an interest in not seeing every problem in the former Soviet Union being resolved by Moscow's influence. For example, the Ukraine has a population not much different from ours, but, interestingly, when it declared its independence within the former Soviet Union it had an Army of 1·4 million. It is now trying to reduce it to about 400,000. The Ukraine is a sensitive area. We must make considerable effort, not necessarily through Moscow but direct to Kiev, to ensure that its relationships with ourselves and Europe are kept on a stable footing.

We must be much more imaginative about how we give comfort to our newly independent friends in central Europe. The extension of the NATO guarantee is easy to say, but is a risky thing to do. NATO has been successful and has been vibrant simply because it has had a clear remit. If we start to expand it almost as a diplomatic alliance, we may run into trouble. I have debated with Hungarians whether they understand the full implications of the commitment that it would place on us, let alone them, to respond to an attack on a member country. There are all sorts of ethnic and regional problems. There are 1 million Hungarians, for example, in Romania. Many difficulties could emerge.

None of that, however, is a recipe for doing nothing. We must make it clear that our guarantee is that under no circumstances could NATO see an external threat to the eastern countries that would leave us disinterested, and we can devise such elements of what that guarantee might compromise. It is not possible to conceive of, for example, an external attack on Poland without its going straight to the security of European Community countries and, therefore, NATO itself.

There are all sorts of formulae towards which we can build. The European Community has a role in taking up the idea of a European political area. That concept will at least give the people in central Europe the feeling that they are involved in discussions without having to meet the acquis-communautaire and all the demands of full Community membership. At least they could then be party to discussions on security and other matters such as the environment where their interests and ours intermingle.

In such a wide-ranging debate, I have tried to focus on certain areas. Our security is diplomatic, it is military and it is economic. We must ensure that under each of those headings we do the most possible to protect the British people. In the European Community, an area which I think has been the most controversial during the past year, no British national interest is served by attempting to deny the importance of our full and whole-hearted membership, whether for reasons of political influence or simply because of a crude calculation of the jobs that are involved. As 13 out of every 100 manufacturing workers in Britain are employed by foreign firms, it would be short-sightedness and foolhardiness of the worst kind if Britain were to adopt a negative approach to relations in the Community. After the Foreign Secretary's comments today and what I anticipate that he will say tonight, I have ever confidence that there is now no question of a Conservative Government every being negative about the European Community.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): There are 44 minutes remaining before the wind-up speeches and six hon. Members hope to catch my eye. With a little co-operation they may be able to speak.

1.6 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I begin by concurring most strongly with the words of the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) about the importance to Britain of the European Community. Now that the Maastricht treaty is in place, it is time that the Government worked with vision and foresight. I fear that at the next intergovernmental conference in 1996 we shall again find great difficulties unless we begin preparing now to look to the future.

In the limited time available, I shall concentrate my remarks on the common foreign and security policy aspect of the Maastricht treaty, but first I shall comment on two issues that were mentioned earlier. First, we all welcome the fantastic if painful achievements in South Africa. It would be remiss of us not to recognise that economic sanctions, as supported by the Labour party, requested by the United Nations and opposed by the Government over many years, have played a crucial role in the weakening of the apartheid regime and have supported the African National Congress and other forces that are working for liberation and democracy.

Secondly, anybody who shows an interest in the middle east is delighted that the Israeli Labour Government have reached an agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organisation. We hope, pray and trust that the extremists and the rejectionists on both sides will be resoundingly defeated and that that agreement will come to fruition and lead to comprehensive peace throughout the middle east. I must take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) in that I do not believe that we should make any excuses for continuing the Arab economic boycott of Israel. The time to lift that boycott is now. It is important to recognise that the boycott is not like sanctions on South Africa and connected with UN security resolutions, but is imposed independently by certain states which put pressure on companies—including British

[Mr. Mike Gapes]

companies—that are concerned with trade in that region. It is important that our Government should join the Germans, the Dutch and other European Community countries and clearly state that we do not tolerate that economic boycott, especially at a time when there is a real possibility for economic development in the occupied territories and in Israel, which will benefit all the people of that region.

I turn now to the difficulties that we face in Europe and to our future security relations, east and west. Last week I was at the headquarters of NATO and SHAPE—Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe—with my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and a group of Labour Members. All of us knew that following the revolutions of 1989 and the political changes we needed to rethink our security approach, but none of us realised in 1989-90 quite how momentous and difficult those changes would be.

Poland is one such example. In 1989, Poland had three neighbours: the German Democratic Republic, which no longer exists, the Republic of Czechoslavakia, which no longer exists, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which no longer exists. Poland now has seven neighbours. We must recognise that the process of disintegration in Europe is continuing, as was mentioned earlier, within the Russian Federation itself.

I do not believe that the architecture for security issues about which we have talked will necessarily have the same number of states in five years' time, in three years' time or even in two years' time. We used to say that the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe—the Helsinki process—involved 33 or 34 states. There are now 53 member states of the CSCE. NATO is involved in discussions with the countries of the former Warsaw pact and it has established the North Atlantic Co-operation Council—NACC, to use its new acronym. Some people see the council as a means of saying to the countries of central and eastern Europe which want to join NATO that they should be involved in the processes, while having no real influence. Others see it as an automatic conveyor belt through which Latvia and the other countries, such as Romania, which want to join can beome members of NATO.

We must be careful. Are we seriously saying that we shall give a security guarantee to all 38 members of the North Atlantic Co-operation Council, or potentially to all 53 members of the CSCE? Are we really saying to Kurdistan and to the other places a long way from Europe that any attack on them will be perceived as a threat to the security of all the other states in the North Atlantic alliance?

There are countries which are run by medieval-style warlords. There are countries with civil wars and countries where ethnic conflicts are raging today. Let us consider Georgia and Nagorno Karabakh, and all the regions where there is massive instability. Let us consider the biggest enigma—what happens in Russia. I visited Russia before and after Gorbachev, and I am worried about the political processes there. I have friends and political acquaintances who were members of democratic Russia and who were leading dissidents under Gorbachev. They were inside the Russian Parliament when Yeltsin sent the tanks against it. They are not communists or fascists; they are democrats who believe in constitutional, parliamentary democracy, and who happen to have chosen the side of Parliament against the President.

Let us look back 350 years to the history of this place. We can see that sometimes Parliaments have to be defended—even inadequately elected Parliaments. It was certainly not a democratic Parliament here in 1640 and in subsequent years.

I hope that the elections on 15 December lead to a true democracy, but I fear that if President Yeltsin does not get the result that he wants we shall see further attempts to erode, undermine and destroy parliamentary democracy in Russia. The west must say, very clearly, that there will be no economic or political support if he does that. We should not use weasel words or be mealy-mouthed about it. The time to say it is now, when we can still have an impact, not when it is too late.

I have referred to the acronyms and the plethora of organisations. One of the unresolved big issues is what will happen to the relationship between the Western European Union and NATO, as set out in article J4 of the Maastricht treaty. We all know that there are two visions of the approach. The British and American view is that the Western European Union should be the European pillar of the Atlantic alliance; the French view is that the Western European Union is the embryonic defence arm of the European Union as a whole, an embryonic defence community which will perhaps ultimately be based on British and French nuclear weapons and some kind of west European military bloc.

I understand from talks in Brussels last week that there will be a NATO summit in January, and that discussions are currently going on which are supposedly finessing this problem. The issue is probably less high on the agenda today, but I am convinced that, unless we are very careful, we could have the worst of all possible worlds in two or three years' time. There could be a political situation in which we had sent signals to the United States to accelerate their already planned reductions in Europe, leading to an ultimate complete withdrawal—the 100,000 US forces leading down to perhaps 50,000, or even a symbolic American presence in western Europe. On the other side, we could have a growing nationalisation of defence policy and a disintegration of integrated structures within NATO. The French want a European defence without the Americans because of their Gaullist ambition—which is very slightly restrained by President Mitterrand at some levels, but is nevertheless endemic throughout the whole French political establishment, both left and right.

We must be very clear that if we go down that road it will cost a great deal of money and will undoubtedly lead to a proliferation of nuclear weapons, or at least restrict all ideas about further steps towards nuclear disarmament. That would not be in the interests of this country or European security as a whole.

We should do all that we can to keep the United States in Europe for the next few years. That requires us to be clear that it is welcome in Europe on the basis of a co-operative security relationship. That relationship will change, but it has to be done now rather than being left until 1996—when we have the intergovernmental conference in the European Community—or 1998, when the Western European Union treaty runs out.

I also fear the tensions over Bosnia. The American flip-flopping from one week to the next about what they are going to do, and the unrealistic perceptions of some people

that a military solution can be imposed from outside—that we can go in, stay for six months or a year, disappear and then have no problems—will prove a big difficulty for us in the future.

One big problem is that even if an agreement is reached, some 50,000 troops will be required to police it. The Americans have said that they might contribute 25,000 if the agreement was really capable of implementation; that would mean that a further 25,000 western European troops would be needed to make up the numbers.

Where will those extra troops come from? They cannot come from Germany, because of its role in the former Yugoslavia in the 1940s, during the second world war; for similar reasons, they cannot come from Italy. Nor can they come from Turkey—which has a huge NATO army—because it is a Muslim state, and its troops would not be acceptable to the Croats and the Serbs. Presumably they cannot come from Greece either, because of the relationship between the Greek and Serbian orthodoxies. We are left with France, Britain, Spain—perhaps—and the Benelux countries.

That leads us to another question: where will those troops come from? If 20,000 British troops are tied up in Northern Ireland and have to be rotated, how can there be sufficient forces to deal with the peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia? Those operations may have to continue not for a few months but for five, 10, 15 or even 20 years. Look at what has happened in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. I believe that such issues should be debated publicly. We should not be hiding behind other arguments; we should be speaking out honestly about matters concerning the future of security in Europe.

According to the Queen's Speech, the Government are committed to pursuing a process which might at some stage—perhaps—lead to a comprehensive test ban treaty. I do not think that that is good enough. We have an American moratorium, which President Clinton has bravely continued despite some congressional opposition. We have a Russian moratorium, which really needs to be reinforced. We have a French moratorium, although there are numerous reports that the French Government would like to continue nuclear testing before the end of the year. And in recent weeks the Chinese have broken the moratorium.

It is about time that our Government announced, openly and publicly, that we are to have a moratorium. By that I mean a British decision—not a decision made for us because the Americans will not let Nevada be used for testing. I mean a British decision to impose a moratorium in our own right and to oppose any further nuclear tests by any nuclear-weapons state. I also want a comprehensive test ban treaty within the next year, so that the non-proliferation treaty review conference in 1995 can be a great success.

We have seen some good news in the newspapers today about the Ukraine, at least to some extent. Yesterday, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to ratify the START 1 treaty, which is very important. The Ukrainians have also said, however, that they will keep a number of former Soviet nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory. That is bad news.

We must make the maximum possible effort to encourage nuclear disarmament in all the former Soviet republics, a halt to proliferation, a comprehensive nuclear test ban and—in association with that—a review of NATO and British nuclear strategy. Our ultimate aim should be to give control of international security and nuclear weapons to an international body linked to the United Nations Security Council. We must move away from national competition in nuclear policies, and build greater international security.

1.24 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I start by thanking the Foreign Secretary, the Minister of State and other Foreign Office Ministers and their officials for the great help that they have given me in attempting to deal with the terrible stories which are now coming from Iraq. I thank in particular Patrick Nixon and Alistair Harrison. I also thank warmly the Secretary of State for Defence and his team, whom I cannot name.

The backdrop of the middle east peace process is cloaking the continuing tragedy of the Persian gulf. It is hiding so much, and behind the curtain the horrors of Iraq continue. Saddam Hussein is reaping a grim harvest of twisted minds. In every family there is one or more informer to the state. The children go to school where they are indoctrinated by the teachers to speak against their parents. He reaps a harvest also of twisted bodies, who are the victims of torture and of lifelong imprisonment in tombs of prisons, some underground.

Saddam Hussein said that he would still rule Iraq if there were as few as 3 million people under him. He is getting there. He has been in power for a long time and he rules by institutionalised violence. The House will recall his territorial ambition to take over from Nasser as the pan-Arabic leader. His game plan surely nears completion. It is a master plan of total rule by him of a suppliant people which is enforced by terror.

The House may remember that one of Saddam Hussein's targets were the Jews. In 1981, a pamphlet published by his foster father stated that there were three groups whom God should not have created—Persians, Jews, and flies. Persians were

"animals God created in the shape of humans."

Jews were a mixture of

"the dirt and leftovers of diverse peoples."

Flies were

"a trifling creation who we do not understand God's purpose in creating."

In 1984, the head of the Mukhabarat secret service defined as fifth columnists Jewish and Iranian children, whose families were seen as people who were working against the state. They were named, classified, and were deported. Jews have been in Iraq since the seventh century and the cross-fertilisation between the great Persian civilisation and Iraq has been taking place since time immemorial. Internal aggression against Jews, Iranians and Assyrians, Kurds and Shi'ites, started early in his rule, which began in 1968. In 1981, he shifted to external aggression and attacked the Iranian province of Khozestaan which he called Arabistan. The eight-year long Iran-Iraq war was marked by Iraqi chemical weapons attacks in Khozestaan. He failed against Iran in 1988 and just a couple of days later in mid-August of that year he moved to Kurdistan with an internal attack, again using chemical weapons.

Saddam Hussein later invaded Kuwait which he declared was just a province of Basra. When he failed there and the allies drove him out, he used chemical weapons again and moved into the south of Iraq. The marshlands of Mesopotamia are under remorseless attack now. The

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people who live there are known as the Ma'dan. Saddam Hussein has defined them as "lower than animals" as "rats" and as "the scum of the earth".

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and I would not have intervened if it had not been about something very important.

Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the aftermath of the Kuwait invasion, 625 prisoners of war were taken to Iraq who still rot in those prisons nearly four years after their capture? Is she aware that the Iraqis are still failing to meet United Nations resolutions 686 and 687 for their release?

Miss Nicholson: I am aware of those unfortunate prisoners and also of the prisoners from Britain who are in Iraq. Those include Paul Ride, the son of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Ride of Bideford. There are other people of different nationalities who have been captured for crossing the border into Iraq inadvertently.

I also remind the House that there are thousands of Iranian prisoners in Iraq, and that in Al Gharib prison there are many thousands of Iranian and Iraqi women. Recently those women sent a secret message out saying that, if rescue came, they would rather that a bomb was dropped on the prison. They have been violated so many times that they feel that they cannot remain alive with dignity. I am sure that the Kuwaiti prisoners must feel just the same.

Her Majesty puts high on the agenda of her Government Iraq's compliance with Security Council resolutions. Surely it is clear that Saddam Hussein is not complying with any of these resolutions—particularly with resolution 688. Her Majesty also identifies it as very important that we work towards the effective implementation of the chemical weapoons convention. I believe that our work on that is essential.

There was, I believe, an attack involving the use of chemical weapons in the marshlands north of Basra on 28 and 29 September. Reports came through immediately. They were issued by the supreme council of the Islamic revolution in Iraq, whose honourable representative in London, Dr. Al-Bayati, and his staff work so hard. I also received reports from the borders of Iran and Iraq from witnesses who managed to escape the marshes two or three weeks later. I immediately passed on the evidence that I received to the United Nations Special Commission. Tim Trevan, spokesman for the commission, assembled a team on the basis of the data with which we provided him, led by Jan Fisher and Roger Hill. Last week, that team was in Iran, by courtesy of the Iranian Government, who co-operated immediately and properly and allowed its members access to the witnesses and to the local medical people in the team of the AMAR appeal, which I chair, who also had knowledge.

It appears that the gas was phosgene. A tank commander engaged in the assault was killed, and left in his battle tank a document detailing the protective devices that the army should take with it because of phosgene gas. That surely means that those involved knew which weapon they were using.

In the past two days, we have had news of anti-chemical material that Saddam Hussein has been laying on the ground, of the burial of animals and human bodies and of the transport of army victims—some were harmed by the chemical weapons attack when the wind changed—to hospitals elsewhere. I know that the chemical weapons team from the United Nations Special Commission has now completed its interviews in Iran. I believe and understand that it will be proceeding to Baghdad and from there seeking access to the marshlands and the area that we identified for it.

Let me read the House just a sentence or two of what that witness, Mr. Abd Ali Hashim, said:

"The time was eight o'clock in the morning with the army advancing from the Al Fatra area"—

that is close to where he was—

"Around 9 o'clock in the morning I saw white clouds. After I reached the area which was bombarded I saw missiles and I knew that it was chemicals as used by the army. I saw tanks in which there were some masks and later I heard from one of the soldiers that the wind changed course and caused many victims in the army itself. I could see the plants changing colour and wilting . . . the dead bodies had blue skin and blisters. Some soldiers were wearing their masks."

Earlier witnesses told us that children turned blue and fell down dead, and animals too. Perhaps the gas was combined with an exfoliant in order to harm the environment as well. We have other details which have come straight from those still in the marshes.

It is important to recall that the United Nations commission has to get details—samples of soil from the site and samples of blood from the victims, for example. We must therefore wish the team well in its difficult search for evidence in the marshlands of southern Iraq. I sent the team a map identifying the precise location of the attack immediately after it happened. It was in the Al Hammar marshes, west of Algatra, south of Al Pyapat and north of Rumyla. I pinpointed it for the team from data immediately provided to me.

Why should we be surprised to learn that Saddam Hussein has been using chemical weapons? I am not. Victims who came over to the safe haven of Iran after the 1991 uprising had with them clear physical evidence of chemical weapons having been used. Over the past two years, I have told the House of victims coughing their guts out and still just alive and talking of the smell of burnt garlic. This time, witnesses have spoken of the smell of rotten apples.

When I visited the marshes last year, on one of my missions for humanitarian relief, I was warned not to go to a particular spot because it had been bombed chemically the day before. Coincidentally, at the same time as the chemical weapon assaults seemed to have been taking place, the Royal Air Force was overflying six villages slightly north-west of the area bombed by the chemical weapon. I thank most profoundly the Secretaries of State for Defence and for Foreign Affairs for giving me the opportunity to release the first overfly film to be shown which was taken from the cockpit of the RAF Tornado jets. It is the first material that the allies have released of the overfly that we have been carrying out for the past year and a quarter.

Over the area of the Euphrates river, the RAF filmed, and with infra-red treatment identified by imagery, some villages in the marshland area of southern Iraq that have been destroyed.

For the benefit of the House, I shall identify village No. 5, which is located south of the Euphrates river in the Hawr Al Hammar marshes. Around 100 ruined buildings can be observed. Scorch marks are visible around some buildings. These show up as white marks on the infra-red images, suggesting that they are warm and that the burning is

possibly recent. The regular pattern of destruction suggests that the buildings were demolished either by fire or possibly by high explosive detonators. Cultivated areas surrounding the derelict buildings have been destroyed by fire and dried-up riverbeds can also be seen.

The RAF has filmed six villages in this way. It makes it clear to me beyond all reasonable doubt that the data that the victims have been giving us as they have crossed the border into the safe haven of Iran have now been substantiated. Their rice farms have been burned down; there is no cultivation left possible to them because the marshes have been drained—the dry riverbeds can be seen on the imagery; the fish have died and the water buffalo have gone; the villages have been destroyed and the people have thus been aggressively pushed out. The combined RAF and victims' data is of great importance.

I shall now briefly turn to the question of conventional weapons in the Persian gulf context. I suggest that when Henry Kissinger stated that if we supplied both sides in the Iran-Iraq war we would control the other countries in the region, how wrong we were. I stress the point that the policy of dual containment, which Washington still seems to continue to support, is a mistaken one. It is our duty to pull back the supply of conventional weaponry that went into Iraq in the 1980s. Indeed, in the Iran-Iraq war, 39 countries supplied either or both Iran or Iraq with conventional and other weapons, including consistent offers, and I believe supplies, of chemical weapons, too.

In the town of Dezful, in south-west Iran, the entire town was destroyed by Scud missiles. Chemical weapons were used there also and I have seen the effect that that has had on the Iranian earth.

In his recent speech, the Prince of Wales called for a greater understanding between Islam and the west. I believe that that is a most important call. I hope that we shall soon have in the Palace of Westminster an opportunity of listening to a debate with Islamic scholars and other experts. Iran will supply the scholars and I believe that we shall be able to obtain the assistance of Islamic professors in Europe for the seminar. I want also to stimulate a debate on Islam and democracy. I hope that these moves will lead to a greater understanding in the west of Iran, which, after all, is the country next door to Iraq —its terrible neighbour. I thank the Iranian Foreign Ministry now, which has been most generous in allowing myself and the AMAK appeal teams of doctors and nurses to carry out humanitarian relief, Mr. Ansari, the chargé d'affaires here in London, Mr. Niknam who is senior in the Foreign Ministry and other Iranian colleagues have become friends and partners in this important work.

It is all too easy for the world to forget the cruelty that has been carried out by Saddam Hussein in his grim dance of death. We must not ignore the planned destruction of human, animal, bird, fish, water and soil life that is being carried out in the Mesopotamian marshes and elsewhere in Iraq.

Let me briefly refer to a UNICEF document entitled "Facts for Life." The cover of that document bears a picture of Saddam Hussein, who states:

"The image of the future Starts with the Child."

When I was last at the United Nations, it seemed to me that the deputy Secretary-General's major concern was how quickly he could move on to his next appointment, which was with the Iraqi Foreign Minister.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said that in the United Kingdom, in respect of foreign affairs, we punch above our weight. Let us now do just that with regard to Iraq. Let us call for and organise a Nuremberg trial. Let us disseminate the knowledge which will be given to us shortly by Dr. Edward Maltby, head of the International Union of Nature Conservation wetlands committee, about the destruction of the marshes. Let us work hard for the establishment of a safe zone for the marsh Arabs. It is not yet too late for these and other measures to be implemented.

Finally, let us plan with the confidence that no nation has ever been completely wiped out. If we act swiftly, there may still be some chance of saving some of the Iraqi victims from the extinction that Saddam Hussein has planned for them.

1.40 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): I should have liked to raise many issues in this debate had there been time. One issue that I will mention briefly and which the Government should address, relates to the future of the world given the impact of the export of the Islamic revolution from Teheran. It is absolutely essential that we address that problem which is influencing the world from Algeria, across the middle east, through Tadzhikistan and into the Sinkiang province of China.

As I have been the vice-chairman of the British all-party Yugoslav group for the past nine years, no doubt hon. Members would expect me to mention the situation in Yugoslavia. The Foreign Secretary has not really addressed the problem of sanctions against Croatia. Sanctions are being applied and have been enhanced against Serbia despite the fact that the Serbian President and others, including David Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg, have been willing to reach some agreement over the Bosnian situation.

The Government have shown sympathy. The correspondence from the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), has been most helpful and sympathetic with regard to the supply of medical equipment and other medical supplies to Serbia. However, although the sanctions committee often reaches agreement about the passage of equipment to Belgrade, which has become one of the main routes for the supply of medical aid to the Muslims in Bosnia, an individual member state of the United Nations can defy the sanctions committee. That was the case with equipment that the sanctions committee agreed could be exported from Siemens in Erlangen in Germany. However, that equipment could not reach Belgrade because of opposition from America; some of the components were American. A recent law case in this country confirmed that. The whole question of sanctions resolutions should be considered.

However, it is often said that Serbia was mostly responsible for the war in Bosnia. Certainly, playing the nationalist card was an issue in Serbia when President Milosevic first came to power. However, it was certainly not confinded to Mr. Milosevic. Both President Tudjman and Mr. Izetbegovic played the nationalist card in that country.

It must be rememberd that when Croatia declared her independence on 26 June 1991, she did not use the constitutional means open to an independent republic within the Yugoslav federation. It is as though Fermanagh and Tyrone, with the aid of the IRA, suddenly said, "We

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

are going to declare our independence." What would we say about that? Would we not deploy British troops in the Province to deal with such a situation? I rather fancy that we would.

In fact, Croatia's independence was wrongly recognised, after some time, in January 1992. The British Government acceded to pressure from Helmut Kohl, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) mentioned, and gave way. It is interesting to note the date—January 1992—because in September 1991 HVO forces and regular forces from Croatia were active inside Bosnia-Herzegovina. At that time, Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognised by the international community as part of the Yugoslav federation. How do I know that? Because, with colleagues of all parties, on 2 May I visited the site of Bosanski Brod in northern Bosnia and saw two bodies being exhumed from a mass grave in an area which had Utashe symbols written on the walls of the town, indicating the presence of extreme right-wing Croatian forces at a time when Bosnia was recognised by the international community as part of Yugoslavia.

The media have a lot to answer for in regard to the impression that has been given in this country of events in Yugoslavia. That includes the BBC, unfortunately. I have great admiration for the BBC World Service, but on 2 September, with colleagues from both sides of the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), I was in Bosnia and I heard on BBC radio that the Geneva peace talks had broken down. Quoting Sarajevo radio, the BBC said, "Serbian troops are now massing for an attack on Gorazde and the town is coming under shellfire."

With the help of the Bosnian Serbs and the United Nations, we were able to cross from the Serbian lines to the Muslim lines and enter the town of Gorazde. There was no fighting around Gorazde and a shell had not been fired in the area for more than six days, according to the United Nations commander in the area. We need carefully to consider whom we are supporting in the conflict and make sure that we do not put all the blame on one side of the argument.

Looking at the Muslim situation in Bosnia, one sees that there are at least some glimmers of hope. Mr. Fikret Abdic, who leads the Muslims in the area around Bihac, has signed a declaration and accord in line with the Owen-Stoltenberg plan for the western autonomous province in Bosnia, the area around Bihac. He has come under attack from Izetbegovic and the fundamentalists.

Again, we come back to the old problem of Islamic fundamentalism. There is the danger of such a state existing in the heart of Europe, in Yugoslavia. Fundamentalist forces are fighting inside Bosnia. If the Secretary of State for Defence consulted some of the British commanders in Bosnia, they would confirm that the Bosnian seventh brigade is made up almost entirely of fundamentalist extremists from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. That issue needs to be explored.

If we are to have peace in the Balkans, we need to formulate a package to cover the whole of Yugoslavia and that package must contain a provision for strict adherence to human rights by all parties. After the break-up of the Yugoslav federation, the first ethnic cleansing took place in Croatia where Serbians are now regarded as third-class citizens. Unlike some people, I am glad that the Secretary of State for Defence and the Government have been cautious and have not responded to the calls for air strikes. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) recalled what had happened in Somalia, where air strikes enhanced the warlords. In spite of the faults in their policy on Croatia, I believe that the Government's cautious approach has been correct.

I hope that the Government will show real muscle in their discussions with the European Community and will insist to Helmut Kohl that a common European policy means a common European foreign policy, not a German foreign policy imposed on the rest of the European Union.

1.51 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Anyone who, like me, has sat through today's debate and listened to almost every speech cannot but believe that the level of expertise we have heard bears out the importance and the range of responsibilities borne by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and his staff. The Opposition spokesman said that the Gracious Speech appeared to have come off the same disc as last year. The Queen's Speech has in fact changed, but the importance of foreign affairs for this country's economy and security can never be underestimated.

I, too, wish to thank Ministers, but I should also like to thank the Foreign Office staff, the diplomatic corps, the people who administer the aid programmes, and those who run the British Council and the BBC World Service because they also play a major part in ensuring that Britain's role is understood throughout the world.

I shall make just two points. I do not intend to range around the world, mentioning all the areas in which I take an interest because that would take the rest of the day. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said that Britain punches above its weight. I am anxious, however, that we do not become anorexic: I want us to put on weight in terms of influence, for all the historic reasons that I do not need to recite. I am worried that the constant pressure on the Foreign Office budget makes it ever more difficult for us to play the role for which we are uniquely—historically and traditionally—equipped. I hope that that fact will be recognised in the Budget on 30 November.

We have heard about Britain's influence and our role in the various difficult situations described today, but we must remember that the costs are minimal. The costs of the Foreign Office's diplomatic budget is less than 1 per cent. of public expenditure, but elsewhere billions of pounds are spent, often trying to put right the very things that go wrong if we pursue false economy and fail to prevent them happening instead of putting them right.

The Foreign Secretary properly mentioned the increasing role of the Foreign Office and its officers abroad in the commercial world, including Asia and India. Sadly, Britain is now slipping to sixth or seventh in terms of investment in Vietnam just as that country emerges from its dark days. Taiwan is now the No. 1 investor.

We say that we want to play a constructive role in strengthening the capacity of the United Nations. That is very important; the Select Committee considered that as a specific role. In that aspect, too, there is the problem of false economy, because the cost of repair is always greater than the cost of prevention. If we are to take a full part in

"Agenda for Peace", we must ensure that all members of the United Nations contribute and ensure that it has a proper income to do that job. One cannot prevent many of the problems that we have heard about today without the highest quality of diplomatic and military intelligence.

I hope that all my hon. Friends in the Government will consider the 54 recommendations that we have made for the future of the UN. We want action, not just words as I am afraid has been far too much the case—although I am not criticising the Government. When things go wrong, when things are underfunded, as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) suggested the operation in Angola was, what is the consequence in dreadful human terms? Since the renewed fighting 500,000 people have been killed and a further 3 million have been displaced. In money terms, we have another appeal for $226 million for emergency relief. If we had done the job right in the first place, if the UN had had the right people, the right authority and the right amount of cash, that situation might not now confront us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West mentioned very movingly the situation in Iraq. Others have mentioned Bosnia. These are examples of precisely the same problem. It is, therefore, a false economy not to have the right intelligence and the right amount of money to begin solving the problem rather than picking up the pieces.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) mentioned the subject of aid. One solution that was not mentioned to the problem of the increasing share of aid which goes to multilateral organisations was to increase the budget. I should like us to renew the growth in the aid programme during the welcome expansion of our economy, because that is the simplest way of putting right the imbalance.

Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling, I am concerned about not just the redirection of aid to multi-lateral organisations—many of which do a better job sometimes than bilateral organisations because of the major structural changes that are necessary—but the amount of aid that is having to be given for emergencies. In 1984-85, at the height of the Ethiopian crisis, we were putting £45 million into emergency aid. This year's figure is £134 million. Emergencies have arisen and we need to help. That is squeezing the bilateral programme, which is the transfer of real resources to prevent such emergencies and build up the standard of living of many countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

In that one regard, in terms of the debt situation, I commend the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and all those who vigorously pursued the implementation of the enhanced Trinidad terms. No one could have argued more strongly than the Prime Minister or my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in international forums this year. Debt is a drain on the resources of the least developed countries which cannot continue if we want to bring them back into the family of nations and into the genuine world of international development.

The Commonwealth has not been mentioned today, but it was mentioned in the Gracious Speech. I am a great supporter of and believer in the Commonwealth. It is a unique organisation and it is now seeking a new role, developing new contacts and seeing where it can function in the next millenium. One of the ways in which it has gone forward is in the promotion of democracy within and outside the Commonwealth.

In the previous Session of Parliament I was lucky enough to bring in a Bill which became the Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993. That Act enables local authorities in this country to transfer skills and technology to any local authority anywhere else in the world, subject to certain conditions. It works successfully in terms of the know-how fund because money is specifically allocated for that type of transfer, something which is valuable in central and eastern Europe. I also want that to be developed in countries where the needs are even greater, especially in Africa.

I want my right hon. Friends to consider a suggestion for the agenda of the next series of Commonwealth meetings. There are biennial meetings of Heads of State, and the parliamentary link—the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association—is a good system. I should like to think that we shall start to discuss, in this House and in other forums within the Commonwealth, the creation of a local government forum. It would act as a broker between local authorities within the Commonwealth and the wealthier Commonwealth countries—such as Australia, Canada and ourselves—to transfer the very necessary resources which create the roots for democracy.

I commiserate with the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) who has not been chosen to speak, as I have often been in the same position. Often I have sat through a debate only to have to rush through my speech at the end. Will the usual channels consider whether future debates on foreign affairs could be more specific? It would be far better to have a half-day debate on one subject instead of a general debate in which hon. Members incoherently discuss subjects which range all over the world. That would be fairer to hon. Members who are interested in one country.

I have only sat through the entire debate because I have tremendous respect for my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench, especially the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The role of the Foreign Office and its importance to this country are underestimated, and I recognise the links with the Secretary of State for Defence. So much of our humanitarian work is undertaken by his officials and by his, and our, troops. I therefore welcome the fact that he is to reply to the debate.

2.1 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): This has been a good debate. It is a pity that it has been foreshortened and I regret that some hon. Members who have sat through it have been unable to speak. However, the debate on the Queen's Speech lasts for several days and I hope that they may yet catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The quality of the debate has been superb. Every participant has brought his or her own insight. Members of the House are a unique repository of knowledge and they added to the quality of the debate.

At the beginning of the Gracious Speech we see that,

"The Government attach the highest importance to national security."

An admirable statement, but one which, frankly, lacks credibility. The Government's actions do not match those fine words.

Throughout the defence community, uniformed officers and civilians are in deep dismay. From the very top to the

[Dr. David Clark]

very bottom, from the highest air chief marshal, to the most humble private, there is a strongly held belief that the Government are not serious about our security. I do not believe that any Government of any party have been weaker on security since the end of world war two. One has to return to the 1930s to find a Government who have placed such a low priority on the defence of our realm and on our national security. I shall return to that subject.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I think that you ought to end it there.

Dr. Clark: No, I shall come back to it.

Our present security needs are different from those in days past, when we were involved in the cold war. The collapse of the Soviet Union has obviously changed things dramatically. The START 1 and 2 agreements gave us hope, but they did more than that—they added to our security. It is vital that START 1 and 2 are ratified and acted upon.

During the past six weeks, the Secretary of State and I have both visited Russia, and I am sure that we both spoke to Russian officials. I am certain that he is as worried as I am about the stability of that region. I was greatly concerned to learn that not one nuclear weapon in the former Soviet Union has been destroyed. Given the highly unstable nature of politics in that region, that represents a great potential danger to world security. The Secretary of State and the House know that by 1997, 4,000 nuclear weapons are due to be destroyed under START 1, but no progress has yet been made. Some weapons were collected, but they are stored in highly unstable conditions. The Government's much-vaunted programme of assistance has only just begun, with the delivery of equipment to Russia —but they have ruled out any further action.

Two years ago, we called for extra assistance to the former Soviet Union for that specific purpose but nothing happened. Other countries reacted more swiftly. Britain plans to spend only £30 million over the years, whereas President Clinton plans to spend at least £1,000 million on Russia alone and additional sums will go to the Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. That matter is of vital urgency and our Government should react more speedily.

The second comment on defence in the Gracious Speech refers to NATO, and rightly so. My right hon. Friends and I have always recognised that NATO is the key to our collective security. In fact, a Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernie Bevin, was the driving force behind the establishment of NATO in the late 1940s. It was through NATO that we were successful in winning the cold war.

That era is over and NATO must dramatically change. Some right hon. and hon. Members suggested how that change might be brought about. Progress was made at the London, Rome and Oslo summits, but more fundamental change is needed. The question of admitting the democracies of the former Warsaw pact countries cannot be postponed indefinitely. Some day, we will have to grasp that nettle.

One welcome change announced at Oslo allowed NATO to act out of area. Its first activity was in Bosnia. I pay tribute to not only our troops—superb as always—but the French, Spanish, Canadian, Norwegian, Dutch, Kenyan and Nigerian troops, all of whom are doing an admirable job. I get sick of people knocking the United Nations. It does not have the apparatus to do the job. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) made that point when he spoke about intelligence gathering and communications, which are vitally needed. Those troops, of whatever nationality, are serving in Bosnia to ensure that humanitarian aid gets through, and it is not their fault if it does not.

Having said that, I was concerned by the Foreign Secretary's announcement earlier today, in which I thought that he was signalling to the world that we are contemplating withdrawing British troops from Bosnia. If that is the case, I should regret it. Our view is that British troops should remain there as long as their mission is attainable and the United Nations believe that is possible. The signal that the Foreign Secretary gave today was not particularly helpful at this moment.

We must continue trying to get aid through. We may have to change the rules of engagement to do so, but we cannot stand by and allow tens of thousands of innocent people on all sides to perish. Food is there—on the coast, in Croatia. Some of it is rotting because it cannot be sent through. We must continue our efforts to get it through.

A further worry is the attitude of the Government to any post-peace settlement. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) said earlier, if a peace agreement is signed by all three sides—two of the sides have signed and a settlement should be reached soon—we shall need to have 50,000 troops available and to be able to put them in quickly, within days if possible. We cannot have a repeat of Vietnam, where troops were dribbled in.

With that prospect in view, as the Secretary of State for Defence knows, the Secretary-General of the United Nations unofficially asked NATO to put together a coalition. At the end of September, he wrote to the Government asking how many troops we would contribute to the post-settlement group that will ensure that the settlement is kept.

Sadly, the Government have not even responded to that letter. Why not? The Secretary of State must know, as I know, that NATO is deeply concerned about the Government's attitude to the matter. How can NATO make any plans when it does not know where the troops will come from?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South said, numbers are critical. We shall have to contribute British troops. I am sure that the Secretary of State has in mind where the troops could come from. He might have to draw them from the rapid reaction corps in central Germany. If there is a peace accord, we believe that British troops must play their part in ensuring that it is operable, in bringing some peace and in easing the suffering in Bosnia.

Another part of the Gracious Speech refers to the comprehensive test ban treaty and the non-proliferation treaty, but perhaps we should first consider our own independent nuclear deterrent. I had hope earlier this week. Stories emanating from the Ministry of Defence made me believe that the Secretary of State had finally seen the light and was going to fall in line with what the Labour party has been suggesting for a number of years—that the number of warheads on the new Trident system should not exceed the number on Polaris. We did not believe that it made sense to increase the number of warheads from 192 to 512. When the rest of the world was reducing warheads under START, the British Government would be increasing them. That

simply did not make sense and it endangered the non-proliferation treaty, which comes up for review in 1995.

I was delighted when I heard the stories. I welcomed them and said that the Government were doing something right—only for my hopes to be dashed the following day, when I discovered that, far from reducing the number of warheads to 192, the Government intended to double the number from 48 per vessel under Polaris to 96 per vessel under Trident.

Does not the Secretary of State understand that that is the wrong message to send to the world? We should not double our nuclear capability at this time. We should at most be keeping it at the level that we had under the Polaris system. By such means, we could at least show the rest of the world that we are prepared to make sacrifices to try to ensure permanent continuation of the non-proliferation treaty.

I am pleased that the Government have finally come round to the suggestion that we should be in favour of a comprehensive test ban treaty. However, they have been laggards and I believe that the Government have said it out of convenience and not out of conviction. Nevertheless, they should start saying it loudly, because, with the other available means, we no longer need to do any nuclear testing.

I began by accusing the Government of being weak on defence. Obviously, with the end of the cold war, there is scope for us to reduce the amount that we spend on defence, like virtually every other country in the west and in the rest of world. However, one cannot expect our troops and armed forces to perform all their past functions if the men, the women and the money available to spend are reduced in future. We need to assess the threats that face Britain and our security and reshape our forces accordingly. We need a full defence review. Such a review is supported by almost all the military, by almost all political parties and by a considerable number of the Secretary of State's Back Benchers. That is the way to ensure that morale in the armed forces is kept high and it is the best guarantee of the protection of the security of Britain and Britain's interest.

2.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The House always enjoys the attempts of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) to present the Labour party as the champion of defence and the armed forces. It was perhaps significant that in searching for supporting evidence for his claim, the hon. Gentleman had to go back as far as the days of Ernie Bevin for his only hard material. The reality of the Labour Government 1974-79 was that they cheated our armed forces so badly and provided such miserable incomes for the soldiers, sailors and airmen that there was a huge exodus of service men from which we still suffer a crucial shortage and that period is known as the black hole—one that the armed forces have suffered ever since.

I always listen to the hon. Gentleman with great hope but little satisfaction, hoping that I shall hear an alternative Labour defence policy. Originally, I thought that it was the House only that was deprived of an alternative defence policy until I read with some interest a recent interview that the hon. Gentleman gave to the *New Statesman and Society* —presumably a friendly journal—on 12 November. It reads:

"Fifteen months into his job as Labour defence spokesperson, David Clark gets annoyed at the suggestion that he has been keeping a low profile."

He goes on to assure the interviewer, as he has assured the House today, that the Labour party believes that there is scope for further cuts in defence spending, a subject to which he has no doubt given a good deal of thought. No doubt he knows the sort of areas where he would like to reduce defence expenditure.

Dr. David Clark *indicated assent.*

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman nods, but it does not seem to be the case. When asked that question in the article, he is described thus:

"Clark is vague, however, as to where the cuts should fall".

He says:

"Just now, I simply don't know."

That is a clear statement of Labour policy and one which will be of benefit to the armed forces in their search to understand the Labour party's view.

Today, in reference to nuclear policy the hon. Gentleman said that we must send a proper message. He accused the Government of sending the wrong message on nuclear policy, presumably implying that the Labour party would send the right one. The matter of Trident is dealt with in the same article. The hon. Gentleman told the interviewer:

"I wouldn't scrap it."

That is clear enough and is a considerable improvement on past Labour party policy. The article continues:

"'I'm not saying that we'll use Trident,' he says somewhat excitedly. 'I don't think we would. We just need it there as a standing reminder.'"

That is sending the real message to a potential threat to this country.

Mr. David Clark: It is a deterrent.

Mr. Rifkind: On the contrary. If the hon. Gentleman believes that a proper definition of a deterrent is to say in advance that in no circumstances will one use it, it is highly unlikely to deter.

Dr. Clark *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rifkind: It is no use the hon. Gentleman implying that he did not say that; that is exactly what he said. His words were:

"I don't think we would"

use it. The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting contribution to defence debates. There has been a debate for some time about the principle of no first use of nuclear weapons. The hon. Gentleman believes in no first use and no last use. Nevertheless, he seeks to maintain that that is a credible defence policy.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to give way to the real voice of the Labour party.

Mr. Corbyn: What the Secretary of State is saying is all very interesting. There are only 10 minutes left for his speech Perhaps he will tell us exactly what is the purpose of the Trident submarine and against whom the 192 or 512

[Mr. Corbyn]

nuclear warheads are targeted. Does he not think that in the modern world the best thing would be to abolish Trident and nuclear weapons altogether?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Sadly, we live in a nuclear world and even in 10 years' time, when the two super-powers have, we hope, made massive reductions in their nuclear weapons, they will still have more than 3,000 strategic nuclear warheads. That figure does not include other nuclear powers. My statement earlier this week revealed that Trident will have an explosive yield comparable to Polaris. The precise number of warheads is only one factor to take into account. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that what is relevant is the total destructive force of the system. I have made clear what that will be in practice.

The article about the hon. Member for South Shields in the *New Statesman* concludes:

"Clark's credulousness is of little concern to the Labour leadership, which sees foreign affairs and defence essentially as a matter of party management."

What a vote of no confidence that is in the hon. Gentleman and in what he seeks to do.

I now turn to some of the more constructive and interesting contributions in the debate. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir. D. Steel) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) properly referred to the disturbing evidence coming from North Korea. North Korea remains the world's last Stalinist state. It is a powerfully armed country which represents a potential threat to the security of its region. We are all clearly concerned about the possible development of nuclear weapons in that country. I believe that it is right that the response to that threat should come from the international community and not from any individual country. It is highly relevant to the discussions that will take place on the continuation of the non-proliferation treaty and to the importance of ensuring proper verification procedures.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), in a characteristically thoughtful and highly relevant speech, properly warned us of the growing importance of China in world affairs. He properly referred to the fact that China has been one of the relatively few countries recently to increase its defence expenditure. There is substantial expansion of the Chinese navy and we are all conscious of the fact that not only is China the world's largest country in terms of population, but it has permanent membership of the Security Council. It has played a relatively modest part in global affairs over the years. It has been essentially a regional power and has not shown much interest in matters beyond its own immediate region. However, it is reasonable to assume that as the Chinese economy develops, possibly dramatically, and as its military power also increases, China is likely to play a more global role, which will have profound implications for the whole world.

The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) asked for an assurance about the Hawks going to Indonesia and he expressed concern about that matter. When I was in Jakarta earlier this year, I discussed that very question with my Indonesian counterparts. They have given a clear assurance that the purpose of the Hawks is to ensure the external defence of Indonesia and that they will not be used for internal purposes. We attach importance to that assurance as one that can be seen to be reliable.

There is some difficulty in understanding the Labour party's policy on arms sales. We regularly hear ritual speeches from the hon. Member for South Shields and his hon. Friends about the unattractiveness and unacceptability of arms exports. Yet when we try to pin the hon. Gentleman down, his policy appears to be little different from that of the Government. The question of arms sales was raised in the article from which I have quoted. The hon. Member for South Shields is quoted as finding it worrying that Britain is the second largest arms exporter. He then goes on to say, with regard to various countries to whom we sell arms:

"Sales to allies: no problem. Sales to friendly Governments, such as Saudi Arabia: all right. As for British Aerospace's proposed sale of Hawk ground-attack planes to Indonesia . . . Clark is in favour. South-east Asia needs a stronger security system, he says, and Indonesia must be part of it."

Once one has gone through that list, there are hardly any countries left to which the United Kingdom does sell arms. The hon. Gentleman knows that the United Kingdom has strict rules about those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) referred to the circumstances of the debate about the Western European Union and NATO. He is correct to emphasise that the WEU must be seen as a complement to NATO and not an alternative. NATO remains the absolute foundation of our collective defence. At one stage last year, we were concerned about what appeared to be a rather inconsequential debate about the precise relationship between the two organisations, and the absurdity of both WEU and NATO assets being used in the Adriatic at the same time, which resulted in a considerable over-supply of naval assets and made little contribution to the problems in that region.

The WEU may have a useful contribution to make in circumstances where the United States does not wish to be involved, or cannot be involved for some reason, or where the European countries of the alliance wish to work closely together.

As for the reserves, my hon. Friend made some interesting suggestions about the Household division. It is important that we should have the most flexible approach to the use of the reserves. They are less expensive than regulars and are keen to be used. There was considerable frustration during the Gulf war when, unlike the reserves from the United States, Australia and other countries, our reserves—apart from a number of individuals—were not used in any effective fashion. The recently published Government proposals indicate our desire to see a much more flexible approach, and we have suggested the possibility of a pilot scheme whereby a unit from the reserves might be made available for one of our UN commitments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) referred to the situation in Russia, an issue to which not enough attention has been given. In recent months,we have seen a development of Russian policy to what it has chosen to call the "near abroad", and that is a significant term for the former republics of the Soviet Union which are now independent sovereign states.

When I was in Moscow earlier this year, I was concerned that even among the Russians close to President Yeltsin—those who would consider themselves strong

reformers and not reactionaries like Rutskoi or Khasbulatov—there was an inability to accept that Ukraine and other former republics are now sovereign independent states, with the same absolute right to independence as any other country in Europe. There was a tendency to assume that somehow Ukraine, the Baltic republics, Belarus or other states of the region should have some relationship with Russia that recognises particular Russian interests of a kind that could have significant implications.

There cannot be a new Monroe doctrine for Russia in the present circumstances. It is important that in the current debate about the possible enlargement of NATO we do not make the mistake of allowing some division of Europe —however unintentional—to separate the Poles, the Czechs and the Hungarians on the one hand from the Ukrainians or the Baltic republics on the other. We have an interest in the security of all those countries, and it is highly satisfactory that the recent United States proposals entitled "Partnership for Peace" offer a relationship with NATO that would be available not just to Hungary, Poland and the Czechs—important as that is—but to countries of the former Soviet Union, although the nature of each country's individual relationships might vary depending on circumstances.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) for the remarkable way in which, for some time, she has championed the interests of the marsh Arabs. She has once again enlightened not only the House but the nation as a whole on the proper basis for concern about what is happening in that region. We would view with the gravest concern any evidence revealed to the United Nations—which is studying the situation in southern Iraq—that might give it reason to believe that chemical weapons might have been used in that part of the country. Clearly, the use of such weapons is contrary to Iraq's international obligations; moreover, it gives rise to a particular sense of abhorrence which is felt not only by all hon. Members but by the international community as a whole. I have no doubt that if Iraq and the regime of Saddam Hussein wish to make progress in being readmitted to the international family of nations, any evidence of use of chemical weapons will render that impossible.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday next.

Reserve Forces

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Michael Brown.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister is suffering from a severe earache and is partially deaf, so I shall try to improve on my customary whisper.

In the modern world, there are only two ways in which a country can provide modern armed forces with up-to-date equipment within limited resources. One is by keeping conscription going, as our continental partners have; the other is to do what all our major English-speaking allies do —that is, have a reserve army broadly comparable in size to its regular army.

For that reason, I find it incredible that we can even contemplate further cuts in our Territorial Army, which is already so far out of line with comparable countries in being barely half the strength of its regular counterparts.

It is not part of my brief today to argue that our present TA is in good shape. I believe that we have badly designed units, under a regular command structure which, in many cases, is very unresponsive to their needs. Their problems are compounded by a failure to use them properly in the Gulf.

It is deeply sad to note that, even before "Options for Change", Britain had a 30 per cent. wastage level. In Australia, the figure is only 21 per cent., and in some states in the USA, in the National Guard it is as low as 16 per cent. The reason is, of course, that the National Guard and the Australian reserve army are taken seriously in peacetime and during intermediate conflicts.

In the Gulf war, the National Guard sent 60 battalion or greater-sized formed units into action. In a recent article, Brigadier Hammerbeck, commander of our own 4th Army brigade, said:

> "From the US Army, we got the National Guard 142nd Artillery Brigade. By God they were good . . . It was a sight I shall remember the rest of my days . . . Talking to an Iraqi artillery commander after the war he told me that 90 per cent. of his crews . . . had been killed or wounded in the initial bombardment."

I wonder if a British TA could have achieved the same —herded, as they now are, into an arbitrary number of five drill halls per unit, besieged with paperwork and frequently commanded by regular formation commanders who have never done a single posting in a TA unit. I believe that some of them might have been able to do it, but they were not given the chance to try. We did not call out any TA units for the Gulf; we simply called on a relatively small number of individual volunteers.

This is reflected in our day-to-day approach as well. Whereas the National Guard and the Australian reserve army are called out regularly in a range of peacetime activities, from disaster relief to drug interdiction, nothing like that scale happens here. I was pleased, however, to note an allusion to that in the consultation document.

The main purpose of our reserve forces must be to fight in wars and lesser conflicts. We can see what the TA used to be able to do. Two of the three Greenjacket battalions in the heroic defence of Calais, which saved tens of thousands of British service men, were territorial.

The little sapper unit that went back and destroyed all the oil installations from Brest to Spitzbergen was a Kentish Territorial Army unit. The last time that we sent

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

formed TA units into action was in Aden. A unit that I was subsequently privileged to serve in was engaged in fighting with terrorists there and had an officer decorated for gallantry.

It is terribly sad that, despite the step forward of considering the use of territorials in peacetime, our ideas are so desperately modest. We are talking about pools of individuals in a higher readiness reserve pool. Australia, with a much smaller population than us, is forming up a similar brigade of 4,500—two thirds of whom are territorials—available at 90 days' notice. Indeed, Australia already has four battalion-sized units available at 30 days' notice which are composed entirely of territorials.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I do not wish to hinder the hon. Gentleman in his excellent presentation of the vital cause of an effective Territorial Army. Does he agree that, under new Ministry of Defence proposals, we are in danger of reducing our reserve services to an elite club which provides fun weekends and paid adventure training opportunities without requiring any commitment from its members ever to volunteer when required for active service?

Mr. Brazier: I am conscious of the point that has been raised by the hon. Gentleman. A number of commanding officers have made the point to me, most recently in a letter I received this morning, that it is profoundly wrong to have the divisive concept of a pool of people who want to put their names in a ring to be called out from their units if a good opportunity happens to come up.

I believe that every territorial has volunteered. The National Guard and the Australian reserve army are right to stress unit integrity against what they call the cherry picking of individuals. We need three things to make the system work. First, proper compensation is needed for employers if people are called out; that important subject is discussed in the document. Secondly, we have to bite the bullet on discipline. In America, if a soldier fails to turn out for an important training period—this returns to the point made by the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis)—he will be arrested and disciplined. Thirdly, and most important, we must have units of a viable size. I look to the Minister and the Secretary of State to reverse the disastrous decision that was taken two years ago to try to maintain the shop window by reducing the size of units, instead of the number.

What we need are smaller numbers of larger units so that they are viable for operations. Again, the National Guard is right on that subject. The kind of approach outlined in the readiness reserve concepts may work for a few elite units—for example the Paras and other special forces—rather in the way in which it works already for the Royal Marine Reserves. However, for an ordinary TA unit whose loyalty is to its own drill hall and its own local community it is death.

I am conscious that the excellent Territorial Army unit in my constituency—the 5th battalion of the Princess of Wales Regiment, which had more than 500 men at camp last year—is to be reduced in size.

My last point is that I believe that it is profoundly important that—as in America, Australia and even Canada—we should have a reservist in charge of our reserve forces who should be based in the Ministry of Defence's main building as the focus of advice for Ministers on reserve forces matters.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): Does my hon. Friend agree that, at a time when there is uncertainty about the future shape and size of the regular forces, it is all the more important to have a properly integrated study for reserve forces to match their capabilities to their commitments? Does he also agree that recruitment to the reserve forces represents one example of people offering voluntary service, and that that concept, which is so valuable to our society, is likely to be undermined if measures to hinder recruitment are put into action?

Mr. Brazier: I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend. I fully accept that Ministers have inherited a situation from their predecessors that it is difficult for them to reverse, but feel that I must draw attention to the contrast between America, where the debates take place between senior regular commanders and senior reservist commanders, and this country, where senior regular officers talk to senior regular officers following some phoney consultation process with the territorials.

Let me summarise. First, at half the size of our regular Army, our Territorial Army is already absurdly small. We are quite out of line with other countries in that sense. We should be thinking about expanding our TA, not reducing it. Secondly, we need to make use of territorials in peace time, but the American and Australian experience has shown that it is essential that there should be formed units so that the employment and discipline consequences are dealt with, and to tackle the problem of unit size in respect of which my hon. Friend the Minister has, alas, inherited a terrible problem. Thirdly, we must have a reservist director. Only when Ministers look to a reservist who is both eminent in civilian life and experienced in his service in uniform will we have a proper shape for our future TA.

I hope that my hon. Friends and I were not entirely responsible for the Minister's earache. He will have heard from a number of us that we are deeply concerned that we should formulate a new defence policy for the future. I was certainly encouraged to hear the ideas on evolving defence policies that formed such a prominent part of the Queen's Speech. I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister, however, that if we discover that the TA is to be cut again—and, worse still, that the process is once again to be led by a regular structure following some sort of consultation process with the territorials instead of being driven by territorials—it will make it all the harder for us to support him in the Lobbies in future defence debates.

2.42 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) for giving me a minute to intervene. Today's Adjournment debate must be read in conjunction with the debate on foreign affairs and defence that we have just had on the Loyal Address. I shall endeavour not to repeat anything that has already been said about the reserve forces.

I am glad that the Secretary of State is having another look at the structure and form of our reserve forces. That is important. But we must not be obsessed with structure.

as we tend to be. The Territorial Army is based on units rather than individuals and, for that reason, we should regard it as the first line of reserve rather than the last.

In his closing remarks in our earlier debate, the Secretary of State for Defence referred to disappointment that territorials from the United Kingdom were not deployed to the Gulf to the same extent as their counterparts from other countries. There was a very good reason for that, as I know from experience. I was a regular soldier at the time of Suez. To make up the number of battalions going out to the Mediterranean, we received in vast numbers of what were then called Z reservists—regulars who had completed their service and were on the regular reserve. It was an extremely difficult business. I am talking not so much about training as such—in those days, being a soldier was comparatively simple—as about the political implications.

When a Government reach the stage of having to call up reserves, they have usually undergone a lengthy political debate about whether their country should intervene. As a result, people come back out of civvy street resenting being called up—and, in the case of Suez, thoroughly indoctrinated by the trade unions, which were taking the Opposition's view of our involvement in the Suez operation. That made training them for extremely difficult military operations doubly difficult. Although it is not public knowledge, because many of them did not reach the newspapers, there were mutinies in the Army at that time.

There is a considerable antipathy among regular soldiers to any development of the TA role. Regulars regard the building up of the TA as the signature of their death warrant as regular soldiers. If any review of our reserves is conducted, there must be an important TA input. The one-Army concept is important: if we are to have a single Army with serving soldiers and reserve soldiers, it is important that the TA should be given a higher status than it has at present.

Lastly, I remind my hon. Friend the Minister, who will be winding-up, that it is often said that the Church of England is the Tory party at prayer, but it is also said that the Territorial Army is the Tory party at war. I think that the Territorial Army would like to be given the chance either to go to war or at least enter active service to prevent war.

2.44 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on his good fortune in having obtained this debate and am grateful for his kind words. Yes, I burst an eardrum yesterday, but he has not burst the drum that he has been banging today. Indeed, he has added to the debate on the reserves and I am grateful for the way that he has expressed the views that are shared by many. I hope that I can help today to redress the imbalance that he may feel exists, by paying a genuine tribute to the reservists, to all those people in the Territorial Army and the reserves who serve the nation so well.

This is an issue to which my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury and for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) hold with great importance. The Government also hold to it with great importance. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury on his long and varied career in the TA and his continued commitment to the reserves as a member of the Regular Army Reserve of Officers. He is truly an honourable and gallant Friend.

Our reserve forces are an integral part of our national defence forces. The volunteer reserves have been a central component of our armed forces since the early years of this century and undertook a major role in both world wars. Over the years, the reserves have successfully adapted to new commitments and patterns of warfare and the need to become expert in a wide range of skills and specialisms. Members of the reserve forces, most finding time for the reserves while doing full-time jobs, have met the challenge of an ever-increasing requirement for professionalism and dedication.

The progress of units adapting to new and more challenging tasks has, I believe, exceeded expectations. Many regular soldiers have noted with pleasure the particular headway made by volunteer units recently re-roling to Ptarmigan communications, FH 70 artillery, amphibious bridging, armoured reconnaissance and the new DROPS system for fast resupply of ammunition and stores. In the past year, TA units have rendered invaluable assistance to civl authorities facing serious floods.

In January, elements of 71 Engineer Regiment and 153 Artillery Support Regiment responded at very short notice to the floods in the Tayforth area of Scotland. Similarly, in June, men of the 3rd Battalion, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, helped save life and property during the serious flooding in Wales near Llandudno. The House would also wish to pay tribute to those members of the reserve forces who are currently serving in support of our humanitarian tasks in the former Yugoslavia—mostly here, but some there.

I take this opportunity to make a special mention of the TA in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who intervened during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury, also plays an important role in holding up the excellent reputation of the TA in Northern Ireland. It does not have a role in security operations in the Province, but Northern Ireland is one of the best recruitment areas for the TA in the United Kingdom, and the TA's unflagging enthusiasm is a continued source of admiration. I especially commend the way in which it continues to be able to attract widespread support across the whole of the community.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced earlier this year, the time has come to make arrangements for the greater use of reserves in operational roles in peacetime. As the House knows, we are currently looking at the feasibility of attaching a composite TA infantry company composed of volunteers to regular units on UN operations. Such opportunities will help to ensure that the reservists are given more relevant, more important and, I believe, more fulfilling jobs to do, thereby strengthening the link between them and the regular Army. Indeed, they have welcomed it.

Mr. Brazier: The point on which my hon. Friend the Minister has just touched runs to the very heart of the debate as it is perceived both in America and this country. Let us take the infantry as an example. If an infantry battalion has a strength nominally of 495, which is a fairly standard strength now, and three companies, and one takes that composite company out of one battalion, inevitably one will get the best and most enthusiastic attenders. For the six or nine months that they are away, the rest of the battalion will simply die because they are no longer viable.

[Mr. Brazier]

Alternatively, if we take a cross section against units, we break up unit integrity. To make the concept work, we must return to viable sized units or we will do more harm than good. That is the lesson from America as well as from here.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend has called for larger unit sizes on many occasions. I believe that the key building block in the TA is at company level. More major units with fewer companies is a better framework for expansion and it can provide better national coverage. I do not believe that my hon. Friend has any evidence that larger units lead to lower turnover or less effectiveness.

Mr. Brazier: I should be happy to send my hon. Friend written material about that; this debate is central to the discussions in the United States national guard at the moment. I had a conversation with the Secretary to the Reserve Forces Council, the senior National Guardsman in the United States of America, only five or six weeks ago. The Americans have concluded categorically that they will opt for smaller numbers of units to maintain unit size rather than the other way round. Bearing in mind that the average wastage rate in America is only two thirds of our wastage rate and that the Louisiana national guard, which I was privileged to visit and which particularly emphasises unit integrity, has a turnover rate only half our rate, we should be learning a lesson from the Americans. They have far more experience of unit deployment, most recently on a large scale in the Gulf, than we have.

Mr. Hanley: I have listened to my hon. Friend and I will read again what he said earlier in this debate. However, I do not believe that he necessarily has the evidence to prove what he says. He has merely recounted the experience that he has discovered in certain circumstances. I believe that the way in which we are progressing matches our need for forces in the reserves. The building blocks that I have mentioned are the most practical and sensible. However, let us look at that again. I hope that my hon. Friend will resist intervening again at this stage.

On 17 June, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence described to the House our proposals for the future of naval and RAF reserves. Following a period of full consultation with interested parties, on 18 October he confirmed those proposals. Regrettably, it was decided that two Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment units and the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service should be disbanded as no practicable military role was found for them.

However, there will be additional roles for naval and air force volunteer reserves who will become even more closely integrated with their regular counterparts. For example, service in Royal Navy ships is at the heart of the Royal Naval Reserve. We have therefore decided that, in order to preserve a specific RNR seagoing role and further to integrate the RNR into the infrastructure of the Royal Navy, a dedicated seagoing branch of some 500 personnel will be generated. They will train in all types of Royal Navy ships, not just on mine counter-measure vessels. They will be employed at sea as an integral part of the fleet and they have welcomed that. In the Royal Auxiliary Air Force, our plans for auxiliaries to fill about half the established posts in two Rapier-equipped squadrons are being developed in full consultation with the reserves.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has also said that we are undertaking a study of the operational requirement of the Army's reserves and that a further announcement will be made as soon as our proposals have been formulated. I know that the results of that study are keenly awaited. It will come as no surprise to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury, although no doubt it will still be a disappointment, to learn that I will not be setting out our proposals today. We are still at the examination stage. It is far more important to reach the right decision than an early decision and I shall have to appeal to the House for patience on that matter.

As the House will know, work has been continuing in the Ministry of Defence on the policy and legislation which might govern the future use of reserve forces. On 18 October, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence commended to the House the consultation document entitled "Britain's Reserve Forces: A Framework for the Future." That document sets out in detail our concept for the future use of reserve forces. The proposals provide a basis for consultation and comments and views from all those with an interest are welcome, including from all hon. Members who have spoken today.

The main points of the proposals bear repeating quickly. First, we propose to extend and rationalise the call-out liabilities set out in the Reserve Forces Act 1980. That Act was a consolidation measure which drew together provisions from 34 previous Acts including one from 1662. The current liabilities do not apply equally to all reserves and do not meet the needs of current or future operations. The proposed extended call-out liabilities, which would cover non-warlike as well as warlike operations, will not apply to reservists already serving at the time the legislation came into effect unless they agreed to take them on.

Secondly, in order to allow them to be used more flexibly, reservists would be given the opportunity to register their willingness to be deployed in or in support of operations that are not in response to a direct threat to the United Kingdom. That would be managed through a ready reserve list.

Thirdly, we proposed two new categories of reserve: a number of high readiness reserves, to whom reference has been made, who would possess essential skills and who would voluntarily assume the increased call-out liability; and a sponsored reserve, which would consist of individuals working for contractors in support of the armed services and those who had voluntarily accepted a reserve liability. Those categories would involve only a small part of our reserves.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I am sure that many hon. Members welcome the new category of sponsored reserve, which seems to be directed at people working in the defence contractors industry. I find it extraordinary that in the consultation document there is no reference to medical manpower, which seems to be particularly well suited to a reservist role. Willl my hon. Friend consider extending or at least promoting the idea of sponsored reserves within the national health service?

Mr. Hanley: That is a most interesting idea. My hon. and gallant Friend has his views on the matter and I would welcome them if he has not already communicated them to me.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I am working on it.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend has only until Tuesday next. I assure him that if it takes a little longer to put together his thoughts on that matter, I would welcome extending the deadline for him.

I was also asked for a radical study of reserves. I cannot agree to that request. I cannot agree to yet another study of the role of the reserves. The regular and reserve forces mixed study was a radical study, and ideas such as the high readiness reserve and the sponsored reserve, which has been welcomed, originated in that study, so there is no need for a further study. I am entirely satisfied that we will have examined the full range of possibilities when our current work on the voluntary reserve forces is completed.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To clarify the record, what I urged was integration between the review of the regular and reserve commitments.

Mr. Hanley: I understand my hon. Friend's point.

My right hon. and learned Friend's document considers the impact of all the proposals on the tripartite relationship between the Government, the reservist and his or her employer. Existing provisions for the financial protection of reservists will be looked at carefully to ensure that robust arrangements are in place. Current job protection arrangements will also be considered in preparation for the proposed legislation.

I must pay tribute to the role of the employers. The continuing support of employers is essential to the success of our proposals, and the document puts forward some ideas which might help. I am grateful for the way in which employers have contributed to the current debate. There are also some financial schemes——

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: I have a little more to say; I have not said much so far.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Minister consider the difficulty that will be caused by the obligation to volunteer twice? Will he consider my point about statutory obligations?

Mr. Hanley: I am aware of that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury mentioned it in the defence debate in the middle of October, and we are studying it.

A number of schemes have been mentioned to help to compensate employers when reservists are called out. The flat-rate scheme, the actual costs scheme and the banding formula are all discussed in the document. We have yet to come to conclusions.

The way ahead depends crucially on the response to the consultation process. Copies of the document have been sent to a wide range of interested parties—about 5,000 to 6,000 copies, I believe—and we have had more than 220 responses so far. There is still a little time. I am grateful to those who have given their time, and I shall regard this debate as part of the consultation.

The new reserve forces measure would continue to apply, irrespective of any increase or decrease in the number of the reserves made in response to operational needs in the years to come. The proposals are thus consistent with, but do not depend on, the developing plans for the size and structure of the armed forces.

We are fortunate in this country to have in the volunteer reserve forces a body of men and women prepared to devote a large proportion of their leisure hours to the service of their country. The reserves are an important link between the armed forces and the population at large, most of whom, since the end of conscription, have no other personal experience of military service. They render valuable assistance, and I assure the House that, in our continuing work on the future of the Territorial Army, the requirement to ensure that it is well trained and well equipped to provide an effective war-fighting capability is, and will remain, central to our deliberations.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 22 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Environment and Safety Information (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question agreed to.

2.35 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the extremely cold weather in the country, could you advise hon. Members on how we can help our elderly constituents? Many pensioners in my constituency—the same applies in the rest of the country—are desperately trying to keep warm on small incomes.

Will the Secretary of State for Social Security make a statement about the cold weather payments? The payments are apparently triggered only if the weather is freezing for seven consecutive days, which is an absolute farce. The House of Commons must be concerned with the lives of ordinary people. If hon. Members are not concerned with pensioners who are desperately anxious about the freezing weather, we will not be fulfilling our duty. Will you advise the House how I can get a statement from the Secretary of State on the matter?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has moved from making a point of order and is now making a plea, as he has done on other occasions. I know of his deep and sincere interest in the matter. I think that the hon. Gentleman will understand that he must pursue it with the Government, either through questions or through Adjournment debates.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament—*[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.]*

Question again proposed.

Local Government (Scotland and Wales)

2.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): In the resumed debate on the Gracious Speech, I welcome the opportunity to debate the Government's proposals to reform local government in Scotland and in Wales. These are two extremely important measures and have both been subject to widespread consultation during the past three years. They will, I believe, be welcomed widely both in Scotland and in Wales, and will have long-term consequences in improving the quality, efficiency, and coherence of local government and local democracy in both countries.

I and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for local government in Scotland, who has been tireless in his meetings and discussions with interested parties on the matter, will listen closely to all that is said today about our proposals in Scotland, as will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and the Welsh local government Minister regarding reform proposals in that country.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State for Scotland said that the proposals for Scotland and for Wales had been well discussed during a three-year period. Will he therefore confirm that the time scale for both Scotland and for Wales will be identical, and that elections will be held on the same date?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that we have proceeded independently in terms of the time scale, and indeed the detail and the content of our proposals. It is interesting that those are reconciled in a large number of areas. The Secretary of State for Wales will be replying to the debate this evening, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend will have heard the point made by the hon. Gentleman and will no doubt wish to address it.

There has been a change of cast in the long-running play on the Scottish Opposition Benches. In welcoming the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) to our continuing deliberations on the matter, may I invite him to make it clear a little later where he stands on a number of specific aspects of the debate. He has a good opportunity now to put his party's approach to the matter back on the rails.

Does the hon. Gentleman propose, if he forgets his lines, to stamp his foot and lead his hon. Friends on a fatuous walk-out on a spontaneous procession to No. 10

[Mr. Lang]

Downing street? If he does so, and he tells me in advance as well as the press, I will try to let him know whether my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is at home.

So far, when pressed on his approach to the legislation, the hon. Member has responded; "Remember Maastricht." Well, some of us will never forget Maastricht. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will not think me insensitive if I point out that the Government won the Maastricht debate. The Bill is now law, as is our entire legislative programme for the previous parliamentary Session. We shall win with our proposals for local government reform in Scotland and in Wales. Indeed, it seems to me that the rebels on those proposals are on the Opposition Benches, not on the Government side. I have taken careful note of the many comments from the growing number of Opposition Members who support what we propose.

However, there is one issue of great importance which I hope the Opposition will be willing to clear up at the outset. The House deserves to know where the hon. Members for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) stand on an issue raised at the opening of the debate on Thursday by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). He advanced a highly controversial constitutional proposition when he said, in speaking of the local government proposals:

> "An overwhelming majority of the hon. Members who represent Scottish and Welsh constituencies are against the Bills that will only be carried by the votes of English Conservatives who do not represent the people in the countries concerned."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 24.]

The meaning of that seems perfectly clear. It is that only Scottish Members should vote in the House on Scottish matters and only Welsh Members should vote in the House on Welsh matters. That is a major constitutional change, which would have far-reaching implications, solemnly expressed by the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition in opening the debate on the Loyal Address—the highest profile debate of the entire parliamentary Session.

I ask the hon. Member for Hamilton, for the avoidance of doubt——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No. I am addressing the point specifically to the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and his colleague the shadow Secretary of State for Wales. Is such a constitutional change the official policy of Her Majesty's Opposition? Do the hon. Gentlemen agree with it? I will give way to either of them if they would like to clear up the matter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Perhaps they want to think about it. No doubt they will answer the point later. They owe it to the House to do so.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I should like the Secretary of State to deal with one particular point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I had a telephone conservation earlier today with the Secretary of State for Wales. As I understand it, the Secretary of State for Wales intends to make some announcement later today about the nature and perhaps the timetable of the Bill to reform local government in Wales. At this moment we do not know precisely what are the proposals for Wales because they have already been changed several times.

The Secretary of State for Wales said that he would put a letter on the Board for me and all other Members who represent Welsh constituencies so that we would be informed of the intention of the latest proposals. It is a matter of great regret that I have to say that there is no such letter on the Board for me or any of my colleagues. May I put it to the Secretary of State that we would have a much better informed debate if the Secretary of State for Wales was able to live up to the undertakings that he has given.

Mr. Lang: I shall come to that matter shortly, and I shall deal with precisely those points. If the hon. Gentleman suggests that he should have been told privately through a notice on the Board before such a matter was announced to the House, I suspect that other hon. Members will be on their feet complaining to you, Madam Speaker, at the impropriety of such a step.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that you agree that it is important for a debate in the House to be an informed debate whenever possible. The Secretary of State for Wales is present in the House, as one would expect. Will you permit him, on a point of order, to tell the House at the beginning of the debate what are the major changes that he has in mind for Wales? For example, if he announced that there would be respectively Montgomeryshire and Brecon and Radnor unitary authorities, it might well change the view that some of us would take of the debate.

Mr. Lang *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. May I respond to the point of order? The hon. Gentleman and the House know that we do not have statements from Ministers following points of order.

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Member will contain himself, I shall be able to announce what my right hon. Friend proposes. He is putting the information on the Board for Opposition Members.

What was noticeable about the reply from the hon. Member for Caerphilly was that he did not rise to respond to the point that I put to him; he rose to create a diversion.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No. I want to deal with this point specifically.

The implications of what the Leader of the Opposition said are clear. If only Scots may vote on Scottish business and only Welsh Members may vote on Welsh business, presumably only English Members may take part in English business. The Leader of the Opposition is a Scottish Member of Parliament. He represents Monklands, East—an area with one of the best known local authorities in Scotland. How, then, can he fulfil the role of the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition for the United Kingdom if he is confined in this place to decisions on Scottish issues? Still less could he fulfil the role of Prime Minister. He demonstrates more and more his unfitness for that office.

The policy of the Leader of the Opposition on the matter is one of great irresponsibility. It would split the integrity of this House and this Parliament. It would create second-class Members of Parliament and lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. The House deserves an

answer today from the Opposition on that point. We shall await the necessary clarification with considerable interest and concern.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *rose*——

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Lang: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North.

Mr. Wilson: Having got the knockabout out of the way, as he is going down the road of devolved opinion, will the Secretary of State address himself to the views of Members of Parliament for Ayrshire, and more importantly the electorate there? Will he tell us at this advanced stage in the consultation procedure whether he has had any support for the proposed division of Ayrshire, as set out in the White Paper, other than the support of his hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), who, disappointingly is not with us today, presumably on the ground that he is studying the electoral boundaries of Dumfries?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) was reluctant to address the point that I put to him. Matters of constituency boundaries are for consideration later in the progress of the Bill.

I very much welcome the opportunity today to debate local government reform in Scotland and Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I will shortly introduce major pieces of legislation that will transform the structure of local government for the better. It is therefore right that we should take time before we necessarily become embroiled in the detail of the changes to discuss in more general terms today the current state of local government, its strengths and flaws and, by restructuring, the opportunities presented for its improvement.

Discussion of the detailed provisions, particularly of the delivery of all the services and the new authority structure and boundaries, is important, but will more profitably follow the publication of the respective Bills. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to announce a number of refinements to the new local authorities, which we proposed for Scotland in our White Paper in July. They affect three areas: the boundary between south Lanarkshire and Glasgow; the boundaries of the city of Dundee; and the boundary between the Lothians and Berwickshire and East Lothian at Prestonpans.

In each case, we have listened carefully to the detailed arguments put to us and studied carefully the facts that have been presented. In the first case, we concluded that the areas of Toryglen and Kings Park should more appropriately remain in Glasgow. We shall redefine that boundary to follow much more closely the line of the old county boundaries in the area.

In the case of Dundee, we have acknowledged the importance of Camperdown Park to the city, recognising that it was purchased by trust moneys bequeathed to the city. We propose to adjust the boundary to include within the city not only the park but the adjacent recreational area of Clatto country park. To the east of the city, we have accepted the reasoned arguments that have been presented for the retention of the West Pitkerro industrial estate within the city. In relation to Prestonpans, we have recognised the problems to which the White Paper boundaries would give rise and propose to adjust the boundary to include Prestonpans in Berwickshire and East Lothian.

I believe that these changes will make far more sensible and effective boundaries in those areas.

Mr. Home Robertson: I am glad that the Secretary of State has acknowledged that it was an absurd idea to take Prestonpans out of East Lothian. As it clearly makes sense to leave Prestonpans in East Lothian, will he now acknowledge that the case for Prestonpans to remain in East Lothian is every bit as strong as the case for Musselburgh remaining in East Lothian? They go together and it is idiotic to split them.

Mr. Lang: Given that the hon. Gentleman's responsibilities are in representing Berwickshire, I am surprised that he is not aware of the considerable distinction. We propose to return Musselburgh to Midlothian, where it always used to be. That is a matter that he may wish to pursue later in the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lang: I shall not give way unless the interventions deal specifically with those three points.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I do not wish to comment on the announcements that the Secretary of State has just made, but does the fact that he has said nothing about the local government boundary in Aberdeen, and in particular about Westhill, where 97 per cent. of the people are opposed to becoming part of Aberdeen, mean that he has a fixed mind about that, or is he still prepared to listen to the views of the people of Westhill?

Mr. Lang: Of course the Government will listen to the debate on all boundaries as the Bill proceeds through Parliament in its Committee and other stages. The hon. Member represents an Aberdeen constituency. It was indeed the representation on Westhill of Labour-controlled Aberdeen council that cut so much ice with the Government. No doubt the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) will want to enlarge on that in due course as the Bill proceeds.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: I was about to come to the announcement for which the hon. Gentleman's hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has been waiting so eagerly.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has been listening carefully to representations and arguments from right hon. and hon. Members and many others in Wales about the boundaries of the new unitary authorities. He has decided to make some changes, including the transfer of Ystradgynlais and Llanelly Hill to mid-Wales, the creation of a larger Flintshire by transferring the communities in the north-east from Denbighshire, the transfer of Cynwyd and Llandrillo from Meirionnydd to Denbighshire, and a modest adjustment to the Bridgend-vale border. My right hon. Friend will comment further on those changes later in the debate. He also accepts the recommendation of the Council of Welsh Districts to have about 1,250 rather than 1,100 councillors elected on district ward boundaries.

[Mr. Lang]

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has also decided to make a number of changes to the names of authorities. Important among those is the renaming of the proposed Glamorgan valleys authority to Rhondda-Cynon-Taff. That will ensure that those historic names are not lost from local government in Wales.

Mr. Ron Davies: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for Scotland for giving way. I understand that he is making this announcement on behalf of the Secretary of State for Wales because his pronunciation of Ystradgynlais and Llanelly Hill is better than that of the Secretary of State for Wales.

None of the changes will address the real grievance that is felt all over Wales—in the communities of the valleys, in Meirionnydd, in the Vale of Glamorgan and in Montgomery—about the fact that the proposals do not meet the objectives of reorganisation. The proposals will sever those communities from any sense of self-determination. Are not the proposals hopelessly out of touch with the people of Wales?

The Secretary of State has lost the argument in the Cabinet because he cannot even have the proposals brought before us in the House of Commons. As the proposals command no public support, should they not be dropped, and should not the Secretary of State go back to Wales and build on a consensus which does—if he is prepared to look for it—really exist?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has given us a foretaste of his wind-up speech this evening. No doubt those issues will be debated more fully as the matter proceeds through Parliament.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): My right hon. Friend should bear in mind that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) speaks for no one but himself in respect of the observations that he has just made. I speak on behalf of the communities of Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf. Those communities will be delighted to hear the news from my right hon. Friend, who has recognised their strong links with the county of Breconshire and with Powys. There has been a cross-party consensus in that community of a kind that is beyond so many Opposition Members. The people in my constituency will be deeply delighted with what my right hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing a more balanced view to bear on this debate.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Secretary of State tell us a little more than the absolute zero that has been said so far about the boundaries of the Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend? He described the adjustments as modest. There are four communities affected: Coychurch Lower, Ewenny, Saint Bride's Major and Wick. None of them is difficult to pronounce, so I cannot understand why we have not been told which ones are to stay with the borough of Ogwr and which are not. It is important as they all want to stay in Ogwr.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has made his point and he will be able to develop it as the debate proceeds.

I touched earlier on the strengths of local government.

Mr. Wigley: I realise the difficulty that the Secretary of State has handling a Welsh issue. In the consultation paper, a model for Wales called the Powys model was brought forward that intended to create two tiers in that county to give a greater identity to the three districts there. The Secretary of State suggested that that model may be extended to other counties, which is of some concern to areas that may be affected by such a change. Will he say whether the model still stands in Powys and, if so, is it likely to be extended to other areas?

Mr. Lang: I understand that the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is yes, if those areas apply for it.

I touched earlier on the strengths of local government, and there are many. The years of the present structure—since 1974 in Wales and 1975 in Scotland—have seen a remarkable development in the quality of many of services. In education, social work, roads, leisure and recreation, and many other services, the improvements in the availability and service and professionalism with which they are run have been enormous. In many cases, local government has also adopted innovative service delivery arrangements and is more and more developing new and more efficient management structure. I have seen many examples of that at first hand and I am delighted to acknowledge innovation and efficiency wherever I come across it.

So why do we need change? That is a question that needs to be addressed not only by the Government, but surely by the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, as the reform of local government and the introduction of single-tier government is as much on their agendas as it is on ours. Of course, I cannot answer for any other party, but from the Government's perspective the need for change lies in the continuing inadequacy of a two-tier structure to tackle certain fundamental flaws that, in Scotland and elsewhere, have been present for a long time in the fabric of local government structure.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In the context of change in local government, the Secretary of State has failed to mention the money it will cost, when pensioners are freezing in their homes and are threatened with VAT on fuel and power and there are people without roofs over their heads. Is it not a fact that, together with the English changes, we are talking of spending £2 billion of taxpayers' money that should be used to provide water and heat for pensioners and to provide proper local government services, instead of spending it on that wasteful idea just because the Tory Government want to shift democracy from local government and turn some of the services into enabling authorities? It is a complete waste of time and money, and the money should be spent on something more useful.

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman is still with us when I reach the issue of cost later in my speech, he will discover that the position is very different.

In Scotland, Lord Wheatley's commission, whose work underpins so much of the present structure, identified correctly the flaws of which I have spoken. In the end, the solution that his commission proposed—our present two-tier structure—alleviated but did not cure the fundamental ills. It is worth remembering that, although Lord Wheatley finally recommended a two-tier structure, he did so reluctantly. In 1969, his commission concluded that a system of all-purpose local authorities "has many advantages", being the simplest of all to understand and to operate.

Thus, the legitimacy of the present structure was called into question from the moment its creators recognised the merits of the single-tier option. The Stoddart committee of 1981 expressed the same views more strongly, and almost a decade later the Scottish Labour party said the establishment of single-tier authorities would deal with "the continuing widespread confusion about which tier carried out which function."

So what were the fundamental flaws that Lord Wheatley identified, and to what extent do they still blight local government today? The first flaw described by Wheatley was the complication inherent in the pre-1975 structure —in particular, the "criss-crossing", as he called it, of responsibilities, which made it difficult for the citizen and even the local councillor to know what local government was all about. Wheatley observed, rightly, that such a situation did not make for the best kind of local service.

Although improved by the 1974 and 1975 reforms, problems of the sort identified by Lord Wheatley persist. Almost 20 years after the two-tier structure came into being, too many people in Scotland and Wales do not know which tier is responsible for which service. An ICM survey in March this year showed that one in four Scots did not know that district councils were responsible for cleansing, while one in three did not know that district councils had responsibility for housing—easily the largest district service. Even worse, the survey confirmed that two in five Scots did not know that regional councils were responsible for education—one of the most important local government services.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As it happens, I agree with the Secretary of State about the advantages of single-tier authorities, but does he agree that what he proposes is in fact not a single-tier system? Fire services and the police are to be dealt with by Strathclyde and water and sewerage by three non-elected boards. Only the remaining functions will be dealt with by the new authority. A three-tier system of authorities will replace the existing two-tier system: we are not talking about a single-tier system at all.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is wrong, and when the Bill is published he will become more aware than he should be at present that he is wrong.

The problem is compounded by the continuing lack of any clear definition of the services provided by districts and regions respectively. Different arrangements apply in different parts of the country and, for some services, an overlap of responsibilities continues to exist. Thus, across Scotland, both tiers of local government in different areas may have some involvement in building control, conservation areas, countryside matters and nature conservation, development control, industrial and economic development, leisure and recreation and a number of other services besides. In Wales, there are similar problems. Duplication occurs in development control and planning, in economic development, leisure and so on.

Confusion is inevitable. One small example sums up the problem very well: regional councils are responsible for lighting adjacent to roads, but districts are responsible for some footpath lighting. No wonder the consumer of local services is confused, and no wonder friction, waste and delay have for too many people become the hallmarks of the present two-tier system.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I agree with the Secretary of State that the delivery of service is the critical factor for the public as a whole. In that context, does he think that the Scottish public understand that only 1,000 new houses were built in the public sector last year? Housing is a critical problem with which all hon. Members have to contend. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore specify in any future statement the amount of money that will be made available through revenue support grant, and perhaps by the abolition of capital debt, to enable our authorities, whatever their shape, to address that vital problem?

Mr. Lang: The public would understand the position very much better if the hon. Lady's party painted the complete picture instead of selecting parts of it to suit the case that she has advanced.

The second flaw in local government is its illogicality. Despite various bites at the legislative cherry since 1974-75, the present divisions of functions between the two tiers of local government in Scotland and Wales remain confused. In terms of its impact on efficient and effective service delivery, the separation of housing and social work is perhaps the most notorious consequence of the present two-tier structure.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: I must make progress; I will give way later.

There are other examples. Responsibility for education, libraries and leisure and recreation services, all of which are closely linked, is split between districts and regions. The same is true of consumer protection, weights and measures and food standards. The fact that, after 20 years, it has still not been possible to create a sensible and clear-cut division of responsibility reflects only the impossibility of achieving that under a two-tier structure.

Then there is the expense of the present system. It was the Wheatley commission's view that the complications and illogicalities inherent in the structure of local government before 1975 made the whole system more expensive than it would be to run. The same applies today in Scotland and Wales. There is general acknowledgment among commentators that a single-tier structure can be less expensive to run than a two-tier structure. That is, of course, very much in line with what common sense dictates.

I will refer to transitional costs, but on long-term savings there can be no dispute. Fewer councils, fewer staff, fewer buildings, less bureaucracy, less confusion, less duplication and greater efficiency all point to lower costs. The one consistent point of all studies by all the consultants commissioned by all the councils which had done so is that of savings. It is incumbent upon any Government to seek more cost-effective means of delivering services, and we cannot ignore the potential for efficiency savings when they are identified.

Mr. Brian Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Does the Secretary of State regard it as efficient to allow such a system to occur as we have in Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles? That is the system that he wants to introduce in the rest of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is rather silly to refer to the Western Isles as though that area is an example of what single-tier local government would apply in the rest of

[Mr. Lang]

Scotland. He knows perfectly well that the population in the Western Isles is very much smaller than would be ideal in a single-tier authority. Over the years, all Governments have recognised the importance of giving a sensible local-tier structure to the islands to take account of their geography and particular problems.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then I really must press on.

Mr. Bruce: The Secretary of State is making a good case for single-tier authorities, with which many hon. Members would probably agreee. Nevertheless, what criteria are applied to determine the optimum size for a unitary authority? Why is it that Eastwood is just big enough and Gordon, which is exactly the same size, is apparently too small? Are the views of local people taken into consideration? Do the Government listen only to the views of the Scottish Office or Conservative central office? When will local people have a say?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman knows that local people have had considerable say and no doubt will continue to do so. However, I give him two examples. In the Western Isles we have local authorities of about 20,000. The largest local authority in Scotland is Glasgow, with 620,000. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that we take account of local circumstances, local demography and natural local boundaries, including, where possible, reversion to the previous historic boundaries and response to local allegiances.

I now refer to the matter of costs, not least because it is the centrepiece, we have been told by the media, of the Opposition's attack in today's debate. Even in that matter there is hope of progress. Already, the wilder claims of last summer are being moderated. The successive claims of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East of £400 million, £500 million and then £600 million in successive weeks are now down to the specific figure in mid-October of £126 million, although still accompanied by lurid claims about the consequences for individual council tax payers.

On 8 November, in the Labour party's position paper, the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) settled on a figure of £200 million. That is £4 million above the upper estimate of our consultants and it is almost double the lower estimate, but it is a very big improvement on his earlier calculations. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman spoils that improved performance by wildly exaggerating what it means by way of the so-called massive burden for council tax payers. He is wrong in several important respects and by quite alarming amounts.

First, the hon. Gentleman assumes that all the burden falls on the council tax payer. He forgets that more than 85 per cent. of local government current expenditure comes from other sources, mainly from central Government. So he is wrong by a factor of between five and six. Secondly, he assumes that all those costs will fall in one year. In fact, as everyone else acknowledges, they will be spread over several years. So he is wrong again, this time by, shall we say, a generous factor of three or four. Even at the height of the transition in 1995-96 and 1996-97, total transitional costs are unlikely to exceed £30 million to £35 million in any one year. At its height or at the most, the cost of reform will be less than half of 1 per cent. of total local government current expenditure. That is using the starting figure of the hon. Member for Fife, Central.

Labour Members ignore the other side of the balance sheet—the savings arising from fewer councils, fewer staff and greater efficiency. The figures will vary according to who is compiling them, but all the consultants' reports to all the councils indicated savings from the single-tier structure that they favour. Our consultants' estimates ranged from £40 million to £66 million per annum. The margin is wide because it depends so much on decisions by new authorities and therefore it is hard to be precise.

It is important to recognise that the savings are linked to the transitional costs. Indeed, most of the transitional costs —almost half of them—arise from staff rationalisation and early retirement. If the Labour party's higher cost estimate is right, it is unarguable that the higher savings estimate resulting from fewer staff will follow. Over the first five years, the savings for Scotland will total over £300 million. That will amount to savings of about £1 billion from the reform of local government in Scotland over 12 years.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Does the Secretary of State realise that, after the poll tax fiasco, no one believes any figures that he gives? Does he realise that when the Tories talk about savings they mean cuts—cuts in services for the elderly, cuts for people requiring education, cuts in housing and cuts in our local government services?

Will the right hon. Gentleman answer a specific point put to me by the Scottish Association for the Deaf? One centre dealing with hearing impaired children and others has been set up in Edinburgh but services the whole of Lothian. The association knows that that service, with high-tech equipment and high training, simply cannot be dispersed to a number of smaller authorities. How does he answer the charge that there will be no service in many of the new authorities because he will not make it statutory?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman indulges in his usual policy of scaremongering and alarming those who are aged or infirm. I point out again that the figure on which I have based what I said is the one from the Labour party's position paper.

For completeness, I should say that there is a slight time lag between the transitional costs and the savings. There must be an initial investment to secure the savings. But once the investment is made—and central Government will provide for almost all of it—it is recovered very soon and the savings go on year after year for council taxpayers.

I make an offer to Labour Members—I am a reasonable man. In the interests of harmony and enlightenment, I will accept their estimate of transitional costs of £200 million —although I believe that it is on the high side—if they in turn acknowledge what that actually means. It means, first, there will be almost no extra burden for council tax payers; secondly, it will be spread over several years; and, thirdly, it will be recovered and then substantially exceeded by the savings that flow from the costs. So I invite the hon. Member for Hamilton to ratify that agreement and we can then move on to other more productive and relevant issues.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): Does the Secretary of State know that all the reports of the Local Government Commission in England include the following statement:

"the experience of successive reorganisations in local government and the national health service suggests that transitional costs tend to be higher in practice than had been expected"?

Does he accept that?

Mr. Lang: If transitional costs are higher, it will be because redundancies and early retirements are greater and, therefore, savings subsequently will be greater still.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: I will not give way. I have given way many times and I do not wish to detain the House much longer. *[Interruption.]* In that case, I hope that the hon. Gentleman——

Madam Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way. Only one hon. Member at a time can have the floor.

Mr. Lang: I have given way many times and I must press on to allow other hon. Members to take part in the debate.

I have another question for the hon. Member for Hamilton: where does he stand on COSLA's policy of non-co-operation? As he knows, his predecessor and his party are strongly committed to it. Indeed, it was they who caused the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities so unwisely to abandon the sensible policy of co-operation that it pursued up to the end of July. We had just had a productive meeting with it and we had agreed to a further one and to the setting up of a working party on finance.

Then, alas, COSLA's president, Charles Gray, was suddenly prevailed upon to stand on his head. Proclaiming the non-co-operation policy, as reported in *The Scotsman* on 31 July, he said:

"It is ludicrous to think that we should co-operate on the implementation of these disgraceful proposals and I have no doubt that councils throughout Scotland will take a similar stance."

From standing on his head, he was soon turning cartwheels because, sadly for him, within one week one of the most senior conveners, Mr. Duncan Macpherson of Highland region, said:

"COSLA has been down this road before and this a course of action that would inevitably have to be abandoned sooner or later."

Sadder still, Sir Robert Calderwood, the retired chief executive of president Gray's own council of Strathclyde, intervened with an open letter to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) in which he said:

"I would praise you for changing your mind and if you are going to do it, as I believe you inevitably will, it will be so much better if you do so sooner rather than later."

At the end of August, COSLA and the Opposition parties convened a meeting to redefine what non-co-operation meant. A letter of clarification was issued, which prompted *The Scotsman* to report:

"Disarrary remains over the bid to boycott council reforms."

Councillor Peter Peacock, the secretary of the non-aligned group of councils, was prompted to say:

"I am afraid the letter does not take matters much further forward and disguises the fact that COSLA is split down the middle on this issue."

Even COSLA's vice-president, Andrew Tulley, said:

"To continue to use the word non-co-operation is pointless."

As tensions rose, 20 Labour council groups met at the beginning of September and the president tried another redefinition. Further guidelines were agreed. "The real test," said Mr. Gray,

"is not how many councils have publicly declared policies of non-co-operation, but how many are actually co-operating with the Secretary of State."

Six days later, *The Scotsman* reported that half of Scotland's local authorities opposed the non-co-operation policy. There was another COSLA meeting on 17 September and another definition from the president. Councils should express their opposition

"clearly and unequivocally in whatever ways suit their own circumstances and which they feel will be most effective."

So in a last-ditch attempt to save their non-co-operation policy——

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): How exciting.

Mr. Lang: It does not excite me, but it seems to excite COSLA.

In a last-ditch attempt to save their non-co-operation policy, the hon. Member for Fife, Central pitched in on 6 October, urging councils to respond to a Government request for reform costings, saying:

"They must write in, operating the non-co-operation policy to the letter and spirit of what was decided."

By the end of that month, half the authorities in Scotland were co-operating with the Government.

What a pitiful and humiliating episode for the convention and for the Scottish Labour party. That sorry saga of short-sighted posturing has done nothing to help local government in Scotland. COSLA exists to speak for local government to central Government and to do so with one voice. Driven by the Labour party, it has failed to fulfil that function and it has split its members down the middle. A policy of non-co-operation by COSLA will do nothing to slow or impede the progress of our reforms to the statute book, but I hope that the hon. Member for Hamilton will be big enough to admit, when he speaks, that his party's policy on non-co-operation was wrong and has failed. Let him admit defeat now, before more damage is done, and let him urge COSLA to come to its senses.

Mr. George Robertson *rose——*

Mr. Lang: No. I will allow the hon. Gentleman to recant at length in a few moments.

It is striking, as one examines the Welsh and Scottish proposals, how far two separate exercises have arrived at similar solutions. In each case, we are proposing a pattern of authorities that range significantly in size, population and character, reflecting different characteristics, geography and local loyalties in each country. In each case, we have decided, where appropriate, to return to historic county names and areas and in both countries we have recognised the potential for a co-operative and enabling approach to service delivery, rather than an assumption of the exclusive provision of services by each individual authority. We have both recognised that authorities should have a much more flexible legal framework, enabling them more readily to purchase services and expertise from each other, and our respective Bills will provide for that.

Progress in the debate and progress in the reform of local government will be helped enormously if we have answers to the questions that I have raised today with the hon. Member for Hamilton. I shall remind him of what those questions are. First, does he share the view of his party leader that only Scottish Members should vote on

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Scottish matters? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Secondly, does he agree with his hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central that the cost of local government reform will be £200 million? If so, we can all agree on that figure and on what it implies, and put the issue behind us. Thirdly, does he agree that his party and COSLA made a terrible mistake in their policy of non-co-operation, and that they should now admit failure and abandon it? The House will listen closely to his answers, and he will be judged by what he says, or fails to say, today.

The proposals that my right hon. Friend and I will shortly introduce will unlock the unrealised potential in local government—the potential powerfully to represent the people in their areas, organise co-ordinated and effective services and provide real value for money for local taxpayers. Those are goals worth striving for, and they should be supported by all people with a genuine concern for local government.

3.20 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): When welcoming me to the debate, the Secretary of State for Scotland was unwise enough to mention Maastricht. One cannot find a braver man than one who dares to say that Maastricht was a success for the Government; the House and the nation know that the Government got Maastricht through without the social chapter only by using the confidence vote, which the Prime Minister had to resort to, so I am not unhappy if he wishes to remind us of that.

Nothing that the Secretary of State said today makes either relevant or necessary the commitment in the Queen's Speech to legislate for the reorganisation of local government in Scotland and Wales. Although the burden of my remarks will deal with the Scottish legislation, my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) will tackle the details in Wales, should he catch your eye, Madam Speaker.

This exercise is an extremely costly, completely unwanted, totally unnecessary and cynical exercise in Tory political protectionism. Simply to try to tie up a few safe havens for that dying breed of Conservative council bosses, Scotland is to be thrown into the expensive turmoil of a wholly irrational butchery of the existing 16-year-old council set-up.

That the legislation should be the centrepiece—indeed, in Scotland, the only piece—of the Government's legislative programme is a remarkable display of wrong priorities. They call it "back to basics" and endlessly parrot sound money and family values to us. When the national finances have been impoverished by ministerial incompetence—to the extent that millions of ordinary families throughout the land will face the burden of value added tax on their fuel bills from April next year—and Scotland's child care laws are crying out for the urgent improvements that were completed in England in 1989, what on earth are we doing in this 1993-94 Session of Parliament with a Queen's Speech that promises us more tax, more disruption and more upheaval, simply to put Scottish and Welsh councils through the mincer? What for? Reform, they say. The definition of reform is an improvement—something that will take us further forward. That is not what we are talking about in the case of Scottish local government.

The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) is the Minister responsible for Scottish local government, which reminds me of the old eastern European joke in which an Hungarian politician said, "We're about to create the post of Minister for the Navy." When someone pointed out that Hungary was a land-locked country, the politician replied, "After all, the Soviet Union has a Minister for Justice, and Bulgaria has a Minister for Culture, so why can't we have a Minister for the Navy?" So the Scottish Conservatives have a Minister for local government.

In *The Scotsman* last Wednesday, he said:

"Our fundamental aim is to establish a strong network of local councils which are both sensitive and accountable to the needs of the people they serve."

Apparently, that is the Government's objective in this exercise. Well, that is not the view of Councillor Brian Meek, the eloquent, pen-pushing journalist and a Conservative member of Edinburgh district council, who wrote in *The Herald* in July of this year:

"So let's get on with the gerrymandering argument. Did Mr. Lang and his Ministers seek to give their party the best possible chance under the new set-up? Of course they did. Why shouldn't they?"

There we have it, that is plain enough language—blunt, stark and brutally honest. It is a sight more honest than the Government have been up to now by dressing up gerrymandering as public interest.

I do not know whether Councillor Meek was one of those mentioned by Sir Michael Hirst in that letter to the Secretary of State for Defence which was uncovered in yesterday's edition of *Scotland on Sunday*. Sir Michael Hirst, a former Member of the House, said:

"Sadly, grandness and support of the Party seem in inverse proportion and I never cease to be amazed at how many fair weather friends the Party has."

Frankly, I never cease to be amazed that the Scottish Conservative party has any friends at all. With such openly honest friends as Brian Meek, the Secretary of State for Scotland does not need many enemies.

The Government show absolutely no shame about dressing up an assault on local democracy as a drive for efficiency and accountability. They abuse words such as "cost effective" and "local services" when they are engaged in naked political manoeuvring. As they embark on yet another pick-pocketing exercise on the Scottish public, the party which is currently polling in Scotland at below the level of Kim Campbell's annihilated Canadian Tories, is exposed by one of its own top supporters as simply giving

"their party the best possible chance."

Let me come to the issue raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition last week. I would issue a public warning to Conservative Members from England, whose votes will be required to get the Scottish and Welsh Bills through the House against the majority votes of hon. Members representing both countries. We all have equal votes in the United Kingdom Parliament, but the warning still stands.

Not very long ago the same wonderful, silk-tongued people in the Scottish Office sold another idea as being an efficient, accountable, cost-effective change in local government—a change that required blind obedience from English Members to get it through the House, against all the warnings that we deployed against it: that idea was the poll tax, the community charge, the memory of which should send a shiver down the spine of every Tory Member who values his seat.

The poll tax was born in Scotland out of panic and ideology; it also was reared on fraudulent, implausible claims about its fairness and effectiveness; and it was to be visited on Scotland first. Then, even in the face of its incandescently spectacular failure in Scotland, it was to be transplanted on to the rest of the country. History tells us the rest of the tale.

I warn Conservative Members to be wary—to be scared stiff—about providing the Lobby fodder for the suicidally bright ideas that they are asked to support by the bewhiskered, funny-money men and smooth ex-bankers camping out in the Scottish Office.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): The hon. Gentleman seems to be implying that the Conservative party does not have a mandate to govern in Scotland and Wales [HON. MEMBERS: "It does not."] I am delighted that Opposition Members agree with that. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, apart from the general election of 1945, the Labour party has never had a majority of seats in England? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Callaghan and Wilson Administrations did not have a mandate to govern England?

Mr. Robertson: The hon. Gentleman's hearing is almost as bad as his political judgment, because I did not suggest that Conservative Members have no right to vote. I simply issued a warning, based on experience, of what will happen to them if they do not listen carefully to the opinion expressed in Scotland and Wales by the majority parties for which people have voted.

Conservative Members have a free right to vote, as they did for the poll tax; as a consequence, they paid a rich price in all parts of the United Kingdom. English Conservative Members should remember that those guys on the Government Front Bench gave them the poll tax, with all the misery and political fall-out that came with it. Today, the Government are offering those same hon. Members the gerrymander tax, which will be just as lethal to them.

Who will pay for the gerrymandering extravaganza that we are about to embark on? Last week, the Minister with responsibility for local government in Scotland said in *The Scotsman:*

"Cutting costs is not, however, the main objective of the reform."

Too true it is not. He went on:

"What is abundantly clear is that the reform will pay for itself within about five years and will thereafter save money."

Not a single person in Scotland believes in the sort of accountancy fiddling that is going on.

In the same article, the Minister said that he would "further refine the figures". However, the figures change every time a Minister speaks. Today, the Secretary of State told us that we should accept the figure he gave of £200 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) was using Government figures when he proved that, even on the basis of the Government's wildly optimistic figures, the cost to the council tax payer will be substantial. The Minister, however, has now informed us that he has refined the figures yet again. New figures were quoted in *The Scotsman* last week and new optimism was expressed. Not a jot of new evidence was provided, however, to back up those figures.

It is not surprising to discover that not a single expert agrees with Ministers' rose-tinted expectations. Even the Government's own supporters do not take the figures at face value. Mr. Arthur Bell is a prominent Scottish Conservative. He is no fair weather friend—one is not a Tory in Lanarkshire and called a fair weather friend of the Tory party for very long. Last week, he addressed a meeting at the Strathclyde business school in Glasgow and said of the Government's range of possible savings:

"If anyone came to me with a gap as wide as this I would be amazed. I would not wish to make major changes in my business without being more accurate."

In this case, Mr. Bell is spot on; he is absolutely right.

The apparently precise savings figures are bogus. The Secretary of State confessed that in a letter to my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), in which he was a lot franker than he has been so far in public. He wrote:

"the eventual costs and savings arising from reorganisation will depend to a large extent on the activities of local authorities themselves. Most of the decisions on matters such as staffing levels and accommodation requirements will be a matter for individual councils, not central Government. Consequently, it will be for local government to determine the exact level of savings accruing from reorganisation."

What that actually means is that the Secretary of State does not know; he has not got a clue; all he says is that it is up to local government to determine the costing. If that is the case, he should listen to what local government representatives are unanimously telling him about what the reforms will cost them, the country and the individual council tax payer.

Mr. Lang: It is plain that the hon. Gentleman did not listen closely to what I said. I explained that the gap in the estimate of costings is so wide because it will depend on the decisions of 28 separate local authorities.

The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I will listen to local government. According to the views of local authorities to which I am listening, if Tayside became a single-tier authority, it estimates that it would make a saving of £8 million. Angus district estimates that it would make a saving of £5 million. If Dundee were to become one of three authorities in Tayside it estimates it would make a saving of £2 million and Fife estimates that it would make a saving of £5 million should it become a single-tier authority.

Mr. Robertson: I shall deal with local government figures later. It is worth underlining the bogus and spurious figures. The Minister responsible for Scottish local government said that, having looked carefully at all the evidence and refined their original estimates to reflect input from local authority interests and others,

"our conclusions are that one-off transitional costs of between £120 million and £186 million are . . . quickly offset by ongoing annual savings of between £22 million and £66 million".

Those are precise estimates for something that will lie purely and simply in the hands of local government.

However, I base my figures not on that optimistic crystal ball gazing in which the Secretary of State for Scotland indulges, but on the views of the Scottish branch of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which puts forward solid, detailed arguments to show that the Scottish council tax payer and taxpayers in general will pay heftily.

The Government still will not say who will pay and the Secretary of State has come out with a new formula today, saying that central Government will pay almost all of the transition costs. He should then be in a position to say what "almost all" means—is it part, half, two thirds, three

[Mr. Robertson]

quarters, 90 per cent? As the Government do not even know what it is, they cannot be in a position to tell us. We must guess who will pay.

Will the Treasury pay? Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer pay for the cost of Scottish local government reorganisation when the Government have a £50 million deficit and, according to leaks from every Department, must even consider cutting dole payments and invalidity benefits? Will they pay for the extravaganza of producing a Tory-redrawn map for Scotland? That is hardly likely. Are Scottish Office and Welsh Office budgets now sufficiently expandable to take account of the money? That, too, is hardly likely. The answer that everybody in Scotland and Wales expects, is "you pay", the taxpayer pays. "Tax today, jam tomorrow"—the usual Tory slogan.

The figures in CIPFA's document are based not on the Government's fantasies but on the concrete example and experience of the reorganisation of the metropolitan counties, which took place in England and Wales not so many years ago. The most respected body in its field, it produced in March a devastating indictment of the Government's Touche Ross calculations. It said that savings had been overstated and potential costs understated. It said that the margin of error was considerable and that the report did not properly assess the likely cost of reforms. It backed up all its claims with the facts and figures that the Government so glaringly have not produced for Parliament or the people.

I offer two examples from CIPFA's report. First, on retirement and redundancy costs, CIPFA says that Touche Ross

"seriously understates the potential costs associated with this item."

It uses the actual, not the imaginary, experience of the much less complex reorganisation in the metropolitan counties, Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and Avon and shows that the figures range between 1·7 to 2·7 per cent. of expenditure. In Scotland, the equivalent is between £125 million and £200 million on that item of expenditure alone.

The second heading is on winding up existing authorities. The White Paper says that Touche Ross calculates that that would cost £88 million in Scotland—only 2 per cent. of local authority expenditure. But it does not even bother to try to prove it. For a much less complicated reorganisation in Greater Manchester, the cost over five years totalled £13·5 million. The equivalent in Scotland would be £275 million.

So for those two items alone—many more items have been catalogued—the one-off transitional cost would be between £400 million and £675 million. That is about a half a billion pounds on two items alone. That is on the recent calculation of the very local government experts, who the Secretary of State for Scotland says will determine the costs and savings.

The shambles has one message for the people of Scotland and of Wales: very soon, there will be more taxes, bigger burdens, more waste. It is all to pay for a sordid exercise in gerrymandering in the Borders. The gerrymandering was casually and openly admitted by Brian Meek and is scarcely a secret in Scotland, but it is a scandal nonetheless. It will appear all the more so when the outside dispassionate world considers the redrawn Tory map of Scotland, which was described in the editorial of *The Scotsman* newspaper on 21 August as:

"A map drawn to no higher democratic principle, no deeper logic, than the electoral advancement of the Conservative Party in Scotland".

That put it bluntly and accurately.

In the Borders, Berwickshire is gouged out and joined up with a part of East Lothian. The regional convener of Borders regional council, that well-known radical and left-leaning figure the Earl of Minto, said:

"The decision to amputate Berwickshire from the Borders is in my opinion the worst decision of any kind that I have encountered in my life".

In Lothian, gerrymandering descends to pure farce. Even our unfair weather friend Brian Meek found it difficult to swallow what was happening in Lothian. He said:

"I have to say that I found the proposal to gouge out a slice of East Lothian and send it, via the Peterno corridor, to join up with Mid and West Lothian a little on the contrived side."

He goes on to say—this is really getting back to basics:

"Nor does there seem to be a strong political case for it"—

as if that would justify the policy in some way.

In Tayside, despite the changes announced by the Secretary of State today, Dundee city has still lost some of its major commuter communities in Monifieth and in Invergowrie. That leaves the city to pay the hefty bills for services provided to those people who are now taken out of the city boundaries.

In Central region, the obsession with keeping an 81,000 people-strong Stirling safe haven means that a forced marriage will occur between Clackmannan and Falkirk, two distinct and different communities separated by a river estuary and joined only by a bridge that happens to be in Fife region. That bridge, the one connecting point between those two joined-up counties, is scheduled to close for six months in the year that the new council is expected to come into existence.

In Strathclyde, the Alice in Wonderland redrawing goes on apace. Ayrshire is artificially split in two, with South Ayrshire just happening to be Tory-controlled—for the moment. Kyle and Carrick district council has 113,000 people, while North Ayrshire will have a council representing 263,000 people. East Renfrewshire, the home, redoubt and last resting place of the Minister with responsibility for Scottish local government, has a mere 88,000 people. That basic building block in the contrived structure will sit beside West Renfrewshire with 265,000 people and South Lanarkshire with 317,000 people. Helensburgh has been wrenched out of Dumbartonshire. King's Park and Toryglen have been rescued from the original plan to put them in South Lanarkshire and out of Glasgow. The Minister responsible for local government was quoted at the Scottish Tory conference as saying that councils were to be more visible and more accountable to their electorates.

I think that it was again Mr. Arthur Bell who said:

"We have got to get it right this time because this will be local government into the next century. What is proposed is crazy."

Last week, Lothian regional Tory councillor Mr. Ian Buchanan said:

"The problem is not that the reforms do not go far enough, but that they are going in the wrong direction completely. The White Paper is a backward looking document, a plan for the last century not for the next century".

One statistic says it all. The average population base for the 25 unitary authorities would be 204,000 people, but for the five Tory safe havens it will be 95,800. That tells us everything.

There is one measure that was to be in the legislation for Scotland but is not—full-scale English and Welsh-style privatisation of water. That was the Secretary of State's ambition. All along, that has been the Government's ambition and, although Ministers shake their heads and feign innocence, we all remember that day in March when the Prime Minister told us:

"I have no reason to doubt that water privatisation in Scotland will be effective and efficient, as elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 783.]

That was what the Prime Minister said, but the Government were warned off by united and decisive Scottish public opinion and the message finally got through: the Scottish people want water in public hands. The Systems 3 opinion poll, which was commissioned by COSLA in the past couple of weeks and published this morning, shows beyond any shadow of doubt that 95 per cent. of all Scots want Scottish water in Scottish local government hands. Of those interviewed who said that they would vote Conservative at a general election tomorrow —perhaps a very small sample—86 per cent. said that they wanted to keep water in Scottish local authority hands.

I appreciate that the danger of water privatisation has not gone away. We will stay alert to the Government's plans and their intentions. The Government now know that their own political annihilation would be the price to pay at the next election if they were to dare to tamper with Scotland's water and the way in which it is controlled. The new quangos for water are a paving measure, but they are a climbdown in the face of a public opinion scalding that even this Government have never experienced before.

What is the agenda for the turmoil and upheaval that this reorganisation will cause in Scotland? Who will pay the price, the real cost of the confusion that will be created? Scottish industry has already expressed serious reservations. The Institution of Civil Engineers wrote to the Government earlier this year, making this point:

"the case for reorganisation has not been made and an independent committee of inquiry should be set up to fully investigate the present system before further changes are made."

Other business people have expressed serious concerns about the fragmentation of a system that they know and understand and, on transport infrastructure, that they have come to value, especially in regard to what has happened in Strathclyde.

What is in this reorganisation for the thousands of Scots who use concessionary travelcards all over the country —the 340,000 elderly people who benefit from that provision? What is in it for school pupils and parents in localities where catchment areas are being scythed to pieces by new boundaries? What will be the future for special education in the tiny council areas? What will happen to voluntary organisations?

It is a recipe for chaos and waste—chaos in the name of efficiency, disruption in the name of cost-effectiveness and quangos in the name of democracy. George Orwell should have been writing about 1994, not 1984.

Democracy is in question. This reorganisation, if it gets through Parliament, will be the paving measure for yet another lurch to the non-elected state, with more quangos taking decisions but being accountable to no one and more joint boards meeting away from the public searchlight, offering less accessibility but more bureaucracy.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): The hon. Gentleman is waxing eloquent about joint boards and joint arrangements, but his party's paper, "The Future of Local Government", says:

"In a limited number of cases it will be necessary to examine joint arrangements. In different circumstances police, fire and water and sewage services may require these joint arrangements."

Mr. Robertson: We know that there will be hordes of those arrangements, not only those that I have mentioned but many more. Joint arrangements already exist in certain areas. However, the sheer multiplication that will be involved in the reorganisation, with tiny councils buying in services, makes everything else pale into insignificance.

I thought perhaps that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), whose roots remain firmly in the central belt, might have enlightened us about events in the Greater Glasgow health board. I will come on to that in a moment, because that is extremely relevant to what we are talking about. More and more boards and committees will be packed by more and more Conservative cronies.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): My hon. Friend mentioned the year 1994. Is he aware of a rumour that is running around the Welsh media that the Secretary of State for Wales is to announce this evening a delay of 12 months in the proposals? Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to press the Government on whether there is any truth in that rumour?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend will have noticed that the Secretary of State for Wales scarpered off quickly and, who knows, he may be now holding a press conference. However, that is a relevant question, and I hope that Ministers will rise to dispel that rumour.

At least in Scotland—I say this for the Secretary of State for Scotland—we know precisely what the timetable is to be. Welsh Members on both sides of the House have a right to know the timetable for reorganisation in Wales. I will give way to the Secretary of State for Scotland if he wishes to comment on the matter. The right hon. Gentleman may have been spending so much time rehearsing Welsh place names that he has not got round to asking any real questions to do with Welsh reorganisation.

The Secretary of State for Scotland has addressed the question of the lack of co-operation of local authorities in their own execution. The right hon. Gentleman and I appeared on BBC Scotland's "Upfront" television programme last week, and the Secretary of State was asked penetratingly by Ms Kirsty Wark why he was not abandoning next year's regional council elections. The Secretary of State's reply was very interesting. He said that they could not possibly pre-empt the will of Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman implied that the Government do not know whether regional councils are to be abolished, and therefore the Government could not take such pre-emptive action. Yet the Secretary of State expects councils in Scotland to conspire and co-operate in their own demise before even they know precisely what the form of local government will be at end of the process.

Mr. Lang: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for intervening again, but I am sure that he would not want to mislead the House. The point I made was that the legislation could not pass through Parliament before the date when the regional elections were due to take place. If the hon. Gentleman gives me an assurance that the

[Mr. Lang]

Opposition will assist in the early implementation of the legislation, the way would be clear to move on those regional elections.

Mr. Robertson: The answer is no. There will be no co-operation in the early implementation of a reorganisation that can only cause chaos and which is purely bound up with the political purposes of the Scottish Conservative party.

It is interesting to note that decisions cannot be taken about regional elections, but apparently everyone else must assume that the Bill will go through in the exact form that is proposed by the Government.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): The hon. Gentleman has delved into Welsh matters. In view of what he has said, why is the Welsh Labour party in favour of the unitary principle?

Mr. Robertson: The answer is that we want to create assemblies in Scotland and in Wales. A parliament or assembly would have the right to decide on the best way or reorganising local government. That is the way to do it, and not in the gerrymandering fashion that is proposed.

I am sure that Welsh colleagues will find it interesting beyond belief that the Minister can stand up to make such a debating point, but he cannot inform the House what the time table for local government reorganisation is in Wales. [HON. MEMBERS: "They've had 14 years."] Fourteen years is surely plenty of time to think up an answer. I cannot help thinking that the Secretary of State for Scotland's training in the Footlights at Cambridge could have been more useful, and perhaps he could give some lessons to his colleagues in the Welsh Office in slick footwork.

Democracy is in question because of the incredible proliferation of jobs and more jobs for the Tory fair-weater friends. No more sinister evidence could we have of the implications of that Tory non-elected state than events within the Greater Glasgow health board in the past few weeks. A top official in the largest health authority in Great Britain is summarily dismissed in his absence after he has allegedly questioned the level of expenses claimed by his chairman—the Secretary of State's golfing friend, whose business has just gone into receivership.

The dismissal of that chief executive reaches the ears of Ministers not through any formal channel but by means of a press release from the Greater Glasgow health board. The Minister who receives the press release is said to be furious at it. Two weeks later, that top official, who was so bad and so useless in his job that he had to be instantly dismissed in his absence, is found a new, unadvertised, senior and extremely well-paid job with the Minister's own National Health Service Executive. Then the very man who dismissed him, and who will now not face the legal action that the dismissed official said that he intended to take, tells us all how wonderful the original chief executive was and how complimented he is that he has been found a job inside the national health service.

Nobody, but nobody, answers questions—not the chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board, Mr. Bill Fyfe, not the Minister, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, not even the golfing friend of the chairman, the Secretary of State for Scotland. Public money is spent; jobs are lost and suddenly found; reputations are damned and then resurrected. "Back to basics," the Government say, their tongues in their cheeks and their hands in their wallets. They tell us all to go back to basics.

I shall ask the Secretary of State for Scotland some pointed questions, but, before doing so, I remind him of the words of the Secretary of State for Wales in the House of Commons only a few weeks ago:

> "Everyone who operates in the public sector has a clear responsibility to be scrupulously correct in all his or her dealings and to be seen to be above reproach."—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 148.]

So I ask the Secretary of State the following questions. Why was Mr. Lawrence Peterken sacked? Why was that dismissal instant? What had he uncovered or suspected about Mr. Fyfe's expenses? Who was on the audit committee which cleared Mr. Fyfe of the reported allegations? Did Mr. Lawrence Peterken agree with the decision taken by the audit committee? Was the decision to dismiss Mr. Peterken taken unanimously by the Greater Glasgow health board? Was the job offer at the national health service executive made conditional on the dropping of any legal action against the Greater Glasgow health board? Why was the job of special projects manager at the national health service executive not advertised? How many other jobs have been made in that department without any advertisement?

I ask the Secretary of State those questions because they are serious. The public in Scotland, in line with what the Secretary of State for Wales rightly said, deserve answers to them. There is no other forum than Parliament in which to seek the answers. There is no means by which the taxpayer can question the Greater Glasgow health board other than through the Cabinet Minister who appoints the people who run the board. The Secretary of State is due, in all conscience, to give an answer to those questions to the House. They are important questions. Only Ministers can give answers to them. But perhaps Parliament will have to take more measures to seek answers.

Today, I have written to the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of the House to ask whether he too will investigate the circumstances in the Greater Glasgow health board. Where public money and public duties are involved, Parliament is the only custodian of the public interest and the Secretary of State for Scotland is answerable to Parliament.

We are told that, with 160 clauses, the Scottish local government Bill will be the biggest Bill presented to Parliament since 1979. We are told also that the Government want to get it through both Houses before the summer. I must tell the Government that we will fight it line by irrelevant line. The gerrymander tax and the gerrymandered map will not get to the statute book easily or quickly.

We will not filibuster to delay the Bill, but, on behalf of those who will have to pay the additional tax and live with the map should the Government get their way, we will ensure that the Bill gets the scrutiny that it needs and should have had before it ever came before the House.

Throughout the country, we will expose this taxing, fiddling and conniving Government for what the proposed legislation tells us plainly that they are: a Government without support and without credibility, now wedded in desperation for their survival to a measure reeking of one thing alone—crude political self-interest. The people will judge them severely.

Mr. Win Griffiths: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I want to raise with you a serious issue that has arisen out of the opening speech of the Secretary of State for Scotland, when he made a few brief remarks about the changes that will take place to boundaries in the local government reorganisation in Wales.

I have already intervened to ask whether, during the debate, the Secretary of State can be more precise about what he described as a modest adjustment to the border between the Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend. I have since been told behind the Chair that, of the four communities affected, only one will be put back into the Bridgend area.

I ask whether you, Madam Speaker, consider that the way in which that information was relayed in the Chamber today is good enough for the standard of debate that you oversee?

Madam Speaker: That was a good try, but the hon. Gentleman must be fully aware that it is not a point of order. There has been no breach of our Standing Orders. He will have to tease out of Ministers the information that he is seeking, so that it can be properly recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr. Ron Davies: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether, in that process of teasing me, we could tease the Minister for a while. The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) raises is a valid one, because we now face the prospect of having a debate up to 9.30 pm on proposals about which we are not fully aware. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he will be making boundary rearrangements—changes to the published map—in respect of Powys, new Flintshire and the Vale of Glamorgan, to which my hon. Friend referred.

I understand also that the Secretary of State has indicated to the media his intention to change the announced timetable. That puts us in an impossible position. We are supposed to be spending the time between now and 9.30 pm debating the proposals, yet we do not know what, in definition, they will be. Neither do we know the timetable that the Secretary of State is proposing. The Minister of State, Welsh Office is present. The Secretary of State must have taken him into his confidence on these matters.

I ask that you, Madam Speaker, put your expression of concern direct to the Minister so that we can perhaps get a statement from him, particularly on the timetable and the boundary changes.

Madam Speaker: The point that the hon. Gentleman is raising is a serious matter, but it is not a point of order. It is a matter for debate, and it must be developed during the course of the debate. If the Minister seeks to make a statement, of course I must listen to it, but that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Wigley: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You have often said, as have your predecessors, how unsatisfactory it is if information is given to the press outside the Chamber on matters that are relevant to those being debated in the Chamber and is not made available to hon. Members who are taking part in the debate. That appears to have happened in this instance, particularly with regard to the timing of the introduction of the change for Wales.

In those circumstances, might not it be appropriate for the Minister of State, Welsh Office to make a statement?

Madam Speaker: I have only what the hon. Gentleman tells me to go on. I am not aware of statements that have been made to the media in any form at any time. I can say only what I am aware of, and I am not aware of that. Therefore, I must assume that, if the Minister wishes to make a statement later, he is going to do so. I cannot interrupt the debate at this stage unless the Minister is going to make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You have already said that there is no point of order and that it is entirely a matter for debate. During the debate, I hope to help the hon. Members who have raised various points.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a different point of order, which I think you will decide is a genuine point of order, Madam Speaker. When the Secretary of State for Scotland opened the debate, he criticised the Labour party for its views on who should participate in votes on issues relating to Scotland and, for that matter, to Wales. Can you confirm that, at the present time at least, Standing Order No. 85 remains applicable, and that, unless the Government decide to try to avoid a Standing Order which has been a Standing Order of this House for 90 years, all Welsh Members will be members of the Standing Committee which will deal with the Welsh local government Bill when it is eventually allowed into this democratically elected House?

Madam Speaker: Certainly at the moment I can confirm that Standing Order No. 86 is correct, as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has just outlined.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does it relate to Standing Order No. 86?

Mr. Hain: No——

Madam Speaker: In that case, I call the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson).

4.5 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland said when he opened today's debate, the debate on the Gracious Speech on Thursday was indeed truly revealing with regard to the current constitutional thinking of the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). His contribution in that debate will be long remembered. He announced new constitutional arrangements that would come into force should he ever become Prime Minister.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland so eloquently said earlier, the conclusion of those constitutional arrangements must mean that English Members will vote only on English matters; Scottish Members will vote only on Scottish Matters and—although the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did not say this—no doubt Welsh Members will vote only on Welsh matters and Northern Ireland Members will vote only on Northern Ireland matters.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland gave the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, the hon.

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

Members for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) and for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), ample opportunity to come to the Dispatch Box and say whether they disagreed with his conclusion. Neither of them took that opportunity. Perhaps when they reply to the debate later, they will have thought more about the subject, will have telephoned Monklands and have a line on that.

Will the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen confirm that, should the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East ever become Prime Minister—a Prime Minister representing a Scottish seat—he would never take part in, vote in or answer questions in respect of purely English legislation? Will they confirm that on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3.15 pm the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East would not answer a question on a matter of purely English or Welsh content?

Would there be an addition to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's usual standard reply about his engagements? Would another standard reply enter our proceedings? When asked a question on an English matter by an English Member, would the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East have to say, "That is a matter which I, as a Scottish Member of this House, am unable to comment upon?"

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East was talking nonsense last Thursday. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen know that. He was making a mockery of the constitution. He was either playing to the nationalist supporters on the Benches behind him or he was playing to the nationalist supporters in his proposed new constituency. Either way, the House has a right to know from the Opposition Front Bench whether that is the latest constitutional thinking of the Labour party. The least that we can expect is an admission that the right hon. and learned Gentleman got it hopelessly wrong. When the Opposition spokesman replies to the debate, I hope that he will clear up the confusion.

Over the summer, the debate that has developed in Scotland on local government reform has been fascinating. Each of the Opposition parties has tried desperately to deny its own past commitments to single-tier councils. They have tried to distance themselves from their manifestos which appeared last April. They have been encouraged by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is desperate to get in on the act.

It is worth reminding the House about COSLA's role. First, it announced a grand campaign of non-co-operation which we were told would force my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to abandon his plans. When that did not work, COSLA redefined what it meant. When that did not work, it relaunched it. When that did not work, COSLA redesigned it. When that grand plan of non-co-operation did not work, COSLA reassessed it. In November, no doubt, it will bitterly regret it.

A more serious debate than the one offered by COSLA has taken place, and it was most revealing. Over the summer it emerged and became apparent to all that there are two different visions of local government on offer to the people of Scotland. First, there is the vision of my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues that offers strong, accountable and genuine local government. Secondly, there is the confusing vision of two tiers that leads to remote regions, buck-passing between region to district and district to region and people being passed from pillar to post and back again. My right hon. Friend's plans offer a strong, obvious, councillor-elector relationship and, most importantly, a council with which people can identify. Crucially, under those plans, there would be no centralisation and no drain of power from the communities to the centre or from the peripheries of Scotland to the central belts.

The councils proposed would be the most powerful local authority units that Scotland has ever seen. They would be responsible for services that directly touch the lives of everyone living in Scotland—from social work to education, from leisure and recreation to roads, from libraries to fire and from police to planning. All those services and more would be the responsibilities of elected local councillors in town halls throughout Scotland.

The Labour party offers a different vision. Every time its manifesto commitment of single-tier local authorities is quoted, as we heard from the hon. Member for Hamilton, Labour Members shout back and rejoice in yelling that it would occur only with a Scottish assembly. What impact would a Scottish assembly have on local democracy in Scotland? What would be the future for local accountability in a city such as Aberdeen or a town such as Inverness if there were an assembly in Edinburgh? It would have all the relevance of the present Lothian region and the sensitivity presently shown by the Strathclyde region.

Fortunately, we do not have to wait for the nightmare of a Scottish assembly to occur to assess its impact, because in fourteen and a half years, the Opposition have not been idle. They decided what they would do and let us know vividly. The assembly would be one of many and varied powers. The Opposition tell us that it would take powers from this House relating to agriculture, fishing, social security, health and, according to the latest document from the Scottish Constitutional Convention, it would take electricity generation—from whom, we do not know. Probably, the Opposition would not deny any of that.

We have not heard today and certainly did not hear during the summer that, in addition to the powers that the Opposition propose to take from the House to give to a Scottish assembly, they would flesh the powers out with other powers and responsibilities that are currently in the hands of local authorities across Scotland. We are told that they would take education, fire, police, housing, local roads, transport, planning and industrial development to Edinburgh. Opposition Members murmur, but it is no use denying those proposals.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman needs some education. The Labour party proposed that the legislative power currently at Westminster, in relation to all the services that he described should be transferred from Westminster to Edinburgh, but that the administration of all those services would remain with the local authorities. If the hon. Gentleman is to continue in such a vein of ignorance, he should sit down and let some of my hon. Friends speak.

Mr. Robertson: I thought that the hon. Gentleman would say that. Does he expect the House to believe that the proposed assembly, sitting in Calton Hill, would merely take the administrative power? No, it would not. It would take every other power associated with those responsibilities and the hon. Gentleman knows that full well.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has gey few friends on the Opposition Benches?

Mr. Robertson: Absolutely. All the proposals are contained in the Scottish Constitutional Convention document of September 1990, which the Labour and Liberal parties have signed. It is a charter for destroying local democracy in Scotland, for stripping local councils for all meaningful powers and responsibilities and for moving decision making from town halls and council chambers to the royal high school in Edinburgh. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is so determined to sell it off.

The threat facing local government in Scotland is the threat of a Scottish assembly, which in order to have any meaningful role in the life of our nation would have to plunder and claim for itself the responsibilities of local authorities. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has virtually just admitted that. The story does not end with the powers that those who support the establishment of a Scottish assembly have already said it will take and are intent on its taking.

Paragraph 4 of the Scottish Constitutional Convention document—signed by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats—says:

"It must be stressed that this paper represents a summary, and is not an exhaustive listing, of the range of powers which should be held by Scotland's Parliament. Other areas will require . . . further consideration by the Convention or by Scotland's Parliament itself."

That provision would see powers drain away from local communities in Aberdeen, Dundee, Dumfries, Inverness and Perth to a centralised Scottish assembly on Calton hill. That is the real threat to local accountability and democracy in Scotland.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As one of those present who was involved in the constitutional convention, I suspect that I have a better understanding of the document than does the hon. Gentleman. Does he accept that the interpretation given by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was accurate and that it is the legislative powers of this House that will be transferred to the Scottish parliament? Does the hon. Gentleman further accept—if he insists on quoting—that the documents contain copious references to the need to strengthen local democracy in the localities and communities of Scotland? He should not be so selective in his quotations.

Mr. Robertson: I was in no way selective. I merely quoted the constitutional convention. If the Opposition parties do not like it, no wonder it is falling apart.

To prove my point and in conclusion, I can do no better than to quote one of Labour's great Scottish local government gurus. Writing in the *Glasgow Herald* of 6 March last year, Councillor Jean McFadden, the current leader of Glasgow district council and a past president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, gave the following view:

"I think we have to be very much on our guard here. There may well be a tendency for the Scottish Parliament to suck up power from below."

That says it all. That is why my right hon. Friend's reforms are welcome, why they will work and why they will endure.

4.16 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): You will recall, Madam Speaker, that in the absence of the Secretary of State for Wales we tried to secure from the Minister a statement about the timetable. I hope that we shall get such a statement from the Secretary of State immediately. If word is to be sent out to the Welsh media that it is planned to postpone the Welsh proposals by 12 months, every hon. Member is entitled to know it. It is essential, and a natural courtesy to the House—especially those Welsh Members present—that the Secretary of State should intervene briefly to advise us whether he intends to announce a 12-month postponement. All of us invite the right hon. Gentleman to tell us rather than simply sending word out to the Welsh media, which would be an insult to the House. I am offering to give way to the Secretary of State if he is willing to intervene.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): I have made no statement on the subject to the Welsh media. I will make a statement to the House when I make my speech.

Mr. Rowlands: I think that that means that there will indeed be a 12-month delay.

Going "back to basics"—back to old-fashioned values—has become the theme of our debate on the Loyal Address. I should like to remind the Secretary of State of one or two of those old-fashioned values as they relate to institutions, to communities and to the behaviour of Parliaments and Governments.

A number of us recall very well the previous occasion on which Welsh local government was reorganised, under another Conservative Government. The Bill foreshadowed in the Queen's Speech is designed to unravel everything that was done in 1972. I remember the reaction in the communities: in Pembrokeshire the reaction was strong, and the very concept of Dyfed was rejected. Ministers were unwilling to listen to those objections. Now, 20 years later, they have come back to the House with the intention of unravelling all those changes.

If nothing else, the right hon. Gentleman should approach local government reorganisation with humility, and be willing to listen and heed. He does not represent anybody in Wales, but he represents the Government, and he has been given the transient job of Secretary of State for Wales.

The alteration of institutions and the constitution of a community and society is rather more fundamental than average pieces of legislation. A good old-fashioned thought that we should plant in the Secretary of State's mind is that, generally speaking, it is a good old-fashioned basic value that in such circumstances one tries to seek consensus. One reaches out and does not exercise the brute force of a majority in the House to railroad through institutional and constitutional changes that will be embodied in such a major local government reorganisation Bill.

Mr. Wigley: The hon. Gentleman rightly underlines that it is a major constitutional Bill. I saw the Secretary of State nodding his head to that. In the circumstances, is it not outrageous that it should be introduced in the House of Lords?

Mr. Rowlands: It is a total disgrace. No doubt Standing Order No. 86 will also be waived. That shows how

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miserable and insensitive the Government are to Welsh sensitivities and parliamentary procedures relating to Wales.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The hon. Gentleman has been in this House for a very long time. I would be grateful to know whether he has ever heard of what was supposed to be a major debate in which the Secretary of State for Wales was to make an announcement on timing, according to a letter which I have just received at 4.20 pm, at the end of that debate. How can we debate the issue if we are not told what the announcement on timing is before we hear the Secretary of State's speech?

Mr. Rowlands: The hon. and learned Gentleman mentions my longevity in this House. I have spent most of my time trying to achieve parity for Wales with Scotland. We have now reached the absurd situation in which the Secretary of State for Scotland announced changes to Welsh local government, and the Bill will be piloted through the House of Lords by a Scottish advocate. We have gone back 10 steps as a result. It is an outrage. In the spirit of old-fashioned basic values, the Secretary of State for Wales should think again about the way he is treating the House and Welsh Members on this issue.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I must admit that I am a little surprised that my hon. Friend expected anything else from the Secretary of State for Wales or the Welsh Office. As my hon. Friend knows, many Opposition Members have spoken to the Secretary of State and to his predecessor, who said that he wanted to consider adjustments in the light of hon. Members' representations. As my hon. Friend says, the Secretary of State is listening to no one. He is railroading the measure through on the basis of what has been given to him by his civil servants. He has altered the original proposals of his predecessor, the present Secretary of State for Employment—another Englishman—without taking into consideration the views of the people who will be affected by the legislation.

Mr. Rowlands: Like me, my hon. Friend represents one of the great traditional communities. Our communities are outraged at the way in which our genuine, legitimate and non-partisan representations to the Secretary of State appear to have been totally ignored.

We put a basic and fundamental point to the Secretary of State: when one is changing institutions and constitutional arrangements within a community and society, particularly within a Welsh community which the right hon. Gentleman does not represent and cannot claim to represent in any shape or form, one should heed as well as listen to the voices of those who make a sensible, rational case on behalf of changes to such proposals.

We accept that the Secretary of State has power to railroad the Bill through the House and that he will have power to waive Standing Order No. 86, but in doing so he will offend one of the basic, fundamental principles which were supposed to be the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech —the sensible, responsible, accountable relationship that should occur in such issues. Since the Secretary of State announced his proposals, he has failed to find a single supporter for one of his major changes to local government. He cannot find a local authority, community organisation or any other body from Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr or Rhymney to speak for the heads of the valleys communities. No one supports the proposal to which he is apparently sticking.

He has managed to achieve consensus on one matter —consensus against his proposal. In the spirit of good, old-fashioned, basic and decent values of the sort that he has talked about, why has he refused to listen to the unanimous voice that stretches across the heads of the valleys, which opposes his proposal for an unwieldy local authority called the heads of the valleys?

Incidentally, it is interesting that the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland, which has been sent to us, refers to changing the names of authorities:

"Important among these is the renaming of the proposed Glamorgan Valleys authority to Rhondda-Cynon-Taff, thus ensuring that those historic names are not lost from local government in Wales."

Alongside those historic names there is an equal, if not greater, historic name—Merthyr Tydfil. It predates most of the other valley communities in its development, its history and the role that it has played, but it is to be wiped off the map.

We are not simply asking for palliatives or changes to place names. In Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and, indeed, other authorities across the heads of the valleys, we believe that our sense of civic identity is tied closely to the responsibilities and powers of local government—they go hand in hand. Merthyr Tydfil was a powerful county borough. Even in the Local Government Act 1972 it was especially recognised as a library authority. It maintained certain responsibilities and powers because of its distinctive role and the role that it played as the centre of the heads of the valleys. Therefore, it is not simply an authority that can be abolished at the stroke of a pen or in a schedule to a Bill.

In the Welsh Grand Committee, many of us made a passionate and reasoned case to change the boundaries. I thought that, when there was some consensus on the change, the Secretary of State would accept it. However, he has not done so, unless he makes further announcements. I should be grateful if he could say whether these are the only proposed changes to the White Paper. He would reduce my speech by a few minutes if he briefly intervened to say that these changes only foreshadow other more significant changes of the sort that we have recommended to him. If he does not rise to his feet, I assume that he will not announce anything further this evening.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right: I will not make any other big boundary announcements this evening. My proposals reflect many of the representations that I heard, and many communities will be grateful for the changes that I am making. Of course, many parliamentary processes lie ahead, and it is always worth while for the hon. Gentleman to make his points.

Mr. Rowlands: I have been here nearly 26 years, and I have been in the same Department as the Secretary of State. Frankly, one knows that it is more sensible to make a change to the schedule to a Bill now, rather than to wait and debate the schedule, when the Minister will use English votes to override our further representations. If he is willing and game to say that he is still open-minded on a fundamental issue such as the so-called heads of the valleys authority, we will take every parliamentary opportunity to press our case.

The Secretary of State has already made some announcements. He should realise that, in the case of the heads of the valleys, the representations received have been unanimously opposed to his proposal.

Mr. Rogers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of what my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said, is it not against all parliamentary conventions that on such an issue, the Secretary of State can make announcements at the end of the debate, whereas we are all waiting to participate in a debate on the proposals before us? If it was just sheer arrogance on the part of the Secretary of State I would accept it, but surely we need to know what we are talking about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. The Secretary of State is responsible for his own actions.

Mr. Hain: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State for Scotland announced that Ystradgynlais was going back into Powys from the West Glamorgan authority, which affects my area. He made no statement about Tawe Uchaf. That may be because he cannot pronounce it, but I would like to know.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order either.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene. I thought that it was for the benefit of the House if the Secretary of State for Scotland outlined the changes that I am proposing. I have put the statement on the Board. I believe that there are further details in the Vote Office so that we can have an informed debate. I thought that that would be to the benefit of the House because I thought it much better that hon. Members should see what I was going to say later this evening and be able to discuss it rather than being in ignorance. I hoped that hon. Members would appreciate that.

Mr. Ron Davies: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy. May I put on record the fact that I made recommendations to the Secretary of State and I am grateful that he has at least seen in part the wisdom of the case that we put to him. It would be impossible for us to have a reasonable and rational debate today without foreknowledge of the changes that the Secretary of State was proposing to make. I am grateful that he has taken steps to ensure that we are all aware of them.

It would be helpful, however, in furtherance of the argument that my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) is making—and helpful to the rest of us—if the Secretary of State would clarify two outstanding matters. The first is whether he is prepared to reconsider changes in addition to those that he has announced. The second, which is of fundamental importance, is whether he intends to stick with the timetable that was announced by his predecessor to have elections in 1994, with the new authorities taking effect in 1995.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is still not a point of order, but I have no doubt that the Secretary of State will take note.

Mr. Rowlands: We all know about the nature of government; we know the nature of legislative processes. We have all, in one way or another, been involved in them for a long time. We know that the Secretary of State, having heard all the representations, will not make new proposals during the parliamentary debate.

I have made the case for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney; I argued that as powerfully as I could in the Welsh Grand Committee, and I am trying to argue it now. I cannot, therefore, produce any new arguments for the Secretary of State during the parliamentary stages of the Bill. If a process of repetition works, I shall repeat the argument over and over again until the right hon. Gentleman surrenders, but there must surely be a more rational way to change the Secretary of State's mind. That is to tell him that he has heard our case and I do not understand why he has not heeded it. He cannot possibly claim that he has any representative authority to introduce a local government unit of the type that he has proposed. It was not proposed by his predecessor; it has not been proposed by anyone to him and it has not been supported by anyone since he announced it.

In the spirit of the back to basic values consensus, therefore, I do not know why the Secretary of State is being so stiff-necked about the issue of the heads of the valleys, especially as there is in this case—unlike others—a virtually agreed alternative. He could take some refuge in refusing to change, if he were to say, "There are too many discordant voices offering too many alternatives. I will stick to my original plan because it is the least contentious —everyone else cannot agree on the alternative."

In this case, however, there is virtual agreement on the alternative, which is to divide the so-called heads of the valleys authority into a Merthyr Rhymney and a Blaenau Gwent authority. Its size would be of the same order as that of Monmouthshire, next door to us. What is behind it? I said it before and I repeat it to the Secretary of State. We have the same right of feeling about a civic sense, about roots, about identity, about the relationship between those identities and those roots with local government and local government reforms, as any shire county.

Why does the wonderful word "shire" apparently roll off the mouths of Conservative Members as if it had magical properties, allowing authorities the size of Monmouthshire in Wales? The Government do not heed our views when it comes to an urban community with an equally powerful sense of tradition, civic pride, identity and roots. Our people believe that their community is the basis from which local government services should be delivered. We are not a shire, so we cannot exercise the functions that an authority of a similar size, such as neighbouring Monmouthshire, can exercise.

What is the prejudice against the concept of an urban community with traditions as strong as any shire? Why are those traditions being ignored? Why do they not have the same force in the argument? Is it because we tend to be socialist and because we voted against the Tories? I hope that it is not from any sense of party.

Mr. Redwood *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Rowlands: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. If it is not, why does he not listen to us and heed what we are saying? It will not do much damage to his Bill or to the system of local government. I think that we were delivering local government services in Merthyr Tydfil long before the Secretary of State knew where it was. [HON. MEMBERS: "You think?"] No, I am sure that that is so. We really believe in local government—we believe in

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ourselves and in the concept of our borough status. That status survived 1972, although we lost powers to the county, and it even survived the attempted changes in the mid-1930s. I am writing a book on that period. So why, in 1993, does the Secretary of State abolish us just like that, without any meaningful support for his alternative?

Mr. Rogers: Surely the answer to my hon. Friend's question is that it is straightforward political gerrymandering. The Secretary of State may not be concocting boundaries to get a Conservative vote in Wales, because he will not get one in our areas, but he hopes that, by appealing to the people of the shire counties, maintaining shire boundaries and being biased towards them, he will scrape——

Mr. Alex Carlile: He will get no votes in Montgomeryshire.

Mr. Rogers: Yes, I know that we have a couple of odd ones here and there, other than Tories. The Secretary of State is hoping to keep Monmouthshire and he is hoping that he will be able to do it with his own little bit of gerrymandering.

Mr. Rowlands: Perhaps I am naive, but I am not accusing the Secretary of State of gerrymandering, because that is a futile exercise in our neck of the woods. I therefore do not understand why he wants to be so offensive to us, and why he insists on driving through a proposal that offends us so deeply and which has no support.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): On the subject of the Conservatives' apparent affinity with the shire counties, I invite my hon. Friend to comment on this anomaly. The shire county of Monmouthshire is to be shorn of all its urban parts. What could be the reason?

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend is tempting me to stray into other territory. I understand his point. That change has aspects of gerrymandering, but I do not think that that could be the purpose for the change in the case of the heads of the valleys authority.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that it would be difficult to establish an accusation of gerrymandering in my constituency? As I understand it, every community being returned to my area is represented by Labour councillors.

Mr. Rowlands: The hon. Gentleman is making my case for me. If the Secretary of State can make a sensible and rational decision in Ystradgynlais why, in the name of heaven, can he not do so on behalf of the communities that I represent? That is all that I am asking. Why can he not do that for us? I am a great believer in the shires; I am not against them. My wife is a Carmarthenshire girl and was a most bitter opponent of the changes. She has frequently bent my ear on the absurdity called Dyfed and some members of the Government seem to have recognised and acknowledged that absurdity. It was pointed out to them way back in 1972 that it was nonsense.

Let us not create another nonsense called the heads of the valleys authority, which has neither support nor consensus, except a consensus against. If the Secretary of State's nods and so-called pleasant approach to these matters, and the changes he has made already, are to mean anything, I hope that he will say to us tonight that not only will we have future parliamentary processes but that he has listened to our case, not only in the Welsh Grand Committee but in the House this afternoon.

Our case is backed and warmly welcomed by the majority of Members on the Opposition Benches, and I hope that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans)—who lives adjacent to our communities and knows them very well—and the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) will support us in an all-party plea to the Secretary of State to change one fundamental aspect of his proposals: to abandon the absurd merger of the heads of the valleys authority and to restore and retain the powerful civic sense represented by the names of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

4.40 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): The Gracious Speech was widely welcomed in Clwyd, North-West and by all sensible people, particularly the passage which referred to the reorganisation of local government in Wales.

This is perhaps the fourth time that Welsh Members have discussed the reform of local government in Wales and I had hoped that, as the Opposition wanted the debate, we would hear something new from them. Alas, it was not to be. As the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said—it seems to be the Opposition's view—repetition works. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that repetition will not work as far as I am concerned, not even if he becomes blue in the face.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman said that sensible people would welcome the changes that have taken place in his area—so I am not sure why he is accepting them. Our arguments are repetitious because they are the best arguments; they are arguments which need to be consistently and properly made. We will not fabricate arguments just to make them new. The values on which our arguments are based are there to see; they were transparent to the Secretary of State's predecessor and to the Secretary of State and have been completely and utterly ignored.

Mr. Richards: Conservative Members would be more inclined to listen to the arguments of the Opposition if they did not spend their time trying to undermine the Government's reform of local government by instructing their surrogates in the county councils not to co-operate with the borough and district councils in Wales, thereby making life more difficult.

The publication of my right hon. Friend's Bill is eagerly awaited, certainly in my constituency. Colwyn borough will form a new unitary authority with the neighbouring Aberconwy borough and Rhuddlan borough council will form the new unitary authority of Denbighshire. There will be a sigh of relief from my constituents when this comes about because they are sick and tired of not being able to identify which local authority is responsible for which service, as are constituents elsewhere in Wales.

One of the concerns of my constituents, particularly in Colwyn borough, is that when the new unitary authority is formed, the number of members from Colwyn will equal the number of members for Aberconwy. There is some concern about that equal status. As to the rural areas of Colwyn borough, there is a general acceptance that

Trefnant will and should become a part of the new Denbighshire. My constituents are anxious that the five wards in Colwyn borough should continue to exist, because fewer wards in the rural areas of Colwyn would make it difficult for the new represenatives to operate.

My constituents are also concerned about the status of the county boundary between Clwyd and Gwynedd. There are rumours that it will change. Those rumours have been taken seriously and local health authorities and others are vying for influence in the areas of Aberconwy and Colwyn boroughs which may come into that new health authority area. My constituents would be pleased to know whether the boundary will change.

My constituents' greatest concern about the proposed reform of local government is the point that I mentioned in response to a question from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers)—the disgraceful way in which the Opposition have been organising their surrogates in the county councils in an attempt to undermine the proposed reform of local government. It is an undemocratic modus operandi, but it is not unique. I accept that the Opposition may not agree with Government policy, but they seem to be trying to undermine that policy instead of trying to make the most of it and make it work. The Opposition have been in opposition for some 14 years and no longer seem able to distinguish between opposing the Government and opposing the country.

Another example of the Opposition trying to undermine Government policy can be found in grant-maintained schools. Their attempts to prevent schools, governors and parents from exercising their democratic right to decide freely whether they wish to opt for grant-maintained status is quite disgraceful.

Mr. Rogers: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Richards: In a moment.

I urge my right hon. Friend to use all his powers and to take steps to prevent the Opposition from operating in that undemocratic way.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman mentioned me specifically before he made his outrageous accusations. County councils have a right to make up their own minds. I do not know whether Conservative county councils are controlled from central office, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that Labour county councils make their own decisions and not on instructions from Members of Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman's other outrageous point related to people confounding Government policy on grant-maintained schools. The hon. Gentleman is well known for his wild accusations: will he give some credit to the House and give an example of Labour-controlled authorities, or other people, specifically doing what he has accused them of doing? Let us have a few names.

Mr. Richards: There are several schools in my constituency where the Labour party has specifically attempted to undermine their attempts to become grant-maintained. Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan is a particularly noteworthy example, where not only the county councillors but even council officials were campaigning against its becoming grant-maintained.

My complaint against the Labour party is that, although the borough councils and the districts are trying to get themselves organised to accept the reorganisation of local government, the counties are refusing to transfer the information that is required by those authorities to prepare themselves for that event. The Labour party is also ignoring the future careers of many senior officials within those councils, who may well wish to be employed by the new unitary authorities. Obviously the Labour party has no regard for those people.

Mr. Alex Carlile: If, as we expect, an announcement will be made later today that the elections to the shadow unitary authorities are to be delayed for one year, does the hon. Gentleman agree that that will cause great damage to and uncertainty among local government employees in Wales? Does he share the view that, first, we should be told now what announcement will be made so that we can debate the matter and, secondly, that the elections should take place according to the original timetable?

Mr. Richards: The hon. and learned Gentleman is speculating, and if he wants me to speculate upon his speculation, he is taking matters too far. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement in a few hours and I doubt very much whether it will add to the uncertainty that the Labour party has already created.

Why has the Labour party created such uncertainty? It is not as though the Opposition are against the principle of unitary authorities—they are not. They have embarked upon this particular campaign for one reason alone—they want an elected assembly for Wales. All of a sudden, the Opposition have changed their mind. They have been converted by the colleagues of the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and have now adopted the nationalist agenda. They have taken up that agenda not because they believe in an assembly for Wales, but because they are afraid of the nationalists at the polls. That is the one and only reason for the adoption of that agenda.

Mr. Rogers: The hon. Gentleman is indulging in a flight of fantasy. I had a majority of more than 30,000 over my nationalist opponent, so one can hardly say that the Opposition are running scared.

Mr. Richards: The one thing that the Welsh people will want to learn from the fourth re-run of the debate on this issue is the difference between the Conservatives and the Opposition parties. Every one of those parties wants an assembly for Wales, but the Conservative party does not. We are the party that believes in the United Kingdom, but all the Opposition parties, including the Liberal Democrats, want to break up the United Kingdom. Amazingly, they want to break it up into small pieces which they would then insert into a united states of Europe.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right for an hon. Member to mislead the House, apparently deliberately? The Liberal Democrats are in favour of retaining a strong United Kingdom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Richards: I understand that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) will reply on behalf of the Opposition. Anyone who was present when he last wound up a debate will remember that occasion for ever.

My hon. Friends and I have heard the hon. Gentleman speak on several occasions and he always refers to what he describes as the underspending on various services in Wales. He always says that more money should be spent on

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roads, schools and hospitals. Bearing in mind the fact that the Labour party wants an assembly for Wales which will have tax-raising powers, perhaps the hon. Gentleman can aggregate what he believes that underspend to be and tell us how his assembly in Cardiff would set about raising the funds to cover that deficit. Would it be made up through direct taxation, indirect taxation or corporate taxation? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has plans to raise taxation through all those means.

If the hon. Gentleman finds it a little difficult to provide that aggregate, he can merely look at the existing budget of the Welsh Office. Given that he disagrees with the way in which that money is spent, perhaps he will tell us how he would redistribute the budget.

It is a great pity that the sole representative of Plaid Cymru, the hon. Member for Caernarfon, seems to have left the Chamber. For the nationalists, an assembly in Cardiff is the first stage in their campaign for an independent Wales. The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to reveal at his recent party conference that his party wants not only an independent Wales, but an independent republic. He appears to have gone so far as to work out the details of the ceremony for the inauguration of the president. If I am correct, I understand that he has it in mind that the archdruid of the National Eisteddfod should inaugurate the president. I can only assume that the archdruid would be wearing his Sunday best bed linen.

Should the hon. Member for Caernarfon ever succeed in creating an independent republic, he should think carefully about how he would attract inward investment. Given what the hon. Gentleman said at his party conference, anyone with a connection with Surrey or anywhere else in England would not be happy to invest in a republic over which he had any influence, because he seems to object to their drinking habits.

The counter-proposals of the Opposition parties to the reorganisation of local government in Wales are totally unacceptable to the Conservative party and totally unwanted by the people of Wales, as they showed in the 1979 referendum on the issue when they voted 4:1 against them.

4.48 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): One of the consequences of a linked Scottish and Welsh debate is that those of us who usually contribute to Scottish debates have an opportunity to hear our Welsh counterparts, and vice versa. While the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) was speaking, I could not help reflecting on the contrast between him and his distinguished predecessor, who, in 1989, had the political courage and integrity to stand up and fight Lady Thatcher. I understand the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West to be calling on the Secretary of State to stop Labour county councils having the audacity to campaign against Conservative party policies. Such is the fate of pluralist democracy under the Government.

Although the Gracious Speech attributes only 12 words specifically to Scotland and Wales, it is useful to have today's debate. We shall no doubt be told that other measures in the Queen's Speech will affect Scotland and Wales. That worries us and many students, who see the basic services enjoyed by university students threatened by the proposals that will affect the future of student unions.

I am also worried that the Government may try to insert, in a criminal justice Bill substantially designed for England and Wales, measures that will affect Scottish law and that, because of the nature of Committees, many Scottish Members will be unable to examine the proposals in detail. If that happens, it will be a big step away from even the limited advances which the Secretary of State announced in his "taking stock" proposals.

I suppose that teams from Scotland and Wales, like the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, will attend the Commonwealth games in Canada, and we wish them well.

In introducing the debate, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced some modest but nevertheless welcome changes to some of the boundaries.

Mr. Kirkwood: Not enough.

Mr. Wallace: As my hon. Friend says, those changes are not enough. We are in a different position today from when the Secretary of State made his original announcement on the boundaries. Before that, we had had only four maps with general illustrations on them. Only since 8 July this year have the people in the Scottish communities had an opportunity to consider specific proposals. It is clear from what my hon. Friends the Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) said, that the proposals to lump Berwickshire with East Lothian, put Westhill with Aberdeen and have Fife as a single unit and not allow diverse local authorities within Fife are all strongly opposed in those localities.

The Secretary of State has a duty to tell the House what criteria he will apply in changing the proposals that he is presently stuck with. Will the views of the communities to be affected by the proposals have a bearing on the Government's decisions when the matter comes before Parliament?

In a radio interview that I did with the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) last week, the hon. Member said that the Secretary of State had told him that Parliament would decide. I hope that that means that the Whips will be off when we debate detailed boundary proposals, and that the views of the people will count for a lot.

Ultimately, the important question when deciding whether to support local authority reform is not whether we should have one or two tiers; nor is it about the details of boundaries. Rather, we should examine the legislation to see whether it will lead to greater self-determination for local communities, how communities and individuals can exercise effective control over their localities, and whether the local authorities will be genuinely democratic, providing voters with genuine choice and an opportunity for local determination.

If we pretend that what we have today is an example of local democracy, we shall deceive ourselves. As the Secretary of State said when he addressed the House on that issue on 14 July 1993:

"In the regional elections in 1990, the votes cast and seats gained revealed that it took 3,133 votes to elect a Labour councillor, 6,419 to elect a Conservative and even more to elect a Scottish Nationalist."—[*Official Report*, 14 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 1001.]

He stalled on showing what electoral injustice did for the Liberal Democrats.

That perfectly legitimate point is answered not by gerrymandering boundaries but by a fair and democratic electoral system. Under the present system, even the party that gains the most votes in a local authority will not necessarily form the administration. At the latest district council elections in Edinburgh, 29 per cent. of the vote was won by the Labour party, for which it was rewarded with 30 seats, but 40 per cent. of the vote was won by the Conservative party, which was rewarded with only 23 seats. That is a fundamental injustice and if we are to have local democracy, we must change our voting system.

At best, the proposed changes will lead to a different system, but the outcome is more likely to be a worse situation with more power in the hands of unelected quangos and central Government.

The comments of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) on the situation in Greater Glasgow health board in recent weeks were extremely pertinent. I noticed that the Secretary of State nodded in agreement when the hon. Member for Hamilton quoted the Secretary of State for Wales about the need for considerable scrupulousness in how those public authorities conduct their business.

Mr. Redwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wallace: I think that the whole House would agree on that. If the Secretary of State for Scotland agrees, he is duty bound at some stage—preferably today—to give detailed answers to the pertinent questions put by the hon. Member for Hamilton.

The Government have increased quangos in Scotland year in and year out. In 1988, they were spending £500 million of public money and are now responsible for £1·6 billion of public money. The trouble is that they shield Ministers from direct accountability to the clients of those services. They must remain accountable to the House, and I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland will say clearly that he plans to answer the pertinent questions of the hon. Member for Hamilton.

What is coming down the track but the creation of more quangos in the form of three water authorities proposed for Scotland? The Secretary of State did not refer to water in his speech. It is understood that water proposals would be included in a local government Bill and it is important to recognise that such proposals command no widespread support in Scotland. In the opinion poll referred to earlier in the debate, 95 per cent. of respondents said that they wanted water and sewerage services left in the hands of elected local authorities; only 4 per cent. said that they wanted the three larger water authorities; 85 per cent. believed that privatisation would ultimately result if the Government's proposals were adopted; and 82 per cent. wanted a referendum on the issue.

That raises important questions about democracy: first, about adhering to the overwhelmingly expressed views of the people; and, secondly, about the lack of democracy that will result if powers currently exercised by democratically —albeit not as democratic as most of us would wish— directly elected councillors are handed over to appointed quangos. Those three water boards would be made up of appointees and would have no democratic legitimacy.

Will the Secretary of State agree, even if he intends to set up unelected bodies, that there is a considerable case for allowing the three islands authorities to continue to have their water and sewerage services determined locally? I cannot believe that anyone sitting in Dundee—or wherever he chooses as the headquarters of the board that will represent the north of Scotland—will have the slightest interest in the details of the water supply needed on the islands of Rousay, Papa Westray or Whalsey. I fear that all that we have in common is the water that divides us—either the Pentland firth or the North sea.

I hope that common sense will intervene at that stage and that the islands areas, at least, will not be lumped in with the mega-authorities. The main principle is that water and sewerage services should remain in the hands of directly elected councillors who will be answerable to the people for whom those services are provided.

We want local authorities that are free from outside interference to decide for themselves how to discharge functions. If the Government are trying to say that they want strong local government, those who are elected must have an opportunity to decide. On a simple matter like refuse collection, a local authority can decide whether the refuse will be collected by its work force or whether it will engage contractors. Alternatively, it may wish to devolve some of the responsibility to community councils or have a combination of all threee.

If local authorities are told that it is compulsory to put out refuse collection to competitive tendering, the reason for having local democracy almost evaporates. How can people judge whether councillors are doing a good job if those councillors cannot decide such a fundamental question as who will collect rubbish? If we let the local authority decide such questions, at an election the people will decide whether that authority has done a good job. That is what democracy is all about.

When the Secretary of State suggests that the great problem with the two-tier system has been the confusion between region and district, he does not recognise that the biggest confusion in local government is where local authority responsibility and power end and central Government responsibility begins. Often, the opportunity for local authorities to take decisions that they want to take in the interests of their local communities is frustrated by the big hand of central Government.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) misreads what the Scottish Constitutional Convention and those of us who support a Scottish Parliament want. My party wants to take power from Westminster and to give it to national Parliaments in Scotland and in Wales. We want to go beyond that by increasing the power that is given to local authorities.

Given that, in the past 14 years, the Conservative party has introduced 160 measures taking power away from local authorities and concentrating them in Westminster or St. Andrew's house, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South probably cannot understand that some people believe that power should reside in the communities in which they live. Given his background of Toryism, it is likely that he would not understand such a democratic concept.

We want local government to have a power of general competence. Restrictions on it should be applied by voters through a fair electoral system at the ballot box. A majority of voters should install councillors who will work to provide decent quality services and who will not protect cosy municipal practices, but will try to achieve the best delivery of services for those whom they represent. They

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will be judged at the ballot box by those whom they represent. One looks in vain for such a policy from a party that does not have a great commitment to democracy.

Today, *The Independent* reports a briefing from a senior Minister at the Department of the Environment suggesting that English county councils will be the next to get the boot. It suggests that that will not cause the Government any political difficulty because, with the exception of Buckinghamshire, the Conservatives lost control of every county council at the latest county council elections. As we saw with the Greater London council, when the Government cannot win power through the ballot box, they change the rules and gerrymander or legislate a democratic body out of existence.

One would almost believe that, if they were faced with certain defeat at a general election, the Government would introduce a Bill to extend the lifetime of a Parliament. They would do so in the name of efficiency, using the argument that money would be saved by avoiding a general election. The Conservative party has no real commitment to democracy. Against that background, one cannot believe that any Bll introduced to reform local government in Scotland will do anything to improve the quality of our local democracy.

5.13 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for not being here at the start of the debate. Perhaps, if the Strathclyde region had ensured that we had a reasonable link between the A77 and the M8, I would have made my plane on time. Once again, we are provided with a good reason for bringing about a change in Scottish local government to ensure that the interests of my constituents in Ayrshire will be looked after.

I welcome this debate and the fact that so much time has been made available to discuss Scottish and Welsh interests. There was much talk about the local government proposals having been brought forward without proper consultation, but we have had two major consultations on the matter, one before and one after the last election. It is time to act and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has faced up to the task. Instead of talking and talking, as the Opposition would want us to do, he has acted in a firm, decisive and, in the main, sensible manner.

When we enter the debate, discussions will be localised, which is as it should be. Of course, Scottish interests as a whole will be of interest to every hon. Member who represents a Scottish constituency, but ultimately each one will be looking at his or her own constituency requirements. That is how it should be, and I offer no apologies for taking that approach myself.

At the last election all the parties promised single-tier local government. It was a Tory party manifesto pledge, and I am delighted that we are now presenting it. It was also a Labour party pledge—the party policy document stated:

> "All-purpose councils facilitate the move to an integrated approach to service provision and also decentralisation through a local one-door approach."

That statement appeared in a Labour party document before the last election and, for a change, it contained an element of sense. The one-door approach is wise. It is a pity that the Labour party seems to have thrown it out of the door now, but that does not surprise me.

What did the Liberal party have to say in its 1992 Scottish manifesto? It said:

> "We will introduce a single-tier of local government, to deliver most of the services currently provided by districts and regions."

We should notice the word "most"—the Liberals thought that a Scottish assembly would have pulled in many of the services. Those were the words of the Liberal party manifesto, not mine. That manifesto continued:

> "This will end the confusion about who is accountable for what and bring local government effectively within the reach of the local citizens."

That is right—but what happened to those principles? They seem to have been abandoned.

The Scottish nationalists not only supported the idea of single-tier authorities at the last election, but have done so since. *The Scotsman* of 1 October stated:

> "The SNP believe that the single-tier structure will be the most effective"

form of local government. I totally go along with the SNP's vision.

When we consider local government reform and the fulfilment of Tory manifesto pledges—a mark of Tory government since 1979—we see that those issues cannot be put behind us. I was shocked the other day to hear the Leader of the Opposition suggest that English Members of Parliament had no part to play in the current debate. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is supposedly the leader of the United Kingdom Labour party, speaking for all parts of the United Kingdom. However, he suggested that English Members of Parliament should play no part in the debate on the procedures. *Hansard* of last Thursday gives the facts at column 24. I suggest that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) reads it.

Mr. Win Griffiths: As we were reminded earlier, under Standing Order No. 86—under the present rules of the House—the legislation would be handled by a Committee of Scottish Members in Scotland and of Welsh Members in Wales. That will happen unless the Government decide to set aside a Standing Order that has been in existence since before the first world war.

Mr. Gallie: My understanding is that, within the House, hon. Members represent United Kingdom constituencies. As such, Members of all parties and from all parts of the United Kingdom enter the debate and sit on Committees on United Kingdom affairs. I see no cause for concern about the legislation, and I welcome advice on the issue from all parts of the United Kingdom.

Why has the Labour party changed its views on the issue? There is one specific reason: the voice of COSLA, which is represented heavily by Labour Members from central Scotland. The Labour party founded its strong political base on COSLA and on that central Scottish representation. I should like to think that when we debate the subject in Committee—it will be a long and hard debate on 160 clauses, with many hours of debate—Labour Members will throw aside the vested interests of COSLA and look after their constituents' interests. I offer 100 per cent. commitment to my constituents' interests.

The Labour party in Ayrshire is in the mire. Across Ayrshire, there is great relief that Strathclyde will soon be abolished. The Scottish Labour party will struggle to

maintain Strathclyde and try to hold on to its regions, but Labour Members in Ayrshire have shown signs of dissent. We have a new boy in the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), who may obey his party's instructions, but the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), for whom I have the greatest respect, may follow their instincts and the interests of their constituents.

Mr. Donohoe: Why, therefore, is the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) running scared from a debate on the reorganisation of local government on Friday evening?

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South is well aware that notification of the debate was given only a week ago. I have a full diary. I have already had debates in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and in my constituency. I have no need to run scared of anyone. If the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South wants me to debate the subject in his constituency, I shall arrange a mutually convenient time to do so.

Mr. Foulkes: Perhaps I could offer another reason why the hon. Gentleman is unable to attend, apart from his full diary. He has attended two meetings. Out of a large attendance in his constituency of Ayr he was able to get only four supporters from the floor, and he had to leave before the end of the meeting in Cumnock, but I can tell him that we had a vote and no one supported him. He seems to be moving in the right direction. If he went to Cunninghame, presumably some who supported him at the beginning would end up not supporting him at the end.

Mr. Gallie: As the hon. Gentleman and I are well aware, the large attendance in Ayr was of probably about 60 or 70 politically aligned people, and the same applies to Kilmarnock and Loudoun. Both debates were pretty partial. The debate organised by the community council in Kilmarnock and Loudoun was constructive and worth while. I regretted having to leave the debate in Cumnock early. I do not know whether the people who attended were politically aligned, but, in general, for the most strange reasons, they seem to support the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley time and again at general elections. I do not know what the outcome of the debate was, but it was useful and I enjoyed attending. His constituents gave me a fair hearing.

I remind the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley that I sat on a platform with about eight other speakers and was well aware that each of them would speak against the views that I had expressed. It does not surprise me if, having gone first, my voice did not prevail.

Labour Members from Ayrshire are not in tune with their district councillors. Labour-controlled Cunninghame district council wants to go it alone, as do councillors in Kyle and Carrick. I do not argue with them. That is a matter for the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to pursue. I do not know his view, but I am told that he pledged to people in Cunninghame, North that he would support his councillors in achieving their aim. I shall wait to see whether he does so, because, if he did, it would cut across his party's policy, and on that basis he would probably have to give up his position as deputy shadow transport spokesman.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: I will shortly.

Mr. Foulkes: I shall be very brief.

Mr. Gallie: No, we have heard enough from you—sorry, not from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but from the hon. Gentleman.

Councillors in Kilmarnock and Loudoun are suggesting that they should have a single all-purpose authority. There is something ghastly awry in the Labour party in Ayrshire, and rather than having a go at me, occasionally Labour Members would do better to get together and sort out the problems of the Labour party.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Labour party in Ayrshire did get together at a meeting in Kilmarnock with representatives from all constituencies and we unanimously supported an all-Ayrshire authority. He should be aware, and I hope that he will admit it, that every Labour councillor in Kyle and Carrick and every councillor in Cumnock and Doon Valley supports an all-Ayshire authority. I hope that the hon. Member will admit that.

Mr. Gallie: I do not disagree with anything that the hon. Member says, but Labour-controlled Cunninghame district council and Kilmarnock and Loudoun council have said that they want their own authority. The hon. Gentleman has emphasised my point: the Labour party in Ayrshire is in a mess, and if it has achieved unity, but the local authorities disagree, that merely supports my point.

What would a new all-Ayrshire authority mean to my constituents in Kyle and Carrick? It would mean a loss of say. Under a set-up between Irvine, Kilmarnock and Cumnock, our people in south Ayr would have little voice and that must be borne in mind.

We are told that we have a Tory fiefdom. What a lot of nonsense. In Kyle and Carrick—the future south Ayrshire, south-west Ayrshire, or even Kyle and Carrick; perhaps that is a small change that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State might consider—the local authority is accountable to its people. At each election, its complexion has changed, which is good for local democracy and is what local government is all about. If the council delivers and it offers good services at the right cost, it will be re-elected. If it does not, it is the right of the elector to change the complexion of the council. That will continue to happen in south Ayrshire, and that is a very sound basis for looking forward.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gallie: Despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman showed me no courtesy when he was speaking, I will, of course, give way to him.

Mr. Wallace: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I had just begun my speech when he tried to intervene.

What does the hon. Gentleman have to say to his Conservative party colleagues on the council in the city of Edinburgh? Did not 40 per cent. of the voters turn out to vote for the Conservative party, and yet it got fewer seats than the Labour party and is now in opposition?

Mr. Gallie: I would tell them to keep trying and accept the rules as they stand. They will prevail and, in due course, the electorate will see the light.

Mr. Richards: My hon. Friend was kind enough to give way to the Liberal Democrat spokesman on local government, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Does my hon. Friend recall the recent Tower Hamlets by-election when a leaflet that was produced by the Liberal Democrats was criticised as racist? The Liberal Democrat party said at the time that it was conducting an inquiry into that leaflet. Will my hon. Friend ask the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland when the outcome of that inquiry will be known?

Mr. Gallie: I must tell my hon. Friend for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) that we are talking about local government in Scotland and Wales. However, since I have emphasised that I am a Member of the United Kingdom Parliament, I should be happy to give way to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland if he wishes to respond.

Mr. Wallace *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I suggest that hon. Members stick to the debate on Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Gallie: I feel that you have saved the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland some embarrassment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

What is currently on offer from the Labour party on the local government review? There is no doubt that it will say that it wants a commission. The subject of a commission will come up during the parliamentary debate, no doubt on the Second Reading of the local government Bill, and will be pushed at that time. What would the commission be? It would be nothing more than a talking shop which would put a time barrier on a change for which many people across Scotland cannot wait.

It is in line for Opposition Members to seek delay constantly. They are people who, I would suggest, would never do today what can be put off until tomorrow. Their policies are those of the indecisive, of those who shirk responsibility, and of those who would welcome several layers of government to mask their responsibility.

Opposition Members want a Scottish assembly for just such a purpose. A Scottish assembly would achieve another level of restriction that would be placed on the citizens of Scotland. Another layer of politicians would be added to the requirements of Scottish business, Scottish interests and Scottish development. We certainly do not want an assembly. There has been much talk of the powers that such an assembly would either suck in or have redistributed. We have heard very little from Opposition Members on the cost of such an assembly. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and the hon. Member for Fife, Central should take that on board when they are talking about changes in the constitutional arrangements in Scotland.

In finalising—*[Interruption.]* Maybe I will not finish, given the obvious popularity of my words. I will expand on what the Opposition want to do. I mentioned the loss of democracy in Ayrshire, and the loss of input for my constituents if there were to be an all-Ayrshire authority. I did not mentioned the cost, and what it would it mean for my constituents. I said that we would lose our say, and such an authority would mean my constituents would have excessive amounts to pay.

When I look at the make-up of Ayrshire, I find that, in Cumnock and Doon Valley, 82 per cent. of domestic residences are in the A and B bands of the council tax. In Kilmarnock and Loudon, the figure is 71 per cent. and in Cunninghame it is 68 per cent. In my constituency, 80 per cent. of residences are in the higher bands of the council tax. Believe me, that my constituents are no better off than others in Ayrshire. The facts are that their properties have higher values and their levels of income do not represent that.

Those who are currently worst off, and in particular those pensioners who are just above the levels of social security support, would be the people who would suffer from an all-Ayrshire authority through extra council tax demands. That is one great reason why there is no way that we will go down the path of an all-Ayrshire authority if I have anything to do with it.

Looking at the Gracious Speech overall, there are one or two other issues of importance to Scotland to which I should like to draw to the attention of hon. Members. One is the commitment of the Government to continue to upgrade overseas aid. I applaud that. Considerable progress has been made over the years but, at times, that acts against us. In my constituency, British Aerospace has had to shed jobs because of the misdirection of overseas aid in Brazil. I should like my hon. Friends and right hon. Friends to take that on board and pass it on to the relevant Ministers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman addressed his remarks to Scotland and Wales, and not to Brazil.

Mr. Gallie: I made that point with particular reference to the interests of Scotland and the impact of overseas aid on Scottish jobs. I apologise, and I will now make my second point.

There are references within the Gracious Speech to law and order issues. I trust that those references are spread on a United Kingdom basis, because there is interest in Scotland in changes in law and order and in criminal justice.

The Government are intent under the local government review to make changes to the children's hearing panel system and to the reporter service. I hope that the review will give some teeth to the children's panels to deal with many of the young hoodlums who come before them. I pay tribute to those who sit on the children's panels. They are dedicated to their task and they are interested in the future of Scottish children, but they are also interested in the protection of the public. I hope that that issue will be kept to the fore in the changes that are to be made to the reporter service.

5.38 pm

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): The hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) started his speech by accusing Opposition Members of "talking, talking, talking". The hon. Gentleman has just given an absolutely marvellous example of an hon. Member who has the ability to talk but—as was clear from the rest of his speech—does not have the ability to listen to the people of Ayrshire or to the people of Scotland. The hon. Gentleman's clear interest in the Labour party in Ayrshire leads me to conclude that he is thinking that the only way that he can keep his seat at the next general election is to join the Labour party.

The Government have claimed in the White Paper that they want to make councils more accessible, more

accountable, and more reflective of local loyalties. The Government clearly do not listen to what the people of Scotland want. My view, and certainly the view of my constituents in Dunfermline and west Fife, is that the Government's proposals are not in the interests of Scottish people. The Government's proposals are about centralisation of power at the Scottish Office and here at Westminster. They are about the privatisation of public services and the creation of yet more quangos and well-paid jobs for the Tories' friends such as the former general manager of Greater Glasgow health board.

I shall give a few examples of the Government's failure to listen. In the west end of my constituency is the community of Kincardine. For many years that community has been part of Fife. It is loyal to Fife. Yet the people of Kincardine have been told that they will be tacked on to the newly created council of Clackmannan and Falkirk. They protest loudly.

Thinking that the Government might be prepared to listen to their voices, the people of Kincardine and their community council carried out a survey. They visited 1,016 households. They found that 93·12 per cent. of the people of Kincardine wished to remain in Fife. So will the Government listen to the people of Kincardine? Will they allow them to stay in an area which they feel is accessible and accountable, and to which its people are loyal?

The second example of the Government's failure to listen is the proposals on the future of the management of the water service in Scotland. The vast majority of the Scottish people have said that they want the water service to remain solely within the control of democratically elected councils. They say that water is a basic need which should belong to all the people and not just to the ever fewer friends of the Conservative party in Scotland.

If the Government are still unable to accept that that is what the people of Scotland want, are they prepared to hold a referendum on the water service? The Government might as well—it would be a cost-saving measure—include in that referendum questions not only about what people want for the future of the water service in Scotland but about whether they want a Scottish parliament and about the reorganisation of local government once we have a Scottish parliament.

If the Government want strong and effective local government, they should wait and they should introduce legislation to create a Scottish parliament. If the Government want value for money, as they claim, they should ditch the White Paper because no one wants the changes proposed in it and no one needs them. The taxpayer certainly does not want to see yet another £200 million wasted on yet another whim of the Conservative Government.

The people of Scotland clearly want elected councils which are directly accessible and accountable. They are largely satisfied with the present arrangement. They do not want further hiving off. They do not want an extension of the contract culture. They do not want further unnecessary compulsory competitive tendering. I suggest that the only people who should be put out to contract are the Ministers in the Scottish Office. We can safely predict that no one would want them.

I am aware of other hon. Members' interest in the debate, so I shall conclude. I agree with the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) that proposals should be sensitive and accountable to local needs. If the Government are serious about that, they should take notice of what the people and my constituents in Kincardine are saying. They should keep water in public control. They should promote value for money and competition by giving Scotland Scottish parliament and then allow Opposition Members to show how to improve public services, how to introduce accessibility and accountability, and how to govern a country in the interests of all rather than a few.

5.44 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I realise that this is a debate on Scottish and Welsh local government, but everything that I shall speak about will be of interest and will apply to Scotland and Wales as much as it applies to English local government.

The big issue of the day is the "back to basics" theme, which the Prime Minister is fully behind. The first measure will be the criminal justice Bill. It will strengthen the fight against crime and provide new powers to detect crime and convict the guilty. The second measure will be the education Bill, which will reform teacher training so that new teachers have more practical and relevant experience in how to get the basics right in the schools. There will also be a deregulation Bill, which will remove specific burdens and ensure continuing efforts to leave business, including Scottish and Welsh business, free of unnecessary and burdensome state interference.

I suppose that we were all delighted a short time ago when, after the Police Federation had taken a perhaps difficult stance on the Sheehy report, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was wise enough to accept parts of it but to leave out the fixed-term appointments and the performance-related pay matrix. That was well thought out. It was right that he should take a cautious approach to a service for which the whole world respects us.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that many members of the Scottish police force still have some serious reservations about the parts of the Sheehy report that have been left in? It is not all milk and honey. Officers from constables to chief constable still have serious reservations about the proposals that have been left in.

Mr. Hill: I am inclined to agree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, in a recent paper the chairman of the Police Federation said:

"The battle is not over".

That is true. There must be further and further talks on all the problems that would prevent our police force from working efficiently. We cannot have a police force which is working at half power.

The number of crimes is increasing for many reasons. For example, we have made it far easier for people to talk about child abuse and rape in the home. Brothers and sisters now want to protect each other and will report incidents to the police. The huge volume of crime that we hear about now may well have been submerged and hidden previously. Now it is coming out into the open. That is why crime statistics are particularly horrifying.

I go to the extent of saying that we must all support the police in every way that we can. There is a moral factor here. A police superintendent in my constituency today begged members of the public to come forward as witnesses. There were plenty of people around when a police officer stopped a car and put his hand through the

[Mr. Hill]

window to remove the ignition key. The young thug put the window up and dragged the police officer along the ground for 25 to 30 yards, giving him some nasty injuries.

Those are the sorts of thing that are happening now. They would have been unheard of 30 or 40 years ago as there would not have been such disrespect for the police. But now there is a moral factor, which comes through the education system, the homes and the behaviour of everyone, including hon. Members in the House. Unfortunately, young people feel the need to express their frustration.

There have been two murders in my area, but not in my constituency. In one of them, a young girl was stabbed 27 times. A form of madness is creeping into our society and we must support the police in every way that we can. We cannot allow youngsters of 14 or 15 years of age to come before the courts and say that they cannot be touched. They know that, at the moment, we cannot touch them. We must give the juvenile offenders courts a new power to send persistent 12 and 14-year-old offenders to secure training centres. The maximum sentence for 15, 16 and 17-year-olds should be doubled to two years in a young offenders' institution.

In the worst cases in my area, youngsters who commit 20 or 30 burglaries confess, go before magistrates, get bail and then commit another 20 or 30 burglaries. We must crack down on what are called bail bandits. The new criminal justice Bill, although it will be subject to much debate, provides that youngsters will not get bail if it can be proved that they are persistent bail offenders.

The right to remain silent, too, is an important part of the criminal justice Bill. That matter will be seriously debated, but it will be possible for the court to draw inferences from the silence of a defendant's refusal to answer questions.

We must use more DNA sampling. There is an idea that it should not be allowed, but really it is structural fingerprinting, and we have relied on fingerprinting for many years. It is a new and possible way for the police to obtain non-intimate samples—such clauses are always included—from all suspects arrested in connection with recordable offences.

There is now a new procedure on squatters which has caused much annoyance. I quote the example of people coming home from holiday and finding that they have squatters in their home.

The question of the disruption of country sport will be fiercely debated, as indeed it should be. We must not waste too much time on that. That measure should go through fairly easily.

However, child pornography must be deeply debated, because there is far too much of it. We had an exhibition in the Houses of Parliament at which the Metropolitan police brought conclusive evidence of what is going on with pornography. We are probably the only people who can deal adequately with that matter in legal terms.

I shall now deal with the police and magistrates court Bill. I have a personal commitment tomorrow to go to the Lord Chancellor's Office, because it is dragging its heels on the new magistrates' building that was proposed for Southampton—another 12 courts. It is no good putting up six more prisons and having far more institutions to look after young offenders; the courts must be adequately serviced and we need extra money to build the magistrates court.

I hope that the Government will not go too far towards taking away from the chairman and magistrates of each area the control of the clerk of the magistrates. I do not think that that is the right way to proceed. It is a team effort and I have been visited by the chairman of the magistrates, the magistrates and the clerk of the magistrates in Southampton, who asked me to say a word against that. It is not a matter that will just go away. If the state gradually makes all the appointments, people working in the system will give up a lot of their moral fibre and think that it is no good proceeding.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Many of us have been lobbied about this measure, about which I have great reservations. The people lobbying us are not radical revolutionaries, or even complaining Liberals. They are often lifelong Conservatives who are unhappy about the powers being taken to the centre. In my area in particular, they are unhappy at the twinning of Somerset with Avon so that more of Somerset council tax payers' money will go into the black hole that is Bristol.

Mr. Hill: That was a useful intervention.

Another matter that will not be affecting Scotland—so often Scotland is ahead of the rest of us—is the Sunday Trading Bill, which will be very emotive. It is beginning to seem as though the middle course is the only course. Total deregulation is proposed and we are promised a free vote, for which I am grateful, but there will be a need for partial deregulation. Sunday trading has been a complete mess for many years and we should get it right. We are promised that that will happen before Christmas. There must be a precise administration system if we are to be able to get it before then.

I chaired the Committee that considered the Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland) Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) promoted it. Without crossing any boundaries, I think that the same Bill should be applicable in England and Wales. Hunting knives are pretty fearsome. Any hon. Member who has travelled on the steamers across the channel to France will know that one can buy knives over there with which one can gut an ox. They are freely on sale, and so are guns, but I am talking about knives now, and we must have a uniform law on hunting knives and strong penalties for those who use them against other human beings.

There is a continuing feeling outside the House—as we are told when we go back to our constituencies—that people in certain areas of a city are no longer free to move after dark. Elderly people lock themselves in. We do not seem to have any plan. To my knowledge, no local authority, bar Leeds, employs security police to keep an eye on the emotive corners of large council estates.

There is no doubt that much of the crime on such estates is due to the fact that the youngsters are bored. They gather in gangs and make a nuisance of themselves. If they can find someone to persecute, they will. The future for all local authorities is to consider introducing security arrangements on their high-risk estates. Councils which do that will be highly regarded. Although this may be more applicable to my area than to Scotland, we need security patrols in my area as soon as is humanly possible.

5.59 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): I am sure that the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) will forgive me if I do not follow his argument.

One of the most disappointing things about the Gracious Speech is that the only reference to Scotland is the old news that we are to have a reorganisation of local government. The speech by the Secretary of State for Scotland was extremely disappointing because he did not give the reasons for the reorganisation. From the very beginning, the Secretary of State has not justified his proposed changes. He has cited no surveys, royal commissions or independent studies. He has simply referred to his own views.

Before I consider local government reform in particular, I want to refer to the Gracious Speech in its general terms. The Prime Minister and others have told us that the theme of the Gracious Speech is "back to basics." That sounds like a computer program to me and we should not be surprised about that. The Government have no respect for the individual.

For the Government, people are simply numbers to be manipulated to suit the Government's preconceptions and dogma. The Queen's Speech, and all that has been said about it, shows that the Government are still thirled to short-termism, to which I and others have drawn attention on previous occasions and to which even the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) managed to refer in his resignation speech.

The Government's attitude is to always change the rules and concepts on which they are operating. If the unemployment figures are too high, they change the basis on which they are calculated in order to reduce them. If that does not work, the instruction goes out to take people off unemployment benefit and to put them on invalidity benefit. If the invalidity benefit bill rises to high, people are taken off that and put on income support. At all times, the issue is to avoid responsibility.

We now understand from the press that the Government are concerned that the bill for unemployment benefit is too high. What is their solution to that? The solution is not to get people back to work. Instead, it appears to be to cut benefit back to six months. The Government are always looking for a quick fix. They are doing nothing to stimulate the economy.

We are always told that we are being given new job opportunities and that unemployment is a chance for people to get new jobs. We are told that unfair dismissal is a barrier to job opportunity and to employment. What did the Government do? They reduced the qualification period during which people can raise actions for unfair dismissal.

The Government claim that what they are trying to do in the Queen's Speech, and what they have tried to do throughout their period in office, is to provide people with freedom and choice. The trouble is that that freedom of choice is confined to those who can afford to choose. For example, employers have rights, but employees are denied choice at every level. The same applies in education.

I have no objection to the publication of league tables of how schools are performing. People can then see what is happening. However, the Government fall down because they see publication of those tables as the end of the matter. They do not consider the schools that find it difficult to provide a good service to pupils. The Government do not try to remedy the faults in our education system. The Government ignore all that. They simply publish the tables and hope for the best.

We are now told that if local government is eventually reorganised, there will be no need for a statutory education committee or a director of education. We are told that that also applies to social work. There will be no statutory right for a social work committee or a director of social work.

The Government talk continually about the need for family values. What about the people who are struggling to keep a family together? What about the unemployed who are desperate to obtain full-time work to give their families and children a decent start in life and decent services? They cannot do that, because they are compelled to try to eke out an existence on income support.

The gap between rich and poor is increasing at a rate probably unknown since Victorian or pre-Victorian times. Are the Government worried about that? I do not believe that they are. I believe that the Government want to promote a society in which there is a greater gap between rich and poor. If the Government cannot respect the individual, how on earth do they expect the individual to respect society?

The problem is that, by their actions, the Government debase and debauch the very values that trip so readily from the tongues of Ministers. We need to restore a society that cares for its people and which gives people real rights and responsibilities. Investment in people, in education and in social services is necessary if we are to have real rights and responsibilities in our communities.

Mr. Gallie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Not at the moment.

The Government do nothing to help the elderly and those whom they so often say that they wish to help—those people just above the income support level.

The Government will make an appalling mistake by applying VAT to domestic fuel bills. We were told six months ago that there would be a scheme to protect the elderly and those on state benefits. We still have not heard the details of that scheme. We simply read in the press that we can discuss that scheme only once the public sector expenditure round is passed. In other words, pensioners and those in need are at the bottom of the queue and not at the top.

I want to fire a warning across the Chamber. We hear in the House and elsewhere that, once a VAT rate of 7·5 per cent. or 15 per cent. is applied, there is nothing that we can do about it. I do not accept that. We are told that it cannot be changed because there is a concordat with the European Community—or the European Union, as we are now supposed to call it. I suppose that we will all have to learn the new names. I do not accept that we cannot change the rate of VAT.

I understand that harmonisation of VAT is desirable and even necessary in an open-border economy in respect of tradeable commodities and consumer goods. However, VAT on domestic fuel bills is not a choice or a tradeable commodity. Fuel is a necessity. The Opposition Front Bench as well as the Government Front Bench should be carrying forward the argument in Europe. When Labour comes to power, it will not accept that we have no right to reduce or even abolish VAT on electricity bills. We must carry that fight at every opportunity in the European Community.

[Mr. Hughes]

I want now to consider the reorganisation of local government. I make no secret of the fact that I have always been in favour of single-tier authorities. I was against the two-tier authority system when it was announced by the Wheatley commission. The big difference between now and then, and one of the reasons why the argument about local government has developed, is that at least the Wheatley commission was a royal commission. At least everyone agreed that there were far too many local authorities in Scotland.

Everyone agreed that some of the small boroughs were totally incapable of sustaining the kind of services that we wanted. That, at least, was a common agreement in local government, Parliament and elsewhere. There was at least that consensus. However, the Government have proceeded not on the basis of trying to establish the facts or the record. They have simply dealt with the matter as an in-house exercise. That is what happened in Scotland.

Although I support one-tier authorities, it is a mistake to denigrate the present system and simply to say that regional councils have done no good and have never played a positive role. I believe that they have played a positive role. For example, Grampian regional council—naturally, I speak about the area I know best—has much to commend it. It has an industrial strategy which, by and large, has worked. It is a mistake simply to say that what Grampian regional council has done to promote trade and industry in the area should be cast aside without examining what good it has done.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) said in an intervention, the problem is that we are not actually going to get unitary authorities. We are not doing away with the two-tier local government system. We will have unitary authorities for some aspects of local government, but we will have quangos, which will be grafted on to the system, to deal with issues that cannot be accommodated properly within local government. Those quangos will have no real accountability. Experience has told us that joint boards do not work. They have been tried and they do not work.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have become excitable about the new local authority boundaries during the debate. Great concern has been expressed about the way in which the boundaries have been drawn, such as the proposed single-tier authority for the Highland region. The Secretary of State began the entire exercise by saying that the objective of local government reorganisation was to bring government nearer to the people. If that has any validity at all, one single authority for the Highland region is total nonsense. Given the geography and the travel-to-work distances, there must be smaller authorities in the Highland region that are more closely related to the people. It is proposed that Westhill should be tagged on to the city of Aberdeen.

The constituency of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)—who, I understand, has other engagements—includes Westhill. The hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside and I went to Westhill some weeks ago to receive a petition. The figures are clear: 97 per cent. of the adult population of Westhill do not want their district to be part of the city of Aberdeen. If, as the Secretary of State has assured us time after time, the reason for having different sized local authorities and different arrangements in different parts of Scotland is to allow for individual and community choice holds good, there is no case whatever for Westhill coming under Aberdeen.

Much has been made of the comments by the city of Aberdeen district council—the Secretary of State used them in his argument earlier—that it would be feasible to bring Westhill into the Aberdeen area; but the council went on to say that that would not be desirable. If the argument that many of the Westhill people work in Aberdeen, visit the city for leisure, for shopping, and so on is a good reason for putting Westhill inside the new boundary, it must also apply to Inverurie, Porlethen and Stonehaven, because the travel-to-work area includes all those people too. The people of Westhill do not want to be inside that boundary and nor should they.

I hope that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who at least had the courage to join us in accepting the petition, will not only listen to the people, but vote against taking Westhill into the city of Aberdeen.

Mr. George Kynoch (Kincardine and Deeside): If I may refer to large rural authorities and especially the Highlands, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the White Paper made it clear that within one year of the new large rural authorities being set up, he expected them to include firm plans for decentralisation and local delivery of services? Will not that overcome the problem, by creating large enough rural authorities to be able to achieve rationalisation and efficiency of service, while giving a decentralised local delivery of services?

Mr. Hughes: Decentralisation at managerial level is not sufficient to counter the argument for democracy. I understand, although I am no expert, that in Strathclyde there is a great deal of devolvement of managerial responsibility and that does not stop people arguing about it or stop the Secretary of State abolishing it. There is nothing in any devolution at officer level that answers the point about democracy, because individual officers will say that they would like to help but that they cannot because the council, wherever it is based, will make that political, strategic or policy decision.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said earlier that the Labour party thought that commuter communities should be worth a city authority. Does not the hon. Member agree that that description describes Westhill exactly?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening or, if he has, he has not understood. If there is a commuter-based argument for Westhill, that argument applies equally to Stonehaven, to Inverurie, to Porlethen, to Newtonhill and to a whole range of districts in that travel-to-work area. Why suddenly mark out Westhill and chuck it into Aberdeen? It does not stand alone on that respect.

I am much more concerned about the powers of local government. It has been put to me that what the Government really want are "no-purpose unitary authorities". They want to strip its powers. Local government is desperately important because it represents a direct responsibility for delivering services such as housing, education, social work, and fire and police services. If councillors are to do their job properly, they

must have the finance. That is the key. There has never been a golden age. I was a member of Aberdeen town council for nine years between 1963 and 1971——

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): My hon. Friend was not the chair of finance.

Mr. Hughes: My mathematics is a little wrong. I was a member of the council from 1961 to 1970. There was never a golden age in which local government was totally free of any responsibility or care for how it spent money. There have always been financial constraints and the need for discipline. It always had to face an electorate and justify how much was being spent and how it raised money. Even under Labour Governments, councils had to hold back and accepted it. The huge difference now is that local government is desperately struggling to provide decent housing, education, and a good physical infrastructure.

The Government deny local councils not just money but any respectability, by constantly highlighting high-spending Labour authorities as profligate. Those Labour councils face the highest level of deprivation and a legacy of past mismanagement of the economy. They have to spend more than rural authorities where deprivation exists but is nowhere near as great.

The Secretary of State says that single-tier authorities will be significantly more efficient. Where will those savings come from? Will the population of schoolchildren suddenly be halved after Third Reading? Children will still be there and will still need education, teachers, and schools. Will the number of people that need housing disappear after Third Reading? People will still need services, but, instead of being delivered by regional authorities, those services will have to be provided by the new authorities. How on earth can there be sudden efficiency savings?

I hesitate to use the word devolution—it gets me into all sorts of trouble—but we need to devolve real power to local authorities if they are to make progress in dealing with social deprivation. That real devolved power must go to the local authorities.

I believe strongly in local government and will seek to defend it as best I can. The restructuring proposals are not based on any demand for restructuring or on flaws in local government. I believe that the flaws could have been rectified in other ways—irrespective of whether I believe in a single-tier or in a two-tier system. I make no bones about the fact that I am happy that we are to return to a single-tier authority in Aberdeen. I am sorry for those who live outside Aberdeen, because I do not think that they will get such a good deal out of the proposals—but that is neither here nor there. It is only 20 years since Wheatley and 16 years since the local government reform.

Constant reorganisation is no good for local services, and they are what counts. I understand the fears of those who work in local government, but local government does not exist simply to provide people with work. It is necessary that local government does that, but that is not the reason for having local government in the first place: it is not a job creation exercise. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The trouble with Conservative Members is that they think that the idea of reorganising local government is to sack people who have given years of service to the local community. That is their reason.

Opposition Members believe—and we say it quite plainly—that the job of local government is to provide the best services. That is what local government is about. If the system is constantly chopping and changing, not only is it more expensive—and that is a shame because it is a waste of money—but my constituents and those of the hon. Members for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) and for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) suffer.

I do not want to be diverted, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak, but I am beginning to become concerned about the possibility that services that need to be delivered in my constituency and in the part of Aberdeen represented by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South will be held back. How can regional authorities plan ahead and commit new authorities to expenditure when they do not know what is going to happen? It would be very sad indeed if services suffered in that way.

The Government did not opt for an independent report which would have enabled us to see where we stood. On the issue of local government and in every other respect the Government have failed the nation and its people. They are here to serve one purpose and one purpose only. They are time-serving their period of office. They have no clear direction and no principle other than that of self-preservation. I believe that the next election will see them wiped out of office. I believe that they will deserve to go, and that we shall then get a Government who believe in people, who have respect for people and who will command people's respect.

6.23 pm

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): This afternoon's debate is a somewhat peculiar conflation of the problems of local government reorganisation in Scotland and in Wales. There are parallels between the two countries, but the issues are to some extent different. There has been a considerable improvement in respect of Wales, in the sense that this debate is taking place on the Floor of the House, whereas when we last debated the subject, Welsh Members were left to discuss it in the Welsh Grand Committee while the Opposition chose to discuss Scottish local government reform on the Floor of the House. At least this afternoon's debate gives us an opportunity to put that right.

My constituents wholeheartedly welcome and endorse the proposed new Monmouthshire council which will be a unitary and effective local authority of the best neo-traditional type.

I use the word "neo-traditional" to draw attention to a very real problem in the whole approach to local government which has not been analysed this afternoon. There is a tradition of local government in our country and that tradition once reflected very well upon the communities that it represented. There was a tradition of civic pride, which we can still see in the architecture of many of our great town and city halls.

There is another aspect, however. The Government's proposals—certainly in respect of Wales—are part and parcel of a wider Conservative vision, which involves undoing the gross errors of the 1960s and the early 1970s. I see that the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) is in his place. I deeply respect the passion with which the hon. Gentleman addressed the House and told us of his conviction that Merthyr Tydfil is a county borough. The hon. Gentleman's remarks reflected a deep sense of history and a deeply conservative conviction—let me say for his benefit that I mean

[Mr. Roger Evans]

conservative with a small "c"—that things should not be altered. When 1,000 years of British history were disturbed, and privileges granted over centuries to different urban communities by way of royal charters or incorporation as cities or county boroughs were taken away, we entered into an unhappy revolutionary phase that created the problems that we must now tackle.

Mr. Alex Carlile: As a neo-traditionalist who wishes to undo the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the same standards should be applied to central Wales as to Monmouthshire and that the old county of Montgomery should be restored?

Mr. Evans: I know that the hon. and learned Gentleman will argue his case passionately and persuasively.

What was right in the 1960s was the tradition of city government and urban government. It was a strange situation, though, because, also in the 1960s, we had the model of the counties, which had not been an entirely happy one. We had two-tier local government and urban and rural districts—certainly in my constituency—did not have the financial resources to develop the modern services that were then thought desirable.

The late Richard Crossman recorded in his diaries how, as Minister of Housing and Local Government, he was troubled with the problem of redrawing the boundaries of the county borough of Plymouth with the surrounding Devonshire countryside. He decided to upset 1,000 years of history and unhappily unleashed upon us the Redcliffe-Maud commission and further legislation under a Conservative Government in the early 1970s. The result was that the most bloated model of local government, which did not address the real problems, came into being.

There are a number of serious problems with local government and they need addressing.

Mr. Rowlands: The hon. Gentleman has reminded us of the history behind the proposals. The Redcliffe-Maud proposals were not implemented in Wales. We looked at them and produced a proposal, but the 1972 Act was not based on the Redcliffe-Maud proposals in any shape or form.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman is right. In the interests of brevity, I did not go into the sordid details. My point is that, once one disturbs tradition, one opens an open-ended can of possibilities as each interest is examined and each argument developed. One is then immediately faced with a difficulty. If a consensus that has evolved over hundreds of years has been destroyed, how can my right hon. Friend be persuaded that in Merthyr Tydfil a simple easy consensus can be restored? That is the difficulty of revolution and the difficulty of the left. *[Interruption.]* I leave Opposition Members to argue their own causes.

There are a number of serious problems with local government, on which the proposed legislation will have some impact. First, there is the problem of the quality of the administration of local services in many parts of the country. The impartial traditions of our civil service are highly desirable, but I do not believe that political impartiality has always been a mark of local government officers in areas where one party has been in power for very many years.

We have heard a great deal about the democratic deficit. I believe that what happens in relation to local education authorities is a democratic scandal. One side comes into power at a local government election and throws all the school governors of the opposite persuasion out. At the next election, the reverse happens and, in the interests of democracy, we are told, another set of school governors is turfed out and replaced in its turn by placemen of the party coming into office. That is a democratic scandal and an abuse of education. The modern reformed system that has been put in place is far better and the sooner "democratic" interference with excellence in education and decisions of parents and teachers is removed, the better.

As for the proposal in relation to Wales, this was also typical of the slightly colourful and over-the-top introduction to the topic by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) last week. He made it very clear that there was no support for the proposals in Scotland or Wales. I leave Scotland to others, but for Wales there is no doubt that a considerable body of opinion believes that unitary authorities are correct. There is real difficulty when one tries to re-establish traditions after a period of left-induced uncertainty. To recreate what is acceptable generally is a difficult task.

For example, it is not just that my part of rural Gwent is to be called Monmouthshire. Surely those who represent constituencies in the city of Cardiff have found it peculiar and unsatisfactory that that great city has merely been a district council since the present arrangements came into force. These days, likewise, it is not just Merthyr Tydfil. As for the county borough of Newport, which neighbours my constituency, it is very unsatisfactory that it should be a district council and not have the full powers of a proper county, borough or city council, or indeed now the new unitary authority.

Mr. Rogers: The anomalies that the hon. Gentleman is describing so badly were created by a Conservative Government. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will at least have the grace to acknowledge that.

Mr. Evans: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me say at the beginning of my speech that we are engaged upon a wide, far-reaching crusade to reverse the ideological errors of the 1960s committed by his party and indeed——

Mr. Rogers: And in the 1970s.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman should listen and have a little patience. If he had listened on the previous occasion that I discussed this historical topic, he would have heard me say and he would have heard his neighbour, the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, pick me up on the details of the history, that it was simply because of an accumulation of errors in the 1960s, which the early 1970s Conservative Government fell in with, quite wrongly—indeed, they contributed to the implementation of 1960s proposals—that this unhappy situation has come about. We have seen it in several respects. In contrast, the present four Conservative Governments have set about a systematic agenda of returning to traditional values and to the Conservative principles which have unified our country.

If we implement the arrangements which my right hon. Friend has introduced and which I welcome, what will happen in those parts of Wales where county boundaries as

traditionally understood have no place in future arrangements? For example, will my right hon. Friend preserve the county boundary of Gwent for any purpose, for example for the purposes of the lord lieutenancy or the high shrievalty? *[Interruption.]* I hear mockery from the Opposition, but it would be much tidier to give Newport, for example, exactly the privileges that Cardiff historically enjoyed and to give Monmouthshire the traditional attributes of a shire county.

6.32 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I find myself in a strange position because, in the light of the Secretary of State's announcement, I ripped up the speech that I was going to make.

On behalf of my constituents, I welcome in part the change of thought by the Secretary of State with regard to the boundaries relating to Flintshire and Denbighshire, which dramatically affect my constituency. As the Secretary of State for Wales acknowledges, strong representations have been made to his Department by me and by many local community councils—for example, Delyn borough council and others in my community—about the boundaries that were initially announced in the White Paper on 1 March. It would be very churlish of me not to acknowledge the movement that has taken place to include in Flintshire the communities of Llanasa, Trelawnyd and Gwaenysgor, Mostyn, Whitford, Caerwys, Gwernymynydd, Nannerch, Ysceifiog, Brynford, Halkyn, Cilcain, Gwernaffield and Nercwys in my constituency, as opposed to the former Denbighshire where they were placed by the original White Paper.

The logic of those moves is obvious to all. I welcome the Secretary of State's change of thought on the grounds of service delivery, representations received, and the sense of community in those areas, together with social, economic and geographical grounds and the sense of identity that people feel. His move to include those areas in a greater Flintshire authority will be much welcomed in my constituency and in north-east Wales.

The proposal when the Bill comes before the House will be based on consensus between the current Delyn borough council and the current Alyn and Deeside borough council: one Labour—Alyn and Deeside—and one not Labour—Delyn—agreeing that the best thing for our local community is the merger of those two councils. I am very pleased that, at least on that score, the Secretary of State has seen fit to accept the arguments that were put to him by many people in my community. I pay tribute to those people, the borough council, the community council and other constituents who have written letters and strongly put their case which has been favourably received.

The arguments that I and others have advanced on behalf of Flintshire and Denbighshire and their respective borders are absolutely no different from the arguments that were put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) with regard to his community and by other colleagues with regard to their local communities.

Although I welcome the statement by the Secretary of State for Wales and the changes that have been announced, I am still slightly suspicious about why my community has been singled out when others which have equally good cases have not been singled out.

Mr. Redwood: There is a very simple answer. Cases are different because the changes in Flintshire do not add to the number of unitary authorities, whereas the changes proposed for Merthyr would.

Mr. Hanson: Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney will note the Secretary of State's point and comment on it at an appropriate opportunity.

Mr. Rowlands *rose*——

Mr. Hanson: Now seems to be the opportunity.

Mr. Rowlands: The Secretary of State's intervention is rather serious. Earlier, he was at least at pains to persuade me and others that, in our future discussions, he will have an open mind on the matter. It seems that he has almost closed his mind to the idea and that there will be 21 authorities and 21 only. I trust that his intervention did not mean that.

Mr. Hanson: I note what my hon. Friend says. I would not wish my speech to be hijacked by the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney. Perhaps those points will be raised elsewhere. I impress upon the Secretary of State that the arguments of Flintshire and Denbighshire, which have been welcomed by me and accepted by the right hon. Gentleman, are no different from those for community activity by many of my hon. Friends.

I gravely regret that the Bill is to be introduced in another place. Full and frank discussion in this place should be paramount for changes in local government. Now is an appropriate opportunity for the Secretary of State to indicate the timetabling of the Bill. We await the right hon. Gentleman's speech at 9.30 pm, but many of my hon. Friends wish to know about the time scale before that time.

Despite my welcome of the boundary issue relating to my constituency and to the new appropriate authority of Flintshire, the Bill and the discussion that will take place in the next few weeks remain fundamentally flawed. Despite the boundary success, which I very much welcome, the main questions that remain will be addressed in Committee and in the House as the Bill proceeds. The indications in the Gracious Speech are not helpful.

The cost of implementing the changes is enormous. We currently have more than £200 million to implement the changes and additional annual expenditure, falling on whom I am yet to find out, with regard to the running costs of the local authorities. The accountability of the new local authorities, boundaries or not, needs to be considered in the light of the Gracious Speech and in Committee. I do not wish elected local councillors to have powers removed from them and transferred to a growing army of quangos and trusts. Nor do I wish the number of councillors to be dramatically reduced so that officers have a greater say in the running of local authorities, as opposed to those who are accountable for services.

I have great reservations about the services that will be provided. The White Paper, and presumably the Bill that will follow, will mean further privatisation, a further reduction of services, a further erosion of what local government is about, a further erosion of funding and a reduction in the level of public services provided locally by people who are accountable to local communities.

[Mr. Hanson]

I often say this in my constituency and I will say it again today: local government is good value for money. My council tax bill, which I received this week, came in at £550. For that, I get schools, fire, police, refuse, parks and a whole gamut of services. It is good value for money. The council is accountable to me and my local community. I am afraid that—boundaries apart—the Bill will diminish local government, reduce the level of services and reduce the accountability of the people whom I represent and those who deliver services locally.

A major gap in the Bill and in the Gracious Speech is the question of a Welsh assembly. Earlier, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) raged against a Welsh assembly. I suggest that the case for a Welsh assembly has been made not by me or my hon. Friends, or hon. Members from other parties, but by the Secretary of State. Following a question from me, the Secretary of State recently produced a document entitled "Public Bodies: Appointments made by the Secretary of State for Wales", which is available in the Library of the House. That document is a list of the public appointments made by the Secretary of State and his Department to run services on behalf of the Government. Those appointments, if nothing else, show the need for a Welsh assembly to bring those appointed to democratic accountability.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that when the Labour party was in office, there were 100 bodies in Wales and the then Labour Secretary of State for Wales similarly made appointments to such bodies? At that time, the question whether there should be a Welsh assembly was put to the electorate of Wales and 80 per cent. said no.

Mr. Hanson: Time has moved on since 1979. The Conservative Government who came to power in 1979 with the commitment to reduce quangos have seen quangos doubled in Wales. Recently, I undertook a study of some 51 quangos across the board in Wales. I found that 452 people sit on those quangos, spending £2 billion of taxpayers' money. Who are those people? For a start, 76 per cent. of them are male. I do not recall 76 per cent. of the population of Wales being male. Twenty-four per cent. of the 452 are female. Only one of them is from an ethnic minority. The majority of them have a public school background.

When we look at the careers of the 452, we find that 62 are in business, 38 are accountants, 31 are in engineering, 26 are in education and 114 are directors of businesses. How many trade unionists are on Welsh quangos at present? Two people give their occupation as trade unionists. Thirty-two of the appointees do not have residences in Wales, the country that they are supposed to govern. What right do those people have to govern on our behalf? What democratic deficit exists that does not allow for an assembly to govern the services of the Welsh Office?

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend has made an interesting analysis of the quangos in Wales. But one factor that he has not mentioned is the enormous number of failed Tory party candidates who now chair these bodies and receive huge salaries each year. The Government cannot govern Wales because they do not have a mandate, so they send in those people to do their work for them.

Mr. Hanson: If my hon. Friend gives me time, perhaps I can suggest what the following have in common: Bankers Investment Trust, Beazer Group, Greenalls Group, GKN, Lasmo plc, Leopold Joseph Holdings, Lucas Industries, Morgan Stanley, MEPC, Norcros plc, Pilkington, Steetley plc, Whitbread and Marks & Spencer have all given money to the Conservative party and they all have at least one person serving at a senior level on a quango in Wales at present. What do the following companies have in common? South Wales Electricity, Welsh Water plc, Welsh Water Enterprises Ltd, British Aerospace, British Gas, British Telecom, Amersham International, British Petroleum and British Steel have all been privatised by the Government and they all have senior people on quangos in Wales.

What does the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) have in common with one of my constituents, Philip Pedley? The hon. Gentleman is a Conservative Member of Parliament; Philip Pedley is a failed Tory candidate. They have both been deputy chairman of Housing for Wales which services my constituents. I could go on. What does the chauffeur to the Secretary of State for Employment in the general election have in common with many of these people? He is on a board and he is a Tory party member. What do the 14 Conservative Members on trusts in Wales have in common with each other, apart from the fact that they are on trusts? They are Conservative party members.

To some extent, I do not mind if the Government wish to fill their quangos with Conservative party members. However, let them be honest and fair about it, and recognise that it is not democratic. They should recognise that there is a deficit and that there is a better way to provide services—through a Welsh assembly.

I shall give three case studies of people who are on quangos at present. When people talk about local government or Members of Parliament being bad value for money, let me cite the case of Michael Griffith who serves on a quango at present. He spends 1·5 days per month on the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales for a salary of £2,140 per year, 2·5 days per week on the Countryside Council for Wales for a salary of £29,295 and 3·5 days per week as chairman of Glan Clwyd hospital trust serving my constituency for a salary of £19,285 per annum. According to that, he works six days per week plus an extra 1·5 days per month for that salary, yet he has the cheek to list his occupation as farmer in the book provided by the Secretary of State for Wales. I would like to know when he finds time to do some farming when he spends six days a week on those quangos for a salary of more than £50,000 a year.

Sir Geoffrey Inkin spends 2·5 days per week on the Cardiff bay barrage for a salary of £32,000 and 2·5 days per week on the Land Authority for Wales for a salary of £31,000. However, he lists his occupation as farmer. Finally, Sir Idris Pierce earns £10,700 for spending four days per month on the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. Those people are spending my money and that of my constituents. There needs to be more democratic control. The Labour party and the other parties represented on this side of the House wish to see a Welsh assembly. The omission of one is a major failing and flaw in the Bill.

Irrespective of that, I ask the Secretary of State strongly to consider what needs to be done to democratise appointments to quangos, give some accountability, put the

appointments into the public domain and let people know how, when and why they can influence the decisions of quangos in Wales today.

I commend the Secretary of State for the Bill and the changes that he has made today. I condemn him for what he will do to local government and his failure to tackle the quangos which he, of all people, should be tackling.

6.47 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales because I will not be here when he replies. Although my mother lives in north Wales and I have arguably a Scottish surname, I intend to raise mainly United Kingdom concerns today.

May I start by making a point that will have unanimous support in the House today? The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who happens to be my parliamentary pair, is recovering from a hip operation. When I spoke to him some months ago, he was seething because of some aspects of Scottish local government reorganisation. I do not want to enter into the merits of that issue, but I am sure that he would have liked to be here for this debate. I know that the House misses him—it is a dull place without him. We all wish him a speedy recovery and return to health. I hope that Ministers from the Scottish Office will pay due attention to the concerns that the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, other hon. Members make about local government reorganisation in Scotland.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will remember that in a previous guise he listened to entreaties from me and other Somerset Members of Parliament about local government reorganisation in England. I hope that Ministers will be careful about barging in or supporting commission recommendations for which there appears—as is certainly the case in Somerset—to be little support among the public.

The subject of local government reorganisation has not generated significant excitement among the public, in Somerset at least. I remind my right hon. Friends that if we were to go down the path of abolishing the traditional English counties wholesale without strong local support, we would be getting rid of a tier of government whose history started long before that of this House—indeed, before the Norman conquest. I hope that we will take due caution in going down that way.

I said that I wanted to mention certain United Kingdom matters. One of them concerns Northern Ireland, which is referred to in the Gracious Speech. We all hope for peace in Northern Ireland.

No. 40 Commando of the Royal Marines, which is normally stationed at Norton Manor camp in my constituency, has just started a six-month tour in Northern Ireland. They will be there over Christmas. It is their first tour for six years. When they were there previously they won a sword of peace for their services in the Province.

We hope that there can be progress towards peace, but I warn the House that I detect in the remarks of some commentators about Northern Ireland extraordinarily sloppy use of language—even more so than that which is used about European issues, although in the past few months we have been rather specific in the use of language about European issues. There has been a sloppy use of language which is designed to raise false hopes.

I do not always agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), but his intervention in the Prime Minister's speech last Thursday was, I think, a wise one. He asked what, in the various hopes of talks or talks about talks, was in it for Sinn Fein? We have to be careful not to raise false hopes.

We should also remember that there are at least two groups of terrorists in Northern Ireland. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) in his place. If we go down the route of seeking to appease one group of terrorists, we shall almost certainly play into the hands of the other group.

I am appalled to hear commentators, and sometimes hon. Members, drawing an absolutely incorrect colonial parallel with Northern Ireland, as if Mr. Gerry Adams were like Nehru, Nkrumah, Archbishop Makarios or Kenyatta. It is a false parallel. It will land us in deep trouble if we encourage it because Mr. Adams does not even represent a sizeable minority in Northern Ireland, let alone claim to represent a majority. I speak as someone who has been a strong Unionist as well as Conservative for many years.

My view, and that of our late hon. Friend Sir John Biggs-Davison, who died in hospital in my constituency four years ago and with whom I worked on this for many years, is that it is as likely that Northern Ireland can be smuggled into the Republic in the forthcoming generations as that Alsace-Lorraine can be shunted back into Germany.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments. Does he agree that the media might pay attention to the wartime slogan, "Careless talk costs lives" when they talk glibly about excluding even a sizeable minority in Northern Ireland whose votes are even more numerous than those of Sinn Fein?

Mr. Nicholson: The hon. Gentleman's intervention aptly underlined my own concern.

I shall now discuss various measures that are referred to in the Gracious Speech, many of which I welcome. I listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). We welcome what is proposed on the subject of law and order, but we shall need to be vigilant in the House—far more vigilant than in the past—because the high hopes that we engendered for law and order measures have been disappointed in practice when it comes to operation in the street or the court.

I welcome the deregulation proposals, but I hope that we shall lay the emphasis in deregulation on getting rid of, or mitigating the operation of, those regulations which have often come in under European auspices during the past three or four years and caused considerable difficulties for businesses, charities, individuals, village halls and so on, especially in alleged food safety, environmental health or health and safety at work.

It has been rumoured that about £20 million is to be spent on the kitchens of the Houses of Parliament to bring them up to the standards that are required by those measures. There is, understandably, resentment outside the Palace that we should spend that amount of public money at a time of considerable stringency, but I emphasise that that is just an indication of what, under the present regime of food safety and alleged food health, restaurants and hotels up and down the country are having to spend.

The Castle hotel in Taunton—I hope that you know it, Madam Deputy Speaker—is a fine hotel, outstanding in the west country. I am told that scores of thousands of pounds

[Mr. Nicholson]

must be spent to update its kitchens. I find that regrettable and I hope that we shall be able to encourage businesses and organisations, especially in the tourist trade, to suspend their plans until the scope of Government deregulation becomes clear.

On the other hand, it has been said that we should not "throw out the baby with the bath water" in deregulation. That is important because many regulations have been in existence for a long time and exist for good reasons—especially regulations for consumer protection. I think especially of regulations about fire protection for furniture and night clothing.

Some years ago, my wife made a trading standards complaint about an advertisement in the *Observer* colour magazine that alleged that a type of furniture was fire-resistant when those who know about such things knew that it was not. Eventually, after a year's delay in the courts, the *Observer* colour magazine was fined a rather paltry sum. Such measures of consumer protection exist for a purpose. I hope that we will not be in the business of sweeping away necessary measures.

I have already referred, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Test, to the proposed legislation for magistrates courts. I have worries about that legislation.

I shall also mention another subject that was mentioned in the debate on Thursday which causes great concern. It is not mentioned directly in the Gracious Speech, but I think that it is mentioned by implication. I refer to the operation of the Child Support Agency. Six of the 20 or so people who came to my surgery last Saturday came to make representations about the operation of the agency.

There was an interesting article in *The Independent* on 5 November which suggested how the intentions of the Child Support Agency had been distorted and perverted in recent weeks. We all support the direction of the agency —I saw that in the newspapers the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) commented about that—especially in tracking down and obtaining maintenance from the two thirds of absent parents who do not currently pay maintenance. That is where the emphasis and priority must lie, but the current operations are unacceptable in many ways. I hope that we shall reconsider them. I hope that we can consider the possibility of more phasing in of big increases, of taking into account genuine costs, including the costs of visiting the children from whom a parent is estranged, and also of instituting a sensible right of appeal.

That brings me to what is undoubtedly the biggest concern among our electors at present—the outcome of the spending review and the unified Budget, both of which are referred to in the Gracious Speech. At no recent time has either been awaited with so much complex uncertainty as to the outcome. It has been a no-holds-barred review of expenditure, rumours have therefore abounded, and it has been difficult for Ministers to deny every one authoritatively.

During the past weekend we heard a spate of rumours, which greatly worried some members of the public who might be affected by some of the suggestions in the more extreme and exaggerated stories. We all await the announcements on 30 November and thereafter with great concern and hope that they will head off some of the more exaggerated rumours, which I hope will not be repeated after that date.

Whatever the merits of a longer-term review of the welfare state—for example, with regard to pension provision—such a review will not be relevant to the spending plans for the next few years. Nor will it affect the present generation of pensioners, who found some of the headlines alarming—albeit by implication. In the longer term, an element of political consensus will be necessary if proposals are to survive the vicissitudes of political life.

In so far as the rumours of the past weekend related to benefits, I must remind the House of an injustice—the position of the self-employed. During this recession, unlike previous recessions, many self-employed people have found themselves without work. I do not believe that that was the case in the recession 10 years ago. Many self-employed people in my constituency have found themselves in that sad situation. They do not qualify for unemployment benefit, and if they have savings of more than £8,000, or a spouse or partner who works, they do not receive income support. I hope that any review of unemployment benefit will take self-employed people into account.

Taxation is the other side of the unified Budget. Hon. Members may remember that I intervened on the subject last Thursday, during the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. I urge the Chancellor to beware of the Marie Antoinette tax philosophy. She has been treated harshly by history and I shall try to be fair to her. As I see it, that philosophy argues that it is necessary to protect the very poor, but it has also significantly benefited the wealthy. Under that philosophy, the cost of protection for the very poor and benefiting the wealthy falls on people on middle incomes. The public are already greatly concerned about that.

We know about the measures that the former Chancellor proposed in the March Budget, which for the most part will not take effect until next year, and there is considerable speculation about how the present Chancellor may add to those measures. There is a great fear that people above the income support level and on modest to middle incomes will pay the cost, while people on or above, for example, the present salary of Members of Parliament—about £30,000—will not pay what I described in my intervention in the speech of the Leader of the Opposition as a fair and proportionate contribution to the burden.

The November Budget gives the Chancellor the opportunity to right the balance. The introduction of VAT on fuel and the increase in national insurance contributions have already been announced, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider that balance carefully.

I also hope that on 30 November he will make it clear whether he sees VAT on fuel as primarily a revenue-raising or an environmental measure. If it is just the former, he must be aware that there are alternatives and, as I have mentioned in the House before, many of our constituents—I am talking about Conservative constituents —are urging him to consider direct taxation. I know that some countries find it difficult to go down that road, but, despite the description of this country given by the leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties, we have not gone so far down the road towards a banana republic that we cannot trust our revenue-collecting authorities to avoid corruption and inefficiency and to raise tax sensibly, although some —including my favourite—European countries have a problem with raising such taxation.

If, however, the Chancellor believes that VAT on fuel is relevant to environmental issues—I believe that it is, which

is why I have supported it hitherto—there are ways in which it can be made more effective. For example, he could introduce a significant and effective programme to give assistance for insulation. Considerable sums could be saved if domestic homes were insulated, but the insulation of schools, offices and factories, where large amounts of energy are undoubtedly wasted, could save even more. I appreciate that there could be administrative difficulties, but he might also consider zero rating standing charges, which are not particularly relevant to the actual use of fuel.

As I said, I welcome many of the measures in the Gracious Speech. The majority of our electors—at least 98 per cent. of them—who saw the House interminably debating deep into the night issues relating to the Maastricht treaty, did not begin to understand those matters. They certainly did not understand the strange alliances, devices and manoeuvres in this House while that treaty was pursued. It will come as a great relief to them to see the House dealing with law and order, deregulation and other policies which are relevant to their concerns and to their homes and streets. I hope that we shall successfully carry forward those measures.

7.6 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I shall be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish to return to the subject of local government reform. I join my hon. Friends in their condemnation of the costly, gerrymandered local government reorganisation proposed for Scotland. The procedure on reform should have been either a Parliament in Edinburgh, with powers to seek a consensus of the Scottish people, to find out what form of local government they desired, or we should have had the same as England —an independent public inquiry, which would at least have had a semblance of democracy attached to it.

The discussions here on the proposals for the Lothians, especially those affecting my constituency and the district of Midlothian, are farcical. Midlothian, West Lothian and East Lothian surround the southern, western and eastern sides of the city of Edinburgh. If need be, some amalgamation seems sensible, but it is proposed that a corridor will separate Midlothian and West Lothian.

That corridor is not a natural boundary, although it contains the Pentland hills. In Wales, they would be mountains, but they are just hills in Scotland; they are nae very big, but I wouldnae like to stay on the top of them. Someone referred to it as the Vance-Owen corridor, but I said, "No, it's the Lang-Rifkind corridor." It has nothing to do with Bosnia; it has nothing to do with Muslims and everything to do with Conservative voters.

It is nonsense to have an eight-mile gap between Midlothian and a part of West Lothian. It is not a natural barrier. Such a man-made barrier is totally illogical. Obviously, the situation has been gerrymandered: concocted in St. Andrew's house and endorsed in Smith square, the Conservative party headquarters, to keep their golden boys in office in a certain part of the world.

The argument is that Midlothian may be too small. Our argument is, "Okay, if it is too small, will the Minister look at an amalgamation with East Lothian?" I do not mean part of East Lothian, but all of it. I believe that that suggestion has been put to the Minister by the local authority and it is a sensible concept of a one-tier system.

For 16 years I was a councillor, both with Midlothian county council before reorganisation and then in the Lothian region, and I can say that this proposal does not represent a one-tier system. I remember when it was necessary to hire the Usher hall in Edinburgh to obtain a consensus of all the councillors, when we were trying to get the small boroughs, the landward areas and particular cities together to talk about strategic planning.

The Minister has mentioned the Wheatley report, but, in some ways, it has been totally ignored. He has taken parts out of it and said, "This is what Wheatley suggested, a one-tier system." Well, who ignored it? It was not me. I was in favour of an estuary system, in which the Forth estuary, the Tay estuary and the Clyde estuary would be part of a local authority based on the communications of that particular area. That would make a lot of common sense because they all flow into one another.

The Government are now blaming themselves or their predecessors for the original one-tier system, but what will we get? We will get quangos, boards and multitudes of people coming together by law to be consulted on particular strategic planning. Who is going to pay for that? To whom are they accountable?

There has been no mention of what other aspects of local government the joint boards will consider. For example, is this a back-door method of amalgamating the police into one big authority?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary is shaking his head. I hope that he is right and that it is not the first stepping-stone towards that. We do not like the White Paper on the reforms.

The move that is afoot to form joint water boards worries us. I forecast that the next move will be a joint water board, with a chairman appointed by the Secretary of State, the franchising of the so-called ancillary side of this big board, and competitive contracts for outside contractors, which will do away with direct labour. People will be paid off on that basis. In other words, there will be back-door privatisation of the water facilities in Scotland.

The people of Scotland will never forgive the Government for that. If the Government think that they can do it, there will be as much of a hue and cry about that as about any other aspect of their proposals. There has been no consultation and it is an insult to the Scottish people to put forward this made-up, mocked-up position, and to tell them that it is an update of a democratic process. That is equivalent to insult, not consult.

I hope that the Minister will pay attention—rather than write love letters to himself, or something like that—and look at the Peat Marwick report. For many years, Peat Marwick has been given an opportunity to look into aspects of local government—in other words, it is on the gravy train. To add insult to injury, Peat Marwick has now published a document entitled "November 30th, St. Kenneth's Day", and there is a photograph of Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the front. It is blue in colour, which pertains to our saltire flag, and 30 November is not just Budget day but St. Andrew's day.

That document is an insult to the people of Scotland. Will the Minister and the Chancellor dissociate themselves from this nonsense about a party to celebrate the Budget? Does Peat Marwick know something that we do not know, or is it on the gravy train? I do not think that the unemployed in Midlothian will have a party on

[Mr. Clarke]

30 November to celebrate Budget day, which pertains to Government spending, and this is an insult to the Scottish nation.

Scotland has a patron saint—if the Minister wants to know who it is, he should go to Central Lobby and look at the mosaic of him—and he is St. Andrew. We are very proud of St. Andrew—as are the Russians and the Greeks, who are also pleased to have him as a patron saint—and we do not want a St. Kenneth. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) and I have the same surname as the Chancellor, and we often have to say that we are no relation to the person in that photograph. I can assure the House that the Clarke clan is not proud of all its members.

The document is an insult to Scotland and Peat Marwick should be ashamed to have issued this nonsense on the basis that it is St. Kenneth's day. So far as Scotland is concerned, 30 November is St. Andrew's day and will never be anything else—unless the Chancellor has been canonised. The people of Scotland have been insulted, not only by that matter but by the so-called reorganisation of local government.

7.15 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I have listened to the majority of the debate with great interest and I have heard many excellent and interesting contributions. Regrettably, some of the contributions have been rather negative and have at times verged on the paranoid. That is a shame, because there are important issues to be discussed.

May I apologise in advance for the fact that, regrettably, I will not be here for the wind-up because I have a meeting in my constituency about Sunday trading. I am sure that all hon. Members will sympathise with me about that.

Sunday trading was referred to in the Gracious Speech and I congratulate the Government on bringing forward the changes proposed to Sunday trading and Sunday trading laws, which are much needed. I particularly congratulate the Government on the way in which the issue is being handled, which I think is genuinely appreciated, not only on the Conservative Benches but in the country at large.

For many years, I have had an interest in local government, and over that period I have observed it from the outside. The proposed reforms to local government structure in Scotland and Wales can benefit from the experience that has been gained in many parts of England.

I first remember observing local government when I was a municipal correspondent for a regional newspaper. Just before the reorganisations of the early 1970s, I remember experiencing and watching local authorities at work when they were very small and consisted of the rural district and urban district councils. I remember thinking that that sort of two-tier authority was particularly inefficient and not respected by the majority of the population.

I have always regretted that that system was replaced by an alternative two-tier system which, although it overcame some problems, left in place a structure which maintained a degree of duplication and a larger degree of inefficiency. I have always been a supporter of the unitary concept and hoped that that would come about sooner or later.

Many years later, I sat on the Standing Committee which considered the legislation that brought about unitary authorities in the metropolitan areas, and I was a keen supporter of that. I sat on two other Standing Committees connected with local government Bills, which continued to sharpen my interest in local government and its organisation.

There can be too much reorganisation of local government and there is a danger that we might end up having a Maoist approach to local government—that of continuous revolution or change. I would not support that sort of approach because there is a need for stability in the structure of local government. There is sometimes a tendency to be too negative about local government and I have never wanted to be that.

I believe that local government has an important role in the political structures of our country. It does good work and achieves a great deal for the ordinary citizen by providing essential services. Its administrative ranks also display a good deal of talent. That good work can be frustrated, however, if the structure of local government is inappropriate, inefficient or costly to run, particularly if that means a duplication of services. The argument for no change in the local government of Wales and Scotland is overwhelmed by the need for change.

The defenders of the existing local government system for Scotland and Wales—I am not sure that I have detected many in the Chamber and, if they are present, their defence was somewhat obscure—must justify, and I do not believe that they can, the cost and inefficiency of overlap. In contrast, the Government have come up with an excellent proposal for single-tier authorities. I admit that it will produce radical change, but I believe that it will greatly improve local government in Scotland and Wales. The proposal has been subject to widespread consultation and a variety of views have been expressed.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): The hon. Gentleman has spoken glibly about consultation. The Labour party is objecting not to some form of local government restructuring but to the way in which the Government have restructured it—the gerrymandering that has gone on in the Lothians, Ayrshire and in my part of the country. My local council, Renfrew district council, consulted all the electorate in a referendum. It found that in Barrhead, Neilston and Uplawmoor—which are in the Eastwood constituency of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland—out of a 56·9 per cent. turnout, 78·5 per cent. voted against the Government's proposals. In the Dykebar area of Paisley, in my constituency, out of a 78 per cent. turnout, 91 per cent. rejected the Government's proposals. We object to the reform because it has been gerrymandered.

Mr. Merchant: I am interested in that referendum, because I recently held one on the subject of Sunday trading. I welcome such consultation. As anyone who is responsible for organising or holding referendums will know, however, the answer that is obtained is largely determined by the question that is asked. I do not want to get into a debate with the hon. Gentleman about the specific referendum that he mentioned because that would take the debate down a narrow track, but I am curious to know exactly what questions were asked and exactly what

information the electorate had before them. I doubt whether they knew the full content of the Bill proposed by my right hon. Friend.

It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) said that the Labour party is not arguing against reform or about much of the principle behind it, but about the detail. I hope that I understood him correctly. The principle behind the reform is to improve the provision of services by increasing accountability. The reforms will introduce clarity to the system so that individuals, companies and others know exactly which body is responsible for providing what service. That is not the case now.

The reforms will also provide an opportunity in which local government can re-examine the quality of the service it provides. Perhaps most importantly, that reform will also provide an opportunity to improve efficiency by making it clear that one organisation has responsibility for providing certain, clearly defined services and has an obligation to pursue their provision by whatever means is thought appropriate to obtain the greatest efficiency.

It has been estimated that in the first five years of reorganisation a saving of up to £330 million will be made. That money can then be put back into the provision of high-quality services in Wales and Scotland.

As the hon. Member for Paisley, South said, the Labour party has made it plain that it, too, supports the concept of single-tier authorities. The Opposition's pre-election policy document entitled, "The Future of Local Government in Scotland", which was published about two years before the election, stated:

"All-purpose councils facilitate the move to an integrated approach to service provision and also decentralisation through a local one-door approach."

That is absolutely correct and reveals the merit of having single-tier authorities.

The problem for the Labour party is that, having effectively conceded that it supports the principle behind the Government's reforms, it is now scratching around trying to find reasons to oppose the detail in an attempt to oppose for opposition's sake. That is particularly evident when one considers the behaviour of COSLA. At first, it stated that it would not accept any of the reforms and would not even communicate with the Government about them. When it was pressed by certain of its members, who seemed to take a different view, COSLA agreed to a request for consultation from the Under-Secretary of State to discuss nominations to the Local Government Staff Commission.

The opinion of the Liberal Democrats and that of the Scottish National party is similar to that adopted by the Labour party. The Liberals stated clearly in their manifesto for Scotland in 1992:

"We will introduce a single tier of local government, to deliver most of the services currently provided by districts and regions."

George Leslie, the former local government convenor of the Scottish National party, was quoted in *The Scotsman* in 1992 as saying:

"The SNP believe that the single-tier structure will be the most effective".

That is the logic behind the Government's proposal.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I should make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that the Liberal Democrats are in favour of single-tier local authorities, but we believe that they should be set up in conjunction with a Scottish parliament.

Mr. Merchant: The hon. Lady has provided an interesting extra reflection on local government. I am not certain whether she is suggesting that a Scottish parliament should deal with local government matters and that it should be an extension of local government. If so, I am not certain that that would be particularly relevant to most people who live in Scotland. If the hon. Lady is suggesting——

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This precise point was dealt with earlier when the hon. Gentleman was not present. He has informed the House that he will not be present for the winding-up speeches. Is this the sort of valuable debate when people wander in, as ordered by the Tory Whips, to make a speech and then wander out again?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That is not a matter for the Chair and nor is the content, in general, of speeches.

Mr. Merchant: I have been present for virtually all the debate. I listened to the full contributions from the Front-Bench spokesmen and I have been absent for just 45 minutes. *[Interruption.]* I was aware that that point had been referred to, but I thought that it was important to draw attention—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not believe that the quality of the debate will be served by sedentary interruptions.

Mr. Merchant: Perhaps the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) was insinuating that a Scottish parliament would be a branch of local government—I do not believe, however, that that is part of the argument in favour of it. If not, that parliament would have no relevance to the structure of local government within Scotland because it would perform some other role, presumably by exercising devolved powers from this House.

Single-tier local government will deliver for the people of Scotland and Wales a better quality of service and greater accountability. The reforms have been carefully calculated by the Government to ensure that the structure of that single tier will match the traditional natural communities that exist. I welcome the fact that the flexibility within the proposals reflects that. Such a structure will be closest to the people and therefore properly in touch, yet large enough to be efficient as regards economies of scale. It therefore provides the best compromise.

My support for that approach is strengthened by the argument for single-tier authorities that have been shown to work effectively in England. When I first sat in the House I represented a north-east constituency—Newcastle, Central—where local government was provided by two tiers: first, Newcastle city council, which provided a major structure of local government for the large city of Newcastle and which seemed capable of handling all aspects; and, secondly, a metropolitan council, Tyne and Wear, which was imposed over the top of the city council and took on certain strategic functions. It was never clear where the dividing point came and it often seemed that

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those operating within the metropolitan council, councillors or officials, had nothing better to do and needed to set up committees to invent functions to justify their existence.

The Government then rightly decided that a unitary authority would better provide facilities for people in metropolitan areas, so the county council there and similar county councils elsewhere were abolished. It produced one or two unfortunate side effect, because the people involved in local government at that level then had nowhere to go and had to find something else to fill their time. The then deputy leader of the council decided to stand for the seat that I represented and he now represents that seat in this House. Nevertheless, the experience convinced me that single-tier authorities work more effectively.

Now that I represent an outer London seat, I experience exactly the same thing. My seat has its local government provided by a London borough—a single-tier authority —and it operates much more effectively, directly and democratically than when there was a second tier in the form of the Greater London council. This House must look after the refugees who left the GLC when it was abolished, which may be a less attractive feature of reorganisation. For the ordinary citizen, however, the quality of local government has improved as a result of that reorganisation.

Those lessons can be transferred to the debate on Scottish and Welsh local government and show the successful benefits that will flow from the proposed reform. Not everyone who lives in Scotland and Wales fully realises the real benefits that will flow from the change. In any case, ordinary citizens may not be entirely au fait with the different responsibilities carried by local government units. But the operation of a slimmed-down local government—lean, effective and efficient—will prove extremely popular.

By virtue of being a single-tier authority, my local authority of Bromley borough has been able to take clear steps forward in providing local services. Bromley is a great believer in the concept of the enabling authority that accepts its responsibility but devolves the executive responsibilities that go with it to agencies, to which it contracts out services. It has been in the lead of that process and has gone as far as the law allows it to go, encouraging changes in the law to enable it to continue with the philosophy of an enabling authority. It has proved to be extremely popular to provide services of a greater quality more efficiently and therefore be able to charge less council tax and become a debt-free authority, to all intents and purposes.

I have no doubt that the reform suggested for Scotland and Wales will enable the same forward-thinking approach to local government which Bromley has illustrated. I pay tribute to Denis Barkway, the leader of Bromley borough council, who has been at the forefront of that movement.

The same objectives drive the current local government reform proposals in Wales and Scotland. On the basis of that experience, and the experience of people who have lived in areas that have benefited from single-tier local government, I thoroughly commend that policy and that part of the Gracious Speech to the people of Wales and Scotland.

7.34 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): This debate is in the context of the entire Queen's Speech. Before concentrating on local government in Wales, may I mention two or three other aspects of the Queen's Speech? It is deficient for the needs of Wales and its content is unacceptable. For example, it contains further threats to local government services by contracting out more services, which has a bearing on today's discussion. It contains a threat to social security systems, with talk of limiting benefits within affordable limits. That engenders fears for the future of invalidity, housing and unemployment benefits. Unfortunately, countless thousands of people in Wales still need unemployment benefit. Finally, it contains a ridiculous threat to the future of student unions. The draconian power of legislation is being used to go after something that should be a free association of peoples.

Then there are the sins of omission. The Queen's Speech makes no reference to tackling unemployment, contains no Bill to deal with the housing crisis in Wales, no energy conservation Bill and no Bill to outlaw discrimination against disabled people.

On the main theme of today's debate, it is outrageous that the Bill on local government in Wales should go to the House of Lords for its first hearing. It is a constitutional Bill and I thought that it was a tradition of Parliament that such Bills are heard first in the first Chamber. On what basis is the Bill being sent to the House of Lords for its first hearing?

It is equally outrageous that Standing Order No. 86 is likely to be set aside. We saw how the Government could hold Welsh public opinion in contempt with the Welsh Language Bill in the last Session. Standing Order No. 86 was suspended and a Committee dealing with the Welsh Language Bill consisted of 28 members, 15 of whom were Conservatives. Of those, only six could be mustered from Wales and nine had to be drafted from England.

Are we to see the same again, with English MPs, who do not have to live with the consequences of changes in local government, on the Committee while Welsh constituency MPs, whose areas are affected and whose local authorities expect them to speak up on their behalf in Committees, are excluded from the debate? That will not be acceptable and if the Government intend to go down that road, it is highly undesirable.

Apparently, the Secretary of State may make a comment on timing in the wind up. As a statesman, nothing prevented him from telling the House by way of an intervention at the beginning of the debate what the timing provisions would be. It would have enabled us to deal with the likely timetable. To hold back that information until the wind-up serves no purpose other than to cut across a logical debate.

Mr. Redwood: Given that the hon. Gentleman admits that this is a most important measure, and given that we have an all-day opportunity to debate it, why is only one member of his party present?

Mr. Wigley: Other members of my party are here. In a party of four members, sharing out responsibilities is an onerous job and all four members are taking an interest in the debate. Given the Secretary of State's indication that he expects us to play an active part, all four of us will be

delighted to be on the Standing Committee. I shall be glad if the Secretary of State would make provision, through the Whips Office, to enable that to happen.

The concept of local government has been developed over the century—local authorities were first set up in the late 1880s and 1890s. A central weakness is that those authorities have been regarded as a devolved aspect of central Government and not as authorities in their own right. When local authorities stand up against central Government, we know what happens—the Greater London council did so and was abolished. Local government is not regarded as an authority or as a tier or authorities in its own right, but it should be. The powers that local authorities should have are powers as of right and should not be conditioned, limited or circumscribed by central Government directive.

Local government should also have finance as of right. For example, a proportion of VAT collected in each area should automatically go to local government so that it has money with no strings attached. That would give local government real responsibility; it is only when local government has such responsibility that it will attract the calibre of councillors needed to undertake the responsibilities and the services which communities need.

Can we have clarification on the eligibility of teachers and others working at arm's length from local government to stand as councillors in the new unitary authorities? Will there be a preference for evening council meetings so that a broad cross-section of the community—not just the retired and those rich enough not to have to work during the day—will be able to serve on local authorities?

I referred to the weakness of the Government's approach to local government structures. The weakness in the White Paper and in the discussion in the past couple of years is that we have failed sufficiently to consider functions and finance as well as structures. Another inadequacy is that possibly not enough attention has been given to the strengthening of community councils.

The major and central failure is the Government's insistence on ignoring the all-Wales dimension to the considerations. There was a consensus in Wales when the Secretary of State's predecessor started the ball rolling a couple of years ago. That consensus was based on having an all-Wales elected authority. We and the Liberals, I believe, would call it an all-Wales parliament, our colleagues in the Labour party would call it an assembly. Certainly, there is a consensus that there needs to be a democratic, elected Welsh tier of government to take over the devolved responsibilities currently undertaken by the Welsh Office, particularly those undertaken by the plethora of quangos, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson).

We need democratic control over the many functions that have been centralised. For instance, housing has been largely centralised by quangos such as Tai Cymru, and local quangos have taken over responsibilities from local authorities, including the responsibility to nominate health authorities. Therefore, we need an all-Wales elected system of government. The establishment of a parliament or assembly should have taken place before the restructuring of local government. That would have enabled a strategic approach to allow smaller unitary authorities to be created without denying a strategic decision-taking capacity. That is the danger of what we have at the moment.

An all-Wales body is relevant in the European context. With regard to the Government's consultation paper on the structure of local government in England, the Audit Commission commented:

> "There are signs that the absence of fora in which local authorities can come together to represent the interests of their broader region is beginning to disadvantage U.K. local government in its representations to the European Commission on the use of structural funds."

If that is true, that is another powerful argument for having an all-Wales elected body to give backbone to representations made directly to Brussels.

Many functions have been taken away from local government over the years—certainly since the days when I served as an elected member on Merthyr county borough council between 1972 and 1974. I reinforce the representations made by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands)—Merthyr Tydfil is an historic borough and town, and the county borough which existed provided a model on which unitary authorities could have been based. There is a powerful argument for Merthyr—in its own right, not in combination with widespread heads of the valleys—justifying its continued individual existence.

The White Paper published earlier this year states that the number of fire brigades in Wales will be reduced from eight to three. Will the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance that no other powers will be taken away from local government? What are his intentions regarding national parks in Wales? Is the Secretary of State satisfied that services such as trading standards and social services can be provided with the same expertise, effectiveness and efficiency as at present, without elaborate and undemocratic joint arrangements?

The White Paper makes a number of references to reserve powers that the Secretary of State proposes to have available to him—for example,

> "for use as necessary to ensure that proper service delivery arrangements are in place".

Will the Secretary of State elaborate on the number and nature of the reserve or default powers with which he intends to provide himself in the legislation? Does not the need for reserve powers show either that the proposed structure is fundamentally flawed or that one of the main purposes of the reorganisation is to transfer powers from local authorities to central Government—or possibly even both?

The Secretary of State will be aware of the recent study carried out by a team of top finance officers that showed that the transitional cost of creating 21 unitary authorities amounted to £202 million at 1995-96 prices over a 15-year period. It showed that the running of the new authorities would cost another £6·2 million per annum more than the status quo. Does the Secretary of State agree with the figures? If not, what are his estimates of the transitional and running costs of the new authorities? I have it on good authority that the figures have been accepted by the Treasury——

Mr. Redwood *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wigley: The Secretary of State shakes his head —the argument within Government is a matter of interest.

Whether the costs are in the right ballpark or the Secretary of State provides alternative figures, I hope that he will be able to give an absolute assurance that none of the cost will have to be taken from the provision of services

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that fall under local government at present. I hope that he can assure us that any and all additional money will come from the Treasury.

On the definition of the units of local government, clearly there must be fine tuning to maximise the community of interest of the proposed local authorities. It has been said by a number of hon. Members that there is some consensus on the need for unitary authorities in Wales—in the context of an all-Wales elected authority. If we are to have unitary authorities, we must ensure that the boundaries are right.

I hope that there will be a mechanism for fine tuning to allow that to happen as the Bill proceeds through Parliament or soon after the authorities are set up. Parts of Aberconwy and the Colwyn area might want to be in Gwynedd and Denbighshire respectively. I have referred to Merthyr, and we should also consider Montgomeryshire. Half my family forebears lived in Montgomeryshire, and it would be unacceptable if it disappeared off the map. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Secretary of State may find a way round that.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the argument goes further than just the historical and community interests of Montgomeryshire? The proposal for an authority covering a vast proportion of the land area of Wales—about 2,250 square miles—cannot be regarded as a local authority.

Mr. Wigley: That is the conundrum. How do we create an authority small enough to be local and genuinely representative of communities but large enough to be able to undertake the large responsibilities that unitary authorities must have? That is the difficulty wherever we are—to some extent it is a matter of resources. However, there is a balance of argument in each individual instance, and the balance in Montgomeryshire is certainly in favour of retaining it.

The name Caernarfonshire and Merionnyddshire is not satisfactory; I am sure that another name can be found —for example, Eryri or even Gwynedd. There is not a lot of sense in linking the two names, and I do not believe that that is what people in the area want.

I turn to the matter of timetabling in ignorance of what may be said later. The proposed timetable for implementing the Government's proposals grows daily more impractical, which the Secretary of State may recognise later tonight. The impracticality results partly from the way in which the proposals have proceeded up till now. When one compares the process with the timetable for England and Scotland, the Secretary of State seems to be intent on proceeding with unseemly haste. I hope that we shall have an announcement on that.

It is interesting to consider the Local Government Act 1972. There was a period of 18 months after that Act received Royal Assent before the new authorities took over, and a considerable amount of the work had to be undertaken during that time to enable the policies to work. I know that full well as a councillor and as the son of a local government officer who served at that time.

It is proposed that the Bill should be in place no more than 12 months after enactment, an extremely tight timetable indeed. In the 1972-74 period, considerable preparatory work was done on the basis of joint co-operation before legislation was in place. That has not been so this time because of a lack of consensus between counties and districts. Reorganisation was straightforward in 1974 because major local authority units were generally brought together from smaller units. This time, the Government plan to tear them apart, which will take considerably more time to make work effectively.

If there is a 12-month delay, which I suspect will be announced as an inevitable conclusion of the way in which things are moving, I hope that it will be used to secure co-operation throughout Wales about service delivery plans. That time could be used effectively to ensure a better understanding of service delivery than exists at present.

Most of all, I hope that the time will be used to secure an all-Wales level of democracy, which is the key to getting consensus in Wales and which will lead to a more satisfactory restructuring of local government.

7.50 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words and to follow the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

I should like to make particular reference to local government in Scotland, having been involved in Edinburgh corporation, a single-tier authority, as a baillie, and on Lothian regional council, one authority in a two-tier system, at the upper level.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) rightly said that there are many other demands in Scotland and elsewhere for the funds that will be swallowed up by this reorganisation of local government. He said that he had a number of other suggestions for legislation that is necessary in Scotland. He mentioned child care in particular, but many other measures also urgently need enacting.

I should like to mention such a measure, although it is unconnected with local government. There is a feeling of grave injustice, certainly among my constituents and I think far wider, at the way in which company directors are voting themselves huge salary increases and even larger bonsuses and immense share options at a time when their workers are being limited to very small wage increases in their already modest wages. Such increases for directors are immoral and indefensible.

We have had the worst example today of Peter Wood of First Direct receiving a £10 million increase. He does not earn that amount. It is money paid to him by the Royal bank, which is as much to blame as anyone for having allowed this situation to develop. It is not the bank's money: it is its customers' money, which people who can ill afford it are being asked to pay to someone who does not need it.

There are many other examples of such legalised theft, which needs to be stopped now. It is an appalling indictment of our society. If there is a legislative gap, we should introduce a Bill to curb such abuse.

I say to Conservative Members—to those who have managed to remain and to the one or two have dodged in and spoken and returned; I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) has managed to dodge back in again—that I am in favour of single-tier authorities, but a Scottish parliament and a legislative assembly for Wales must be in place first. The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) said that that is the policy of the Liberal

Democrats, too. A Scottish parliament should then decide the structure of local government for Scotland. That would have been sensible and it remains the policy of the Labour party in Scotland.

An independent commission should have decided the structure of local government. A truly independent commission decided the last restructuring of local government. Lord Wheatley, a Labour Member, Tom Fraser, another Labour Member, Betty Harvie-Anderson, a Conservative Member and a Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) were members of that commission. In addition, there were other members who were not involved in party politics.

The commission objectively investigated local government structures in Scotland and dealt with the range of services that were provided. The notable feature of the current so-called review of local government is not only that it is partisan and political but that it is badly incomplete. There is gap after gap in the structure of local government reorganisation; area after area has not been considered. I have written to Ministers about one or two —for example, justices of the peace and aspects of children's panels—which have not been taken into account in the reorganisation. I have had very poor responses, if any, from Ministers.

I tabled a question in the summer about a staff commission and a property commission, which we had in the last reorganisation of local government in Scotland in 1973-74. Lo and behold, not long afterwards, the Under-Secretary of State suddenly realised that he should have done something about it and made an announcement about the staff commission, but only in general principle and not in detail.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I am sure that he would not want inadvertently to mislead the House. I gave an assurance to the Scottish Trades Union Congress much earlier than last summer that a staff commission would be set up.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for that, but the Minister has not said in detail how it will operate, who the members will be or what its structure will be. He still has not said anything about the property commission, which was important.

An Organisation and Management in Local Government report was produced on the structure of local government management. An independent commission was set up by a Conservative Government and there was even a chap on it called Councillor G. Foulkes of Edinburgh, so it must have been independent. It was called the Patterson committee and it investigated the structure of local government. That has not been done this time. Area after area of local government structures has not been considered as part of the current reorganisation. Last time, Wheatley considered the structure in detail and made recommendations, and the House debated the matter. In Committee, we shall have some very searching questions to ask the Minister and the Secretary of State.

In an earlier intervention, I asked whether what the Government propose is really single-tier. I do not think that it is. I am in favour of a good, all-purpose, single-tier authority, with authorities having the clout and the right size to deliver all services without recourse to joint boards, but that is not what is proposed.

The Secretary of State, who is not here at the moment, said that I was wrong, without saying why. Perhaps the Secretary of State for Wales or the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland could say why I was wrong, because, as I understand it, water and sewerage will be dealt with by three quangos, non-elected boards. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton is right: we should give one and a half cheers for that, because at least it is not privatisation, although regrettably it could be one step on the way to privatisation. However, we shall have a Labour Government, so fortunately the other step and a half will not be taken.

Water and sewerage will be dealt with at the Strathclyde level. In Strathclyde, as I understand it, the passenger transport executive is to continue at that level and the police and fire services will also continue at that level. We will then have a so-called all-purpose, single-tier authority and because some of the services are so small, they will have to join together as joint boards. The proposal is a total mess. It is not a single-tier authority, and certainly will not give accountability.

We know, of course, that the Conservative party is not worried about democratic accountability. The House heard my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) talk about the quangos in Wales. It is exactly the same in Scotland. Tories who could not get elected and who do not have the support of the people whom they put themselves up to represent have been appointed by the Secretary of State.

I will give some examples, particularly from the health service. Eileen Bates stood on a number of occasions in a constituency, and did not get elected. She moved to another constituency and did not get elected there either. The Secretary of State then appointed her to the community health trust in Ayrshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton referred to the particularly notorious case of Bill Fyfe. I endorse every word that my hon. Friend said. I may tell the House that there was a great cheer in Ayrshire when Mr. Fyfe was appointed as chairman of Greater Glasgow health board and moved away from the chairmanship of the Ayrshire health board. It seems strange that the Secretary of State could not find anyone from Greater Glasgow to be the chairman of the health board. I must say that Mr. Fyfe now seems to be very shy of the media, which he was not when things were going in his direction in Ayrshire.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Will the hon. Gentleman be recommending to those failed Labour candidates in Wales who have accepted public office that they should decline it?

Mr. Foulkes: I do not know of any. Most of the Labour candidates in Wales succeed, just as most of the Labour candidates in Scotland succeed.

I now come to the case of Ayrshire itself. What we have in the local government reorganisation is a series of five or six rotten boroughs which will be set up by the Government. The Minister in particular is the architect of that, and I am glad that he is sitting on the Government Bench today. My colleagues from Cumnock and Doon Valley all support an all-Ayrshire authority, and my Labour colleagues from Kyle and Carrick support an all-Ayrshire authority. They came with me to argue that case with the Minister and they did so in an articulate,

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responsible, and powerful way. Naive as they may be, they expected an articulate, responsible, and powerful argument from the Minister in favour of his proposals.

The amazing thing was that the Minister could not answer or justify his proposals, because there is no logical justification for them. There is also no support for them. That is why we support an all-Ayrshire authority. First, the public want it, as even the hon. Member for Ayr has to admit. The hon. Gentleman has been at three public meetings and he has been forced to accept that the people who attended those meetings overwhelmingly reject what the Secretary of State proposes. They want an all-Ayrshire authority.

Mr. Gallie: I certainly do not accept the point that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) makes. He referred to a number of Labour councillors in south Ayrshire who support an all-Ayrshire authority. There are a lot more Tory councillors in Kyle and Carrick than Labour councillors, and they all support the south Ayrshire authority that is to be established. Many of my constituents also support it, as do retailers in my constituency, who have made strong arguments. The hon. Gentleman is totally wrong.

Mr. Foulkes: If the recommendations of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission are passed, the hon. Gentleman may no longer represent Ayr. Looking at the demographic make-up of the proposed constituency, he may have to move somewhere else.

The hon. Gentleman attended public meeting after public meeting and argued in his usual articulate and powerful way the case for the Government's proposals. In one meeting, only four people supported him and in another no one at all supported the proposals.

There are one or two people—such as Provost Gibson Macdonald, who wants to keep a little Tory fiefdom in Kyle and Carrick—who want to retain that authority. But those people are few and those views are not coming from the people at all. The people of Ayrshire are cynical about the Government's attitude to consultation.

I am glad that the Secretary of State for Wales is here. We have had a period of consultation in Ayrshire about the setting up of one of the first NHS trusts in Scotland, the South Ayrshire NHS trust. Almost everyone in Ayrshire is against it, with only a handful in favour. All the doctors, the nurses, and the paramedics in the health board area are against the proposal, as were the vast majority of people in consultation. However, the Secretary of State for Scotland went ahead.

One of the main arguments that we made during the consultation was that we would end up with a huge number of grey-suited bureaucrats with the new structure. That was exactly what was argued. Suddenly, just a week ago, the Secretary of State for Wales wakes up from a long sleep, like Rip van Winkle, and realises that that is precisely what has happened in the reorganisation of the NHS. What we predicted has come true, and the Secretary of State was absolutely right. There are far too many bureaucrats, and not enough medics and nurses.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman should read more of my speech, which he might find enlightening. The speech said that trusts were excellent, give patients and doctors more choice, and permit us to reduce bureaucracy in England, Wales, and in Scotland in a way that I would like. I am delighted to learn that the hon. Gentleman and his party would also like that. In the past, the Opposition set up a lot of the authorities and a lot of the bureaucracy.

Mr. Foulkes: That is not our experience in Ayrshire. The Secretary of State for Wales is closer to those matters than I, being a member of the Government and of the Cabinet. If he can give me one example of a trust that has reduced the number of bureaucrats, I will swallow my words.

Mr. Redwood: The creation of trusts enables us to cut bureaucracy in the districts and the regions. That is exactly what the Secretary of State for Health is doing and what I am doing in Wales.

Mr. Foulkes: The House will see that the Secretary of State for Wales generalises, and cannot give me a specific example. We know what has happened in Ayrshire. Where previously we had one board with one general manager, we now have one board, three trusts, and four general managers. We have also four directors of finance and four directors of administration. They are not called personnel officers now—they have a fancy title—but we now have four directors of human resources. Those are the grey-suited men, and there are fewer doctors, fewer nurses, and fewer paramedics.

That is what we were saying about local government reorganisation. It is being rejected by the people of Ayrshire, and I hope that the Government will, on this occasion, listen to the people of Ayrshire. The Secretary of State for Wales conceded that we got it right the last time round.

Secondly, Ayrshire is the right size to provide the services. It is the optimum size and was examined by Wheatley, as were Fife, Central and others at the time. Those areas were able to provide a whole range of services. Ayrshire is the optimum size for education, social work, planning, and for a whole range of services. All those services can be provided without recourse to joint boards.

Thirdly, if an all-Ayrshire authority were set up, it would match the other bodies in Ayrshire, such as the health board, the chamber of industry, Enterprise Ayrshire, and the tourist board. Therefore, the boundaries would be coterminous and co-operation would be much more possible.

Fourthly, the authority would have the strength to deal with the European Community in the way in which Strathclyde does to get funds for areas of great deprivation.

Finally, there is the argument of geography. The Secretary of State is proposing an amazing division of Ayrshire, where most of what is to be called North Ayrshire will be in fact south of most of South Ayrshire. It is an astonishing proposal and it defies all logic.

I wish to make two general points before I conclude. First, the councillors who serve on the present authorities and will serve on the new authorities are much maligned, often in the House and a great deal in the press. Councillors strive to do their best. They have to declare their pecuniary interests. I wish that Conservative Members were as scrupulous as councillors in declaring their interests. Councillors receive little remuneration and work long hours. We ought to provide for proper recognition of the place of councillors in the new authorities and proper remuneration.

My second point is in some justification of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) who, like many councillors, was vilified by the press, in particular the Scottish press, when he was shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. He was vilified by *The Scotsman* when he predicted during our annual conference in Brighton that the Welsh reorganisation of local government was likely to be postponed a year. *The Scotsman* said, "What a ridiculous suggestion. This chap does not know what he is talking about. He has been drinking in the bars and picking up gossip."

Yet today, if what my hon. Friends tell me is correct, it looks as if we are about to hear an announcement that the Welsh reorganisation will be postponed for a year. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands deserves an apology from *The Scotsman*. The Secretary of State for Scotland ought to think again about Scottish reorganisation. If the Welsh reorganisation is to be postponed for a year, and there is no Bill to reorganise English local government, why are we in Scotland once again the scapegoats one year ahead of all the other reorganisations?

The proposed reorganisation in Scotland is a gerrymander. It is a gerrymander to set up Greater Eastwood, and so that that does not stick out like a sore thumb, Kyle and Carrick will be renamed South Ayrshire. Someone suggested to me that it ought to be called Gallie-lee in honour of the hon. Member for Ayr. We shall have Stirling authority for the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth). It is corrupt gerrymandering and a partisan plan by which the Government hope to retain Conservative control of authorities.

The Government do not want local government to be powerful. They want to neutralise the councils, contract out the services, opt out the schools, centralise the powers as much as possible in central Government and create as many joint boards as possible.The Government are not interested in local government. We are interested in local government. The proposal should be scrapped until we have a Scottish parliament, a Labour Government and proper reorganisation.

8.12 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I imagine that what the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)——

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You always protect the interests of Back Benchers carefully. Several Welsh and Scottish Members still wish to speak. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) is a chalk jockey who has been sent in by the Whips and has not been here for most of the debate, including—I will be corrected if I am wrong—the opening speeches. Is it right that he should take up the time of the House when we are supposedly discussing Welsh and Scottish local government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): It is not for me to say who should speak on either side. I do not know how long the hon. Gentleman has been in the Chamber. I have called the hon. Gentleman and he must make his speech.

Mr. Riddick: I was in the Chamber at half-past two this afternoon. I heard both the opening speeches from the Front Benches. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) owes me an apology. I was here until 10 minutes to 5 because I had a meeting at 5 o'clock. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will apologise for accusing me of not being present for the opening speeches.

I apologise to the House that I was not able to be here for the middle part of the debate. I wish that I had been able to be here. I wrote to the Speaker on Friday making it clear that I wished to participate in today's debate. I was here for the opening speeches. I knew that I had a meeting in the middle of the debate. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will now apologise.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Of course I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if he was here during the opening speeches. But it is not right that he should be out of the Chamber for two and a half hours and then speak in a debate on Scottish and Welsh local government when he has no interest in that subject except as a chalk jockey sent in by the Government Whips.

Mr. Riddick: The hon. and learned Gentleman owes me another apology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Several right hon. and hon. Members hope to catch my eye in the time available. If we continue like this, some of them who have sat here all day will be disappointed.

Mr. Riddick: I am grateful to you for making that clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have worked on my speech over the weekend so I have not been sent in by the Whips. The hon. and learned Gentleman can apologise to me about that at another time.

The Opposition choose the subjects for debate on the Queen's Speech. It is a good illustration of the Labour party's priorities that it devoted a whole day to local government reorganisation in Scotland and Wales and bracketed law and order and education together and gave them one day's debate. I do not doubt for a moment that local government reorganisation in Scotland and Wales is important, but the matters which worry my constituents are the problems of lawlessness and the need to drive up education standards.

I suppose that it is no more than we should expect that the Labour party shows such scant regard for issues of law and order. As we know, it devoted only 155 words to law and order in its general election manifesto. That was fewer than the words that it devoted to the arts and leisure. Perhaps it also shows the influence of the Scots and the Welsh in the Labour party that a whole day was given to local government reorganisation in Scotland and Wales.

I want to make it crystal clear that, although I am delighted to speak in the debate today, I shall not volunteer to sit on the Standing Committee which will consider the local government Bill. I appreciate that other hon. Members have more expertise in local government in Wales and Scotland.

We have had a lot of hot air and synthetic rage from Opposition Members. I noticed that during the Front-Bench speeches—for which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery said that I was not here, but has apologised for doing so—there were only 16 Labour Scottish Members in the Chamber. So there was a great deal of synthetic anger in what we heard tonight.

I regret that the Government do not intend to privatise the water industry in Scotland. We have seen clear benefits of privatisation in England in not only the water industry

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but a host of other industries. We have seen increased efficiency. The water companies as well as all the other privatised companies, such as British Telecom and British Gas, have become more consumer-oriented. The privatised water companies have been able to attract massive investment for the improvements that were needed.

On balance, I welcome the introduction of unitary authorities. I believe that they will lead to more rational decision-making in local government. Opposition Members do not have too much to fear from unitary authorities. My constituency is in West Yorkshire. When we abolished the county council in West Yorkshire, everyone said that it would be disastrous. It has not been. My local council is called Kirklees. It is Labour-controlled. I do not like it very much, but it has not been disastrous. The only reason why it has not worked as well as it might have done is that it has been controlled by the Labour party.

I accept that Kirklees council is too big. I should like to see it split. I hope that the Local Government Commission will examine the status of Kirklees council in the near future. We should create a new council based on the Huddersfield area. That is what my constituents want.

My third point relates to the proposals of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats to introduce regional assemblies. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) admitted that there will be four distinct levels of government—municipal, regional, national and European. What has bedevilled this country for so long is not too little government, but too much government. Yet the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats advocate that we should introduce a new layer.

Mr. Win Griffiths: On that point, surely the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) must be aware that Germany, which is the most successful country in the post-war European economy, has strong municipal government, extremely strong regional government and national Government and was a main player in the creation of the European Community. It does not seem to have suffered from doing all those things.

Mr. Riddick: Germany is not exactly without its problems at the moment. I believe that the reason why it has prospered since the war is that it has had a stable economic framework in which its industries have been able to flourish and invest. I do not put that down to its system of government.

The one thing that we know for sure is that politicians want to justify their existence. If there are more politicians, or if more assemblies are created, which need politicians to man them, one must give those politicians something to do.

Here I am, making a speech in the House of Commons justifying my existence. I know that there are not so many people in the Chamber and I do not suppose that anyone will take any notice of my speech, but I hope that they will.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): I will.

Mr. Riddick: My hon. Friend says that he will. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, an important Member of the Cabinet, is also here listening to my speech; he is one of the men who are formulating policy and generating ideas in the country at the moment. I am delighted to see him in his place.

The reality is that when politicians look for things to do, they usually start by interfering in the lives of ordinary folk. They want to pass laws. I do not quite understand why the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats want to foist yet more government on the nation when clearly we have been suffering from far too much.

One forecast that I would make is that if we were to set up those regional assemblies, one could be sure that they would participate in the latest fashion—political correctness. County councils are currently voting to ban hunting on most of their land. It is fairly meaningless, of course, but it is the politically correct thing to do at the moment.

The Labour party says that so many women candidates must be selected in marginal seats. I think that the Labour party will get into serious trouble and it has already generated much unrest within those constituencies. It is a time-bomb waiting to explode. I notice that the black section of the Labour party is now saying that 30 inner-city seats should be devoted specifically to black candidates. I would have thought that people should be appointed as candidates on merit. That is certainly the way that we go about it in the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* The Labour party ought to follow that example.

I am sorry to say that, even in the national health service, we see a little bit of political correctness at the moment. It is an unfortunate spectacle that right now the NHS is paying compensation to a retired admiral because he did not get the job as chairman of the Cornwall health trust, for one simple politically correct reason—he is a man.

I noticed in *Hansard* the other day that we are spending half a million pounds on setting up a race unit in the NHS. Again, I must say that I am slightly dubious about such an approach.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) should understand that there are certain matters in the health service in which it is important that ethnic minorities have a proper say and in respect of which their illnesses should be properly considered. He will know of the problems of sickle-cell anaemia, which particularly affects the black and Greek populations in this country, about which the NHS knows little and for which it has not done enough to be able to deal with.

I hope that the hon. Member for Colne Valley will not simply discard those matters because he takes a jaundiced view on issues on the basis that he thinks that it is politically correct to do so. It is correct from the point of view of the health service that there are units that look at particular problems that affect different people.

Mr. Riddick: The hon. Gentleman has made a perfectly sound point. However, I do not agree with him that one needs to set up a specialist unit in that way. I have about 3,000 Pakistanis in my constituency. My local council in Kirklees, to which I have already referred, has an equal opportunities unit. Many of those Pakistanis have told me that they do not want that unit to exist. They see it swallowing up a great deal of money. They also see that the unit does not do much for them.

The best way to promote the interests of ethnic minorities is to ensure that the management is well aware of all the problems, the difficulties and the needs of ethnic minorities. I genuinely believe that there is an awful lot of political correctness about the way that we have seen some of those race units, equal opportunities units and so on

being set up. If it was left to me, the Equal Opportunities Commission, which currently costs the Government £5 million per annum, would be abolished. It does not carry out any particularly useful purpose.

I hope and believe that the Queen's Speech heralds a break from that sort of approach, and that we will go "back to basics", as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has described. We shall take on the civil servants in Whitehall who justify their existence in such numbers by introducing new regulation after new regulation. I welcome the changes that are taking place in Whitehall—market testing and putting senior civil servants on to contracts. That is a revolutionary but welcome idea. It seems to me that we should make it quite clear in their contract that they will be rewarded for employing fewer civil servants and for spending less public money than was budgeted for. At the moment, it seems to be quite the opposite way around.

We are also going "back to basics" because we are taking on the liberal-minded do-gooders who have dominated Home Office thinking for the past 30 years. We are challenging the legal establishment that says that the British legal system is the finest in the world and should not be changed in any way; the same establishment which defends the right to silence, which has been of such benefit to so many criminals over so many years.

The reality is that it is terrorists, child killers and ordinary criminals who benefit from the right to silence. They have used that right ruthlessly. I have talked to a number of police officers and they all tell me that it is amazing how even 14, 15 or 16-year-olds, when they come into the police cells, say nothing. They are well aware that they do not have to say anything and that the right to silence exists. Their refusal to say what they were doing and where they were at a particular time cannot be taken into account by a court when and if they come up for trial.

I am delighted that the Government have grasped that nettle and that we will be doing something about it. The reality is that the tape recording of inverviews, which now takes place, provides the safeguard for those people who might be mistreated by the police and will ensure that we do not have miscarriages of justice. We have the example of a case in Leeds last weekend, when the judge said that one of the statements made by the suspect in a police cell was not admissible in court.

It seems to me that there are two factors that will deter people from offending: first, the likelihood of being caught; and secondly, when they are caught, the likelihood of being severely punished. We are taking measures on both those fronts. The police Bill should improve the effectiveness of the police. I hope that the reduction of senior ranks within the police force will lead to more police officers on the streets. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently made an announcement about reducing paperwork.

Last Friday night, I went to address the Huddersfield police forum with my neighbouring MP, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). The Labour chairman of the forum referred to the changes that we are making to the police authorities. He said that they were anti-democratic and that the police authorities, as currently constituted, represented true democracy. He said that police authorities were where people could look to obtain redress and ensure that their views are known.

I asked the people present at the forum to raise their hands if they knew the name of the chairman of West Yorkshire police authority. The only person who knew that individual's name was the Labour chairman of the police forum.

We want police authorities that are professional in their outlook and depoliticised. I believe that the new police Bill will achieve that. It is time to reintroduce the concepts of deterrence and punishment. I welcome the changes that have been made to cautioning. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made a very robust change to the cautioning regime only recently. I also welcome the tougher punishment of juvenile offenders and the crackdown on bail bandits.

I obviously support a settlement that will bring peace in Northern Ireland. However, we must not forget that the initiatives that were taken over the past 20 years were designed to bring peace. Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement were meant to bring peace. At the end of the day, the objectives of the IRA terrorists were not fulfilled by those agreements. Therefore, they continued to kill, encouraged by the political movement which their violence had brought about.

The IRA, the SDLP and the Irish Government all have a united Ireland as their ultimate objective. That is something which the British Government cannot and must not give ground on, certainly not by allowing the Irish Government a greater say in how Northern Ireland is governed.

If the peace process involves the nationalist factions giving ground, that is absolutely fine. However, I do not see how the British Government can give any further ground. We have already allowed the Irish Government some say in how Northern Ireland is governed. I do not see how we can go any further than that and I hope that we will not. Tonight's debate is about local government and I should like to see more and proper local government in Northern Ireland.

I welcome other measures in the Queen's Speech such as the reform of student unions, the reform of teacher training, the privatisation of British Coal and the fact that, at long last, we are going to sort out Sunday trading. Those are all very positive measures.

This autumn's Conservative party conference and this Queen's Speech will prove to be a turning point. There can be no doubt that this year has been very difficult for the Government. We will not become popular overnight. However, I believe that the Conservative star will undoubtedly shine bright once again because we have returned to our fundamental philosophy.

We allowed public spending to rise to an unsustainably high level and we are now tackling that. We put aside our belief in free markets when we joined the exchange rate mechanism, but we now have appropriate economic and monetary policies. As a result, economic growth has resumed; we have low inflation and unemployment is falling. That is good news and it has come about because we are now following Conservative policies.

It was interesting to see how grumpy the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was during the debate on the Queen's Speech last Thursday. He was grumpy because the unemployment figure had fallen by 50,000 on that very day and he had just taken on the job as Opposition employment spokesman. He was fed up because we had already shot his fox. The Opposition are also fed up tonight.

The Queen's Speech heralds the fact that we are now following Conservative principles which are acting as our

[Mr. Riddick]

guiding light. Those principles include our belief in free markets, our belief in private enterprise and in personal freedom and personal responsibility and the reintroduction of proper deterrence and punishment into the law and order system.

What a contrast all that is to the Labour party. After 14 years, the Labour party still has not developed a coherent policy and philosophy of its own because, in its heart of hearts, it still believes in the old philosophy of equality, state control of industry, politicians running the lives of ordinary people and higher taxes. That is what the Labour party truly believes. Labour cannot say it, because it knows that that does not win elections. People do not want it.

The Conservative party and Conservative politicians, not least my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, are generating ideas. The Queen's Speech is full of policies that go with the grain of human nature and the grain of Conservative philosophy. That is why I will support it enthusiastically.

8.35 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): This Queen's Speech will be a drag anchor on Wales. It contains no strategy for industry, for full employment or for building housing and overcoming the homeless and housing crisis in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Instead, we have a fatuous set of new right dogma involving deregulation and cutting safety and conditions at work. There are more private mines in my constituency than in any other. Over the past 20 months, two miners have died and one has been paralysed from the waist down. That situation will become worse as a result of the deregulation measures.

The Queen's Speech is the product of an exhausted and bankrupt ideology which the Government are seeking to progress. The Secretary of State for Wales should spend more time looking after the interest of Wales and not seeking out scapegoats like single mothers or broadcasting on every possible Thatcherite fad into which he can get his claws.

With regard to local government, my hon. Friends have quite properly paid a great deal of attention to boundaries. Neath has an historic tradition of which it is proud. The town of Neath dates back to Roman times. It has a strong sense of community and it wishes to retain a viable identity in its own right.

We are very proud of our extremely strong sense of community in Neath. That is a strong tradition on which we are building and we will build on it for the future. Either I or my hon. Friends—if I am not a member of the Standing Committee—will move an amendment to the Welsh local government Bill to keep Neath's identity.

If there is to be a shotgun marriage between Neath and Port Talbot, the Secretary of State's proposal to bring in the Upper Lliw valley is logical. The removal of Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf from the original White Paper proposals is also welcome. There are details around the edges which must be examined. It is illogical for Pontneathvaughan to be outside the new Neath, Port Talbot and Lliw West Glamorgan authority. However, perhaps that can be addressed later.

I will be brief as others wish to speak. The new Bill on local government and what the Government have been doing and plan to do in future will destroy the principle of local democracy. The Government are creating a situation in which town halls will simply become agents for administering contracts. The leader of the new authority will effectively be the chair of the board of a giant company and the chief executive his or her managing director. Local services will be hived off, opted out, contracted out and privatised.

Apparently, there will be pressure from the Government to sell the assets of local authorities to cut the ability of local government to perform the innovative role that it has traditionally played, especially in Wales. There are even proposals from some Conservative Back Benchers to abolish local education authorities entirely. That has always been the Government's agenda under opting out. As local education authorities are effectively abolished, local government will no longer have a strategic approach to education.

There has even been another proposal put forward by a Back Bench Conservative Member of Parliament. We cannot dismiss it as an outpouring of some demented Thatcherite because, inevitably, the proposals will appear in a pamphlet and, a year or two later, will appear in the Queen's Speech. The hon. Member proposes that local authorities should be required to sell off all council housing at a rate of 10 per cent. a year until it is all sold off. That will destroy the ability of many local families to enjoy the prospect of owning their own home. In my constituency, families face the desperate plight of having no opportunity to get a home—no council homes are being built because local authorities are prevented from doing so.

The more fundamental issue at stake in the Government's approach to local authorities is the destruction of the principle of citizenship. We are all being forced to become consumers of education services, consumers of health services and consumers of social services. As individuals, we are being turned from citizens into consumers in which the market rules rather than the principle of service and provision according to everybody's need, either as individuals or as a community. It is a fundamental change that is not being acknowledged.

Local government and public services are being compartmentalised. Every little service, agency and area of activity pursues its own narrow self-interest and that destroys democracy through democratic institutions and so destroys citizenship and the ability to take a general interest in affairs that are in the broad public interest. We are all being segmented into each area of government and it is destroying the democratic tradition that goes back to the ancient Greek polis, where one became a real citizen through political activity and participation in politics. Politics meant a system of services to provide for the needs of society and the nation. That tradition is now being undermined because citizenship is being destroyed and local government is no longer able to express the needs of local citizens.

That entire thrust is to be seen most sharply in what I term as the "quangoitis" that has broken out in Wales unlike almost anywhere else in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) eloquently described the problem of quangos and how the number in Wales has doubled since 1979 from 40 to over 80 bodies that are filled with men and women appointed by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. Gentleman informed the House that there were 40 quangos in 1979. Why did the Wales for the Assembly Campaign in 1979 claim that there were 100 during the referendum on devolution?

Mr. Hain: It depends how one defines quangos, but I have quoted the official figures. There is now a new elite of 1,400 place men and women in those "quangia" who are responsible for administering services that were previously accountable either to Members of Parliament or to local councils. Those "quangia" control budgets of well over £2 billion—almost the same as the entire local government budget in Wales.

As privatisation, opting out, contracting-out and market testing are driven through remorselessly, almost every public service will be run by a quango or a private company. Members of such "quangia" are in some cases paid more money for a couple of days work in a month than a nurse or a postman earns in an entire year. That is destroying the whole principle of democratic government. National government is being hived off into hundreds of different agencies and local council work sub-contracted to private operators or opted-out boards. The whole civic structure is decomposing.

I hope that the Secretary of State will directly address the threat that such destruction is opening the door to massive corruption. The public service system in Britain has been the envy of the world because it has been relatively or entirely free of corruption. In a system as fragmented as the one to be introduced, public accountability will become increasingly difficult. We have already had a taster of that with the shenanigans of the Welsh Development Agency.

As such fragmentation accelerates and it becomes the function of local government not to deliver services strategically but merely to dish out contracts to private operators, there will be an increasing number of back-handers and all sorts of other corruption will take root and drive the machine of government. I do not believe that the Conservatives have sufficiently woken up to this, or if they have they seem content to allow it to continue.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Wales is comparatively well-off in comparison with Northern Ireland where four times as many people are appointed to quangos spending 10 times the amount spent by local government? I share the thrust of his argument.

Mr. Hain: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will have a chance to expand on that subject later.

One of the dimensions missing from the proposed reforms is the absence of an elected parliament for Wales. If we are to move to unitary authorities, we need over-arching strategic authority at a Welsh level. Otherwise, the fragmentation of government will be carried through society. In future we will find that Wales has lost the ability as a country to determine its own future on a strategic level. That will become an increasingly important drag anchor as we move into European integration and Wales gets left behind on the periphery of the European Union.

8.46 pm

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): I begin by referring, if I may, to an omission from the Gracious Speech as it relates to my constituents and one of their primary concerns. I refer to the debate about Welsh local government reorganisation and its impact on the national parks in Wales. There are 11 national parks in the United Kingdom and three of them are established in the principality of Wales. There is a consensus that there should be a change in the status of national park authorities. They control important planning functions, especially in a large section of my constituency in the Brecon Beacons park area.

Ever since the production of "Fit for the Future", it has been recognised that legislation should be introduced to change the status of national parks. I believe that there is cross-party support for that change and also disappointment that, at the moment, there does not appear to be a slot in the timetable for that change to be undertaken. I am mindful of the fact that legislation is being introduced in a private Member's Bill in the House of Lords and that the Government may be intending to support that measure.

I should be grateful to have clarification of that support. I understand that in another part of the House today, a Minister has said that that may be so. There has also been an indication that the Bill produced to deal with Welsh local government reorganisation will make some changes in the status of national parks. I emphasise that that is a matter of concern to my constituents and ask for some clarification—perhaps even today—in relation to that important issue.

The debate has largely concentrated on the Government's proposals for local government reorganisation in Wales. I have made several representations to successive Secretaries of State concerning that issue. Today we heard of boundary changes that the Secretary of State is minded to propose. I welcome those boundary changes as they affect my constituency. It is well known that I have always opposed the proposal that the communities of Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf should be removed from my constituency. I rose in the House to oppose it on virtually the first occasion on which it was made and whenever the matter has been debated since, I have informed successive Secretaries of State of the strength of local feeling concerning that issue.

In a referendum held in the Ystradgynlais area with cross-party support and participation some 97 per cent. voted to remain within a Breconshire or Powys authority. I am therefore pleased that, having heard from delegations brought by me to see him, the Secretary of State has decided that Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf should remain where their long-standing roots and sense of community lie.

The position in relation to the second part of the announcement on boundaries is slightly different. For some time I have known that the community of Llanelly Hill was displeased about being part of Blaenau Gwent authority. I understand that that community has made strong representations to the Welsh Office to the effect that it wishes to be removed from the Blaenau Gwent area. I think that the community is divided on whether it wishes to be associated with a Monmouthshire authority or to return to the county local authority area of which it was part until 1974—namely, Breconshire. It has been my view that the Gillwern community should come to Breconshire. That being so, I welcome the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, although I recognise that some people in that community will be disappointed by it and would have wished to have been placed within a Monmouth local authority area.

[Mr. Jonathan Evans]

Sadly, we could not debate this matter without further accusations of political gerrymandering being made in the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is true."] Hon. Members say that it is true, but I find it extraordinary that accusations of political gerrymandering should be levelled at me. I suppose that if I had been in a position to welcome the original proposal to remove the Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf communities from my constituency, I would have been accused of gerrymandering, because the communities are predominantly Labour communities—indeed, I think that every ward is represented by a Labour councillor.

But my opposition to the move is also presented as being for political advantage or as gerrymandering. I remind the House that the community of Llanelly Hill, which is now to come within the local authority area that I represent, also has a Labour councillor. I hope, therefore, that there will be no accusation of political gerrymandering in respect of that community. In fairness to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), I should say that he made it clear that no such accusation could be made and I thank him for that.

The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney spoke eloquently about the position regarding his own local authority area and the proposal for a merged Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent authority. There is a responsibility on all of us who represent Welsh constituencies to examine the sensitivities of each area. In the weeks ahead I shall certainly be looking specifically at the arguments that are presented in relation to the hon. Gentleman's area and to Blaenau Gwent, which, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged in his speech, I also know very well.

I would say, however, that is it somewhat misleading to say that the communities of Rhymney and communities in Tredegar and Ebbw Vale are totally unconnected. We well know that Aneurin Bevan, when he represented the Ebbw Vale constituency, represented those three communities. I had the honour to fight my first failed electoral contest in Wales against his successor, Michael Foot, in my home town of Tredegar in 1974.

I repeat that we need to examine the proposals sensitively. The proposal to put together Merthyr Tydfil and Blaenau Gwent involves two areas of roughly equal size. There may be some slight disproportion, but the two are roughly of equal size. How much greater would be the hon. Gentleman's anger if one of those areas were half the size of the other? That could be viewed along the lines of a takeover and that is one reason why I have strongly opposed the proposal that there should be a joint Brecon and Radnor authority—an alternative proposed by some to deal with the difficulties that we face in mid-Wales.

I make it absolutely clear that, ever since local government reorganisation started to be considered, I have been a strong supporter of the proposition that there should be separate local authorities for Radnorshire, Breconshire and Montgomeryshire—a recognition of those three shire counties.

I will not go over all the history of Radnorshire and Breconshire. We have heard on many occasions of the history of Montgomeryshire from the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). There are considerations even more important than history—geography and demographic range and the huge size of a Powys-wide authority. I have had to consider carefully the reasons why I am opposed to Powys. My opposition is based on a recognition of the extent to which people identify with the local community in which they live. One of the reasons—whatever the politics of the matter—why I argued so strongly for my constituents in Ystradgynlais and Tawe Uchaf was that they had that strong connection with Breconshire. Similarly, the strength of connection that people feel with Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire is important.

I welcome the willingness of the Secretary of State to seek to change the proposals. I have examined carefully the model that he has produced, which he describes as the Powys model, but which is derided, in rather less grand language, by Opposition Members. The Secretary of State has shown that he is moving towards a recognition of the strength of local feeling. But real questions about that model remain and they are questions with which we shall have to deal during the debate.

For example, what powers will be exercised at local level in Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire and Breconshire? Another issue that I consider to be crucial is that of financial control. Unless we find a proper method of financing devolved down to the Breconshire and the Radnorshire area, the devolution of power will be meaningless.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Let me take the hon. Gentleman back a paragraph. Does he accept that, during the previous general election campaign, at a public meeting in the Banwy valley in Montgomeryshire, the then Secretary of State for Wales gave an unqualified promise that Montgomeryshire would be a unitary authority? Does he also accept that he made out that Radnorshire would be a unitary authority? If either of those statements is true, may I ask the hon. Gentleman how he squares a broken promise with the present situation?

Mr. Evans: In relation to the hon. and learned Gentleman's first proposition, he will understand that I was not in Montgomeryshire to hear those observations because I was busy fighting in the south. However, in relation to my own campaign, I have made it absolutely clear throughout, as I hope I have today, that I remain a committed supporter of separate unitary authorities within the areas that I represent.

Mr. Carlile: In the general election campaign, the hon. Gentleman said that that would happen.

Mr. Evans: The hon. and learned Gentleman says from a sedentary position that in the general election campaign I said that that would happen. I was a parliamentary candidate who was no part of the Government. The hon. and learned Gentleman is stretching the point if he says that I could have made any such claim. He knows that that could not be the case. All that I could do in the campaign was honestly to state my own position: that I did unequivocally then and that I have done unequivocally throughout the debate on the occasions when the hon. and learned Gentleman has been present to hear it.

I return to the point that I was making before that intervention, which was on financial control. It is very important to have proper means of devolution of financial control to shire levels. It was perhaps inevitable that the Opposition parties would seek to attack the legitimacy of local government reorganisation in Wales on the basis of

their now familiar claim that we cannot deal with local government reorganisation unless we have a parliament for Wales. I unequivocally oppose the creation of a separate parliament for Wales.

In my maiden speech I made it clear that the establishment of any such Welsh assembly would be a major challenge to the constitutional integrity of Wales as an integral part of the United Kingdom. The arguments today are the same old, tired, familiar arguments that we heard in 1979.

It is said that an overweening bureaucracy of quangos runs Wales. We heard that again today. That is the very same argument that the Assembly for Wales campaign presented in 1979, after five years of Labour government. Of course, the result of the vote in Wales at the time was a resounding dismissal of the proposals that were put forward by all the Opposition parties combined. Only one political party in Wales argued against the establishment of a Welsh assembly in 1979—the Conservative party. The Conservative party's case was supported by more than 80 per cent. of the Welsh electorate.

It has also been said that the matter is all to do with bureaucracy and quangos and that quangos are all run by Tories. It is as though the Labour party had never appointed a Labour supporter to a quango in Wales. My word, what short memories Opposition Members have. In the circumstances, I am bound to say that I would be hard put to come up with the name of any Conservative who was appointed to any quango in Wales until 1979, although, to the embarrassment of Opposition Members, we know the names of many of our political opponents who sit on public bodies in Wales today and did so during the 1980s. We heard the fact of the matter from the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson). There are not enough trade unionists, he said, on quangos in Wales. That is what Opposition Members think the matter is all about.

Having made the point that I regret the omission of reference to reform of the national parks in the Gracious Speech, I congratulate my right hon. Friend and the Government on omitting from the Gracious Speech any reference to the creation of a divisive Welsh assembly which would be the first step in separating Wales from the United Kingdom.

9.2 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I will be brief because it has been a long debate and other right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak. It is strange that we are debating Welsh local government when we have not yet heard the speech of the Secretary of State for Wales. That has made it rather difficult for us to debate the subject constructively, especially when we do not have a copy of the Bill.

I hope that the Secretary of State will confirm that the long title of the Bill will not be drawn so tightly as to debar any amendments that will increase the number of unitary authorities beyond the 21 that he has in mind. I hope that he will give an assurance that the long title will not say "to reform local govvernment in Wales by establishing 21 authorities", because right hon. and hon. Members will not be able to increase the number by tabling amendments.

As has been said, the Bill should not start in the House of Lords. I have always believed that there was a convention that only non-controversial Bills, and certainly not semi-constitutional or constitutional Bills, would be started in the House of Lords. However, mention of the conventions of the constitution always falls on stony ground. Since 1979, the Government have ridden roughshod over those conventions. They are not written down, but prople know what they are. The Government have taken a Leninist approach to the House of Commons and its conventions and they have ridden roughshod over them. One of the conventions is that such Bills should not be introduced in the House of Lords.

Another convention of the constitution was that there was an attempt to keep some sort of political balance when appointments were made to quangos. Certainly, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) was Secretary of State for Wales, he was too fair—he appointed too many people from other parties. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) was not in the House at the time. We bent over backwards to keep a balance in appointments to quangos in Wales. That is another unwritten convention over which the Conservative Government have ridden roughshod. It is one reason why there has been no consensus in government in Wales over the past 14 years.

I was in the House when the previous Local Government Bill was introduced in 1972. That Bill related to the reorganisation of local government in both England and Wales. The two Ministers in charge of the Bill for England were Lord Walker, who was Secretary of State for the Environment, and the President of the Board of Trade, who was merely a lowly Under-Secretary at the Department of the Environment. I was a member of the Committee that dealt with the Bill.

When we said that it would cost a lot of money, the Government shook their head in exactly the same way as the Secretary of State for Wales and the Minister of State were shaking their heads earlier when Labour Members said that this will cost a lot of money. It will cost a lot of money in redundancy payments, index-linked pensions, reorganisation, closing down some buildings, construction of new buildings, moving computers and all the paraphernalia of change.

The taxpayer about whom we hear so often from Conservative Members will have to pay. The income tax payer, the council tax payer and the VAT taxpayer will have to pay for another attempt by the Conservative Government to reorganise local government in Wales. However, they should leave it alone. I do not know why the Government—and, certainly, the ideologues from 1979 onwards—are obsessed with local government. They simply cannot cope with local government. They do not want it. They want to centralise economic authority—it is almost bureaucratic centralism in the case of Wales. They simply do not like local government and cannot cope with it.

Mr. Richards: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if the Labour party's policy had been implemented after the general election, all the costs that he has referred to as being unnecessary and unwarranted would have been incurred because it was the Labour party's policy to have unitary authorities in Wales?

Mr. Davies: Our policy is clear. It is to reorganise government in Wales and create a parliament. In 1979, there were deep divisions in the Labour party. If we mentioned the word "parliament", there were all sorts of problems, so we devised the rather odd word "assembly".

[Mr. Davies]

The consensus has moved on and there is general agreement in Wales. If Conservative Members believe that, simply because a referendum was lost in 1979, the position is the same today, they do not know what is going on in Wales. Having watched the centralism that has gone on in economic policy and in the government of Wales since 1979, the people of Wales have no doubt at all about who would vote for a parliament. Within the context of establishing a parliament, we would establish unitary authorities.

We all agree that unitary authorities are a good thing. However, at some stage—perhaps not now, but during debates on the Bill—we must address the question of checks and balances on unitary authorities. In the present system—in my area it is Dyfed county council and Llanelli borough council, Carmarthen district council and the district councils in Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire—there is a check and a balance, albeit not very sophisticated. In relation to planning matters, for instance, one authority deals with housing and planning; another deals with highways. Quite often, that check and balance prevent the abuse of power.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) mentioned Germany. How do we create checks and balances when all that we have are powerful unitary authorities? For example, local authorities are often able to give themselves planning permission and the Secretary of State is not interested and does not want to call the matter in. How do we create checks and balances when there are no elections for four years? If one third of a council retires and there are further elections, that may provide a check and a balance, but we have to address our minds to the creation of the large and powerful unitary authorities to which we agreed. Where is the check? Where is the balance?

Planning law is the last area in British jurisprudence where there is very little rule of law. There are plenty of circulars and plenty of statutes, but practically anything goes in terms of planning decisions. Perhaps that will have to be dealt with in some Committee other than that which deals with the Bill.

I shall now mention my constituency. In 1972 the then Conservative Government decided to abolish Carmarthenshire, which was old-fashioned and which they did not want any more. It was abolished in 1972 and they created Dyfed. Dyfed has worked quite well. It was not the historical area of Dyfed—they got their history wrong there, but one does not expect a Conservative Government to understand Welsh history and the history of areas like mine.

When the Government abolished Carmarthenshire they abolished the old Llanelli borough council, which covered the town of Llanelli. The hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) knows the region well. They also abolished Llanelli rural district council, which covered the old anthracite mining areas of the Gwendraed valley. There was a reason for those two councils, because they related to the economic tradition and the economic activities in the area. They abolished Burry port urban district council and the old borough of Kidwelly, which had a long history. They abolished them all. I do not know why. Local government has not necessarily improved as a result and I do not know whether it is cheaper as a result; but there we are, they abolished about four councils in my constituency.

Now the Government are bringing back the county of Carmarthenshire and abolishing Dyfed. They will now abolish the sole remaining council in Llanelli—Llanelli borough council, which covers the old areas of the town, the Gwendraed valley, Burry Port and Kidwelly. Llanelli will be left without any councils, apart from the community councils. Although I do not denigrate them, I do not consider that to be a satisfactory situation for an area with the traditions, history, spirit and sense of community that Llanelli has.

I have to ask myself, what have we done? What have two Conservative Governments got against Llanelli that from 1972 onwards and in 1993 they wipe out one council after the other? Will the Secretary of State tell us why—if not in his winding-up speech, perhaps later?

Mr. Richards: Is the right hon. Gentleman trying to tell the House that in those years Llanelli borough council discharged its duties and responsibilities impartially and fairly to all?

Mr. Davies: Llanelli borough council does a reasonably good job, as do most councils in Wales, in difficult circumstances, with all the constraints that the Government place upon local authorities. It is easy to find mistakes and easy to criticise local councillors who do a difficult job —much more difficult, in many ways, than that of a Member of Parliament. Why was it necessary for Conservative Governments from 1972 to 1993, to wipe out practically all the local authorities in my constituency?

We will see what happens in the Committee stage of the Bill. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to assure me that it will be possible to increase the number of authorities and that the figure 21 will not be written on to a tablet of stone so that we are unable to amend it.

The Government should have introduced a Welsh assembly and a Welsh parliament, with the metropolitan authorities underneath. They do not wish to do so and they will make another botched job of Welsh local government reorganisation.

9.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): As a councillor who served during the previous reorganisation, I know exactly what the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) means. It is a pity that some of the same mistakes are being repeated. Central Government have consistently failed to understand the importance, the stature and the status of local authorities—more's the pity.

This Government of a million mistakes is about to make another. Having completely fouled up over the poss tax fiasco, the Tories are rushing into an ill-thought-out restructuring which will not last. These proposals do not meet the needs of Scotland's local government. They do not mirror local communities, nor do they conform with the wishes of the Scottish people. This is a rushed reorganisation which no one wants and with which no one has identified. It could, and should, have been so very different. I must ask why this is happening against the wishes of the people and in such a rushed and hassled fashion. The Government have set impossible timetables and imposed their gerrymandered proposals. This is a

Government of haste and waste, rushing proposals through, and throwing money at them that would be better spent on providing local government services.

Many of the boundaries have no basis in local communities. One authority is split by the Firth of Forth, another by a land corridor and another by the Lammermuir hills—a geographical fact that the Government seem not to have noticed. The proposal for the highlands will create a local authority that is geographically larger than Wales. Whatever kind of government that is, it is certainly not local. There is no sense in the proposals. That is especially true because there has been no real local participation in them.

England gets a commission and a budget of £12 million. All we get is a botched scheme that will not last precisely because it does not reflect the reality of the Scottish communities which it is supposedly designed to serve. Because of that, the Government's proposals are fatally flawed.

The Secretary of State has said:

"Parliament will decide the boundaries".

But using the lottery of amendments in Committee and on Report is surely the worst way to approach an issue that is fundamental to the success or failure of the changes. The Secretary of State was actually hinting to his Back Benchers that, if they moved in the right direction, they might get some concessions. I hope that the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) takes the hint. I am sure that the people of Kincardineshire will welcome it if he takes advantage of such an offer. However, I regret that the Secretary of State's offer will probably not extend beyond the Conservative Benches.

The truth is that the people of Scotland and the nature of our communities should decide the boundaries, not the Government, through diktat or some sort of lottery by amendment in Committee and on Report. The Scottish people should have been consulted properly and at length. As I said, England gets a commission and a budget of £12 million, but we get gerrymandering, and it is not good enough.

On the size of the authorities, may I draw the attention of the Secretary of State to the report of the Rowntree Foundation entitled "The impact of population size on local authority costs and effectiveness", dated June 1993. From studying England, the report concluded:

"Evidence does not suggest a straightforward and consistent link between population size and cost and/or effectiveness . . . There are some statistical links between population size and cost and/or effectiveness . . . but such links can point either way".

The foundation found that, on housing, there was

"a tendency for smaller authorities to be more effective",

whereas in education a

"consistent if weak link suggests that population size influences both costs and performance of services".

The main finding in the report was that

"such links can point either way".

The report also points out that there is no perfect size for the delivery of local government services. Therefore, if, within reason, the size of the authority is not crucial, we are free to concentrate on relating councils to established local communities. The Government's failure to do this is an irrecoverable error.

We are about to see an unnecessary period of dislocation and disruption in a local government system which provides a vast range of high quality essential daily services to every family and individual in Scotland. In addition to parallel authorities, staff changes, property transfers and the other disruptions that we have seen in the past, the Government are adding the extra destabilising burdens of compulsory competitive tendering and service provision changes.

The reorganisation is not the only major change facing councils and council staff. Devolved school management, school development planning, and five to 14-year-old development programmes are all happening at the same time as community care, reform of the police service and the extension of CCT. All those changes are central Government measures which have been heaped upon local authorities. The Government have a lot to answer for in their attitude towards our local authorities.

The Government claim that there will be simplicity in the new system, but that is simply not so. There is an inbuilt recipe for confusion in their proposals. The Government are replacing a two-tier system with a multi-tier system containing confused responsibilities, and a reduction in the numbers of elected councillors to preside over the changes.

There will be 28 new councils, of differing sizes, while the size of the police and fire services will remain at their regional levels; and who knows what size the water boards will be? To that will be added new joint boards of all sizes. It is a patchwork quilt of a system in the making.

There is a problem of democracy at the heart of these proposals, which will leave Scotland with the lowest proportion of elected representatives per head of population in western Europe. That is what the Government are doing to us. Fewer councillors allied to more responsibility can only mean an increase in work loads for the new system, and it will be hit with problems at the most vulnerable settling-in period.

There has been no mention of a timetable for CCT, but it was mentioned in the Queen's Speech. The White Paper speaks about the

"need to avoid overloading the management of Councils during the transitional period."

What do the Government intend to do, because CCT will hit those councils when they are at their most vulnerable?

In conclusion—*[Interruption.]* I am tempted to continue, because there is a message that Conservatives should hear.

Scotland will be run by a series of non-elected, non-accountable quangos, which are the opposite of democracy. That is what the Government are forcing on the Scottish people, and that is why they have been rejected by them. Under these proposals, even children's panels will be herded off to another non-elected quango appointed by the Secretary of State, which no doubt will be packed by his cronies. That is the way the Tories run Scotland. They cannot get elected, so they do it by back-door, undemocratic methods.

The Government's proposals to hive off Scotland's water services to quangos is entirely unacceptable—no one wants it or supports it. It illustrates the arrogance of the Government towards the people of Scotland. The water boards are a paving measure towards eventual privatisation. The out-of-touch Government are wrong about the issue, which the Secretary of State avoided mentioning in his speech. He may hide, but he will have to come out into the open and explain what the Government will do about it.

This is not an enabling reform; it is a disabling one. It is a blatant attack on local government and local democracy, and it is, quite simply, a mistake.

9.23 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): We got off to a good start this afternoon when we had the farcical situation of the Secretary of State for Scotland making a statement on behalf of an English Member of Parliament who happens to be the Secretary of State for Wales. That statement clearly illustrated to us all what we have come to understand over recent months—that the process of local government reform in Wales has been an absolute shambles.

It is clear that the introduction of the reforms to Wales will be delayed. That represents intense embarrassment for the Government and the complete humiliation of the Secretary of State. That delay is due to the failure of the right hon. Gentleman to get agreement in Cabinet to present the Bill first to the House. The right hon. Gentleman and his Cabinet colleagues are aware that the timetable for the Bill is now unpredictable and that therefore the Secretary of State is unable to guarantee the introduction of the new authorities by 1995 as promised.

The problem is that Wales is now paying the price for the fact that the Secretary of State is an outrider in the Cabinet. He lacks influence and the confidence of his colleagues. As a result, two precedents have been created. First, a controversial Bill, which undoubtedly affects the constitution of Wales, will be presented first to the House of Lords. That will encourage opposition and will result in a lengthy and detailed examination of the Bill in this House and in the other place. I do not believe that the cause of local government in Wales will be served by the process to be followed in the next 12 months.

Today we have also witnessed the extraordinary precedent of a statement being presented at the conclusion of a debate. If the Secretary of State had an announcement to make about the timetable for the legislation, I should have thought that there was some logic—we attempted to press the Secretary of State to understand this—in him intervening at the start of the debate to say just that. We have listened to the contributions from the Front-Bench spokesmen and have sat here for more than six hours. At no time, however, has the Secretary of State attempted to intervene, despite our encouragement, to make his intentions clear. It is a matter of great regret that he did not do so.

It is also a matter of regret to me that the Secretary of State has not yet come to realise that there is a large measure of agreement in Wales on the reform of local government. I do not understand why on earth the Secretary of State is not prepared to consult and, on the basis of that consultation, to work with the existing consensus. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) stressed that point. What on earth are the Government afraid of? Why is the Secretary of State frightened to consult and to work on the basis of consensus?

What the debate has emphatically demonstrated is that the Government's proposals for local government reform in Scotland and Wales will not command any support from the people of those nations. They are also overwhelmingly rejected by the majority of Members of Parliament who represent constituencies in those countries.

If the legislation reaches the statute book, it will serve the interests of the Tory party, at the whim of a Government with no mandate in Scotland and Wales. It will be voted for by hon. Members who represent English constituencies who have neither sought nor received votes from the people who will be exclusively affected by the proposed changes.

Those changes have nothing to do with improving local government. They are not designed to foster civic pride nor to enhance the sense of community. They are not intended to improve the quality and range of public services. Since they are devoid of public or popular support, they are nothing to do with improving or extending the democratic process in Scotland and Wales. If they will do anything, they will help to frustrate the legitimate aspirations of our two nations for greater control of our own affairs. The proposals run counter to all the tides of politics, public affairs and government, not only in Britain but in the whole of western Europe. They will therefore be met with robust and unremitting opposition when the Bills are eventually presented to the House.

Of greatest concern to those of us who value the democratic process is that the proposals are solely for Tory party political interests. It speaks volumes for the Tory party and its representatives in Parliament that they will put their names and, ultimately, their votes to a process that is at best gerrymandering and at worst corruption.

It is broadly agreed in Wales that the existing system of local government needs reform. The system itself is a result of reform foisted on Wales in 1974 by a Tory Government who would not listen and insisted that the way forward was not by seeking consent but by centralist prescription. It is now the height of cynicism for the Government to use their past failures as an excuse to meddle further in the affairs of Wales when they have neither a mandate nor a consensus and when their guiding principle is nothing but a shabby attempt to shore up the slender majorities of the remaining Tory Members in Wales.

Both the Secretary of State and his predecessor have made much of the fact that there is broad agreement in Wales for the creation of unitary authorities and that they have consulted widely. That assertion is untrue and disreputable, and the Secretary of State knows it. At the last election the Opposition parties in Wales were united in advocating reorganisation and in a determination that the most important reform of government in Wales was to democratise the Welsh Office. Without an all-Wales elected body to provide a co-ordinating framework, it is impossible to construct a system of unitary authorities that can reflect the variety of natural communities in Wales while ensuring that services such as education, social services, transport and planning are effectively delivered and co-ordinated.

If the Secretary of State has listened to the answers to the questions that he has asked, he will know that. The overwhelming majority of parliamentarians and, almost without exception, the whole of local government in Wales have told him that, but he knows that the Tory party can never concede to Wales greater control over its own affairs.

The Conservative party is now in terminal decline in Wales, which is why we have seen the disgraceful manipulations of the quango system referred to devastatingly by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson). It is only by the nepotism of a system that can parachute into public office people who would never be elected that the Tory party can hope to retain an influence over our public affairs.

The events of the past 14 years in public life in Wales give the clearest indication of the arrogance and contempt

shown to Wales by successive Conservative Governments. The democratic and accountable public sector—elected local government—has seen its powers limited and its resources cut. From 55 per cent. in 1979, local government expenditure has fallen as a percentage of total Welsh Office spend to 45 per cent. in the current financial year.

At the same time, there has been an explosion in the number, power and influence of quangos. They have doubled in number from 40 in 1979 to 80 in 1993, and there will be more to come as our health and education services are taken further out of public control. In cash terms, there has been a 246 per cent. increase in quango expenditure from 1979 and quangos now account for one third of Welsh Office expenditure.

Mr. Redwood: If people, in a free vote, decide that their school should be differently governed and that their governors should then have more powers and more direct control over the budget, how is that less democratic than the system that the hon. Gentleman recommends? Surely that is the very essence of truly local democracy.

Mr. Davies: I trust two things—first, that the Secretary of State and his colleague, the Minister of State with responsibility for education, will be even-handed in their treatment of education in Wales and ensure that local authorities and schools that decide to remain in the public sector will be treated on the same basis as those which decide to opt out; and, secondly, that the Secretary of State will recognise decisions taken by local government and by individual schools to remain in the public sector, as undoubtedly they will increasingly do.

The nepotism is bad enough, but in Welsh politics the picture is even more corrupt. As Wales has voted more solidly anti-Tory, the Tory influence has been extended by patronage. In the county council elections in 1993, the Tory party managed to win 21 of the 502 seats available. If the present local government plans go through, for the first time there will be more appointed quango members —1,400—than elected local authority members—1,150. I remind the Secretary of State, since he is proud of his 100 per cent. rating as an unreconstructed Thatcherite, of what his mentor said about the matter in 1980. Referring to quangos, she said:

"There will always be pressure for new bodies. We shall be robust in resisting them."

We know what the present Prime Minister thinks about the present Secretary of State for Wales. The Secretary of State would be well advised to stay out of handbag range of the Prime Minister's predecessor.

Of course, we have not heard a defence of the local government changes. No one has argued that they will provide better local services or that the new authorities will be more identifiable with the communities that they serve. If that is true, when the Secretary of State decides to take Coychurch out of the proposed Vale of Glamorgan, how can he decide to leave in the communities of St. Brides, Ewenny and Wick? In public referendums, those areas had turnouts of more than 75 per cent. Each community had a positive vote of 85 per cent. to remain with Bridgend and the borough of Ogwr. What price democracy? What price can there be?

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: No. I am sorry, but if the hon. Gentleman had wanted to make a speech, he should have done as I have done and remained in the Chamber since the start of the debate. I have no doubt that, if he had risen, he would have been called to speak.

Last Friday, the Secretary of State had the chance in the *Western Mail* to defend his proposals. In an article quaintly described as "John Redwood outlining his vision for the future", he said not one word about the new councils. His defence of his refusal to acknowledge the overwhelming case for an assembly was contained in one small paragraph. He said:

"They want to charge you extra tax for the privilege of being Welsh."

No one has suggested that extra tax will be paid, but I will not take that criticism from a Tory party that was re-elected last year on the basis of lies and deception about its proposals for tax increases. The party which gave us VAT, extra VAT to pay for the poll tax, extra VAT on fuel to meet the spending deficit, and an extra £8·50 for each family from next April is in no position to lecture anybody about tax increases.

The Secretary of State went on to say:

"They want to spend more of the money on bureaucracy".

Last week the right hon. Gentleman caused private panic in the Tory party and a public rebuke because he drew attention to the unique ability of the Tory party to do just that. We have a new system of government in Wales. The Secretary of State does not make speeches but calls representatives of the press and gets his press officer to read them a handout.

It makes interesting reading. It starts:

"I am a child of the National Health Service."

We know that the Prime Minister questions the Secretary of State's parentage, and I am sure that the Secretary of State is getting his retaliation in, but he shows great vision. He goes on to say:

"The task before us is to create a Health Service for the next century".

That is startling. It is 1993. What does he think the task before us is—to create it for the 19th century? He continues:

"There . . . is a restlessness among some of the medical staff about the number of men in grey suits".

I thought that it was the men in white coats who were causing problems in the Tory party. The men in grey suits have seen, as a direct result of the reforms of the Tory party, a 262 per cent. increase in their number and a 900 per cent. increase in their salaries. The Secretary of State is in no position to lecture us about an increase in bureaucracy.

The Secretary of State showed remarkable insight. He went on to say:

"The doctor and nurse, all the clinical staff, are there as the most important people dealing with the patients."

That is reassuring. He concludes:

"Some will say my view is too simple minded".

I think that he will find a measure of agreement on that.

The problem facing the Secretary of State is an inheritance from his predecessor. There is no clear vision and no understanding of why and how local government should be reformed. They have fallen between the trap of a larger number of smaller authorities and a smaller number of large authorities.

I refer the Secretary of State to some advice that was reported in *The Independent* this morning. It was advice given to the Local Government Commission in England: "Unitary authorities"—I commend this to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans)—

"covering either a very large area or a very small population will need a specially strong justification".

[Mr. Davies]

That advice was based, I believe, on the advice of Kate Jennings, who worked in the Minister's private office at the Department of the Environment. He has now taken her to the Welsh Office. I suggest that he has a long chat with his adviser, and if he follows the advice that she is giving his colleagues in England he will drop the reforms and drop them now.

9.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): It is a new idea for a wind-up speech from the Opposition to take the best lines from the Secretary of State's speech that they are attacking, but I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) for giving them even more air time than they have had in the past few days.

Otherwise, it was a load of huffing and puffing from the hon. Gentleman that amounted to nothing. I can assure him that the Cabinet is fully aware of the needs of Wales and that, when it comes to the big issues, Wales is looked after, as it was with assisted area status, as it has been with objectives 2 and 5 status and as it will be in the Budget and the public expenditure statement. I tell the hon. Gentleman to stop huffing about those things and to watch what is going on, because there is good news for Wales in many of the statements that I deliver.

As for the hon. Gentleman's synthetic anger about the issues before the House, I ensured that all Members from Wales had all the important things that they needed for today's debate about boundaries and about the number of councillors. I shall come to the issue about which I did not release information, on timing.

Local government matters. It is because the Government believe that it matters that they are introducing Bills to reorganise the structure of local government in Wales and Scotland—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Hon. Members know full well the rules of the House and it would seem that the Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Redwood: Had the House left me a little time, I would give way. I normally do so, but there is not enough time if I wish to tell the House what it needs to know.

The Government are introducing Bills to reorganise the structure of local government in Wales and Scotland and are well advanced in reorganising the structure of local government in England. Most of the debate in the past two and a half years has focused on boundaries, and the boundaries issue has certainly dominated my postbag in recent months. I wish to establish a structure of local government in Wales that, as far as possible, is based on the traditional areas with which people identify.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. During a debate that was intended to be about Scottish and Welsh local government reform, three Conservative Back Benchers from English constituencies have spent over one hour talking about issues which have nothing to do with the subject. As a result of that, some hon. Members from Scotland and from Wales were not called to speak. In those circumstances, is it not right that a Minister should give way to answer a short question on a factual issue which would take 30 seconds?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Members to whom the hon. Gentleman refers had been out of order, they would have been stopped by the Chair. I have to inform the hon. Gentleman that although certain subjects are raised for debate each day, they are not exclusive. It is perfectly in order to raise other subjects, provided that they relate to the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Redwood: If hon. Members let me tell them what they wish to know, I will give way if time permits.

In the old counties of Dyfed and Newport, for example, precise boundaries seem to be no longer an issue.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a different point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I said earlier that three hon. Members representing English constituencies had spoken during the debate. One of those hon. Members, the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick), is here. Is not the convention of the House that hon. Members who speak in a debate should be in the Chamber for the winding-up speech? Where are the other two hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Redwood: People in Wales would like to hear what I have to say. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will now permit me to continue.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I beg to move, That strangers do withdraw.

Notice being taken that strangers were present, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Standing Order No. 143 (Withdrawal of Strangers from House), put forthwith the Question,* That strangers do withdraw:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Richards *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Members of the House and the people of Wales were expecting an important speech from the Secretary of State for Wales this evening. That has been denied them by a disgraceful tactic by a Liberal Democrat Member, a part-time Member of the House known as the moonlighting Member for Montgomery. When will the people of Wales and Members of Parliament hear the important statement by the Secretary of State for Wales on the reform of local government?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair, but I inform the hon. Member that if the Secretary of State still has the floor at 10 o'clock, it will be open to him to continue his speech when the debate is resumed tomorrow, if he chooses to do so.

Mr. Riddick *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Throughout the debate, we have heard demands from Opposition Members that the Secretary of State for Wales give details tonight of the changes that he intends to make to some of the boundaries. Is it not a disgrace that the Liberal Democrats have ensured that that cannot take place?

On a further point of order——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already said that the matter is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Riddick: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order, so it cannot be continued.

Mr. Riddick: On a completely new point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the last Session of Parliament, during the passage of the Railways Bill through the House, we saw some disgraceful scenes when Labour Opposition Members disrupted Parliament. We are now seeing Liberal Democrat Members disrupting this Session of Parliament. What can you do from the Chair to stop such disruptive tactics?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member is no more raising a point of order now than he was earlier. It is not a point of order for the Chair. It may be a point of substance, but it is not a point of order.

The House having divided: Ayes 10, Noes 91.

Division No. 1] **[9.46 pm**

AYES

Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Dafis, Cynog
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Salmond, Alex
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones and
Mr. James Wallace.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Barnes, Harry
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bermingham, Gerald
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bowis, John
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Congdon, David
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cousins, Jim
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Fyfe, Maria
Gallie, Phil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lewis, Terry
McCartney, Ian
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Morgan, Rhodri
Murphy, Paul
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Neill, Martin
Paice, James
Pike, Peter L.
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Thomason, Roy
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Michael Brown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Alex Carlile: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. While the rule remains as it is, the hon. and learned Gentleman must wear the proper headgear.

Mr. Carlile *(seated and covered):* On a point or order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not right that the debate has been continued—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not expect the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to behave in quite such a foolish fashion.

Mr. Carlile: The debate has now been going for almost seven and a half hours. Can you, Madam Deputy Speaker, confirm that it would have been in order for the Secretary of State for Wales, or a Minister, to make an announcement at any time on whether the elections to the new authorities would be postponed for a year?

Secondly, do you, Madam Deputy Speaker, believe that it is in order that an announcement has been leaked to the press that tells us that those elections will be delayed for a year?

Madam Deputy Speaker: So far everything has been in order.

Mr. Redwood: It is a great pity that we have had this interruption. I will give the House the news that it wanted, as I see that my time is now up. I will propose that we delay implementation by one year in order to give sufficient parliamentary time so that a good debate can be had——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Ms Janet Anderson be appointed a member of the House of Commons Commission in place of Mr. Peter Shore under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Child Migrants

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

10 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield) *rose——*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) should delay for a moment while the Chamber is cleared. Will hon. Members please leave quietly?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am most grateful for the opportunity to raise an issue tonight about which I have long been concerned. This issue, which has concerned many hon. Members, relates to the migration of thousands of British children. My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) hopes to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Like most people in this country, I was blissfully unaware until about a year ago that from 1618 until 1967 my country had exported about 150,000 children to various parts of the old empire including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe and the Caribbean. I learned of that policy when, a year ago last October, I met an Australian in Speaker's House who was attending a receiption on the eve of the rugby league world cup final between Great Britain and Australia.

The woman concerned told me that her late father had been one of thousands of British child migrants who were exported to Australia. She said that she hoped to learn about his ancestry and hers while she was in Britain—someting denied to vast numbers of migrants for generations.

I found what she told me astonishing. I also found it personally disturbing because, as the Minister is aware, prior to being elected to Parliament I worked in the social services. I began working in social work in 1968. Often I worked very closely with some of the agencies which, I discovered, had until only the previous year been involved in the export of British children in sometimes very questionable circumstances.

I want to make it clear at the outset that it is not in any way my intention tonight to attack those who currently run those agencies. I will obviously refer to the impact of schemes operated by a range of agencies including the Catholic Child Welfare Council, Barnardo's, the National Children's Home and the Salvation Army. However I, perhaps more than most hon. Members, am very conscious of the important contemporary work of those organisations and others. I am also very much aware that the whole story of British child care policy is one of subsequent generations viewing with concern and sometimes horror what was deemed good practice by our predecessors.

I am not here tonight to rake over elements of our history which some would say are best forgotten. I want to ask this Government to address seriously their responsibilities to those who, as we speak, face every day the emotional and sometimes physical implications of having been child migrants.

A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of meeting in the House of Commons a former child migrant from Australia who is trying to repair the appalling damage that has been caused by this country's migration policies. He broke down as he told me how he was taken from his mother and family and had his name and religion changed. He has only recently had an operation on his ear to rectify a condition arising from physical injuries received while under what was deemed the care of one of the agency families concerned. He is fortunate to have an occupation that now pays him reasonably well as he has had to spend about £30,000 travelling to and from Britain making inquiries about his own identity, with the invaluable help of the Child Migrants Trust. He eventually found out who his mother was, but sadly experienced that of so many others with similar backgrounds, and found out that his mother had died not long before he managed to establish who she was.

I had that man's case in mind when I raised the issue of child migration at Prime Minister's Question Time recently. The House will recall that the Prime Minister replied:

> "Any concern about the treatment of the children in another country is essentially a matter for the authorities in that country."
> —*[Official Report,* 2 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 147.]

The former migrant that I met is a British citizen—one of hundreds and possibly thousands of former migrants who are British and for whom the British Government have a past, present and future responsibility.

Many of the former migrants, especially in Australia, have retained their British citizenship, as there was no provision made for child migrants sent there in the post-war period to automatically assume Australian citizenship. Many do not realise that they are still British and often find out only when their application for an Australian passport is rejected. It was not the policy to provide migrants with passports or full birth certificates when they left Britain and many of my age and older still lack a full birth certificate and the most basic of information about their real identity or personal background.

I do not have the time to do justice to a summary of the history of the child migrant scheme, but I urge the Minister to study some of the literature concerning the scheme and especially the detailed research in the book "Lost Children of the Empire" by Philip Bean and Joy Melville, first published in 1989. They made it clear that while migrants were usually called orphans, the majority were not and were more often abandoned, illegitimate or from poor or broken homes. When they were admitted to care, sometimes temporarily, their parents usually had no idea that they were likely to be dispatched to far outposts of the empire. Children were frequently told that their parents were dead and in many instances it was clear they were not.

Bean and Melville examined the reasons for continued existence of the schemes over and above the questionable argument that it was in the best interests of the children concerned. It is clear from their research that the reasons ranged from it being cheaper than keeping them in Britain to a deliberate attempt to populate the empire with what was deemed good British—that is, white—stock. Their book also alleges that the religious affiliations of certain concerned agencies was an important factor in some of the arrangements made. On Canadian migration, they state:

> "Ontario wanted as many non-Catholics as possible to settle there, conscious of catholic expansion in adjacent Quebec and Quebec, eyeing the influx, called in turn for child Catholics"

Whatever the motivation, it is clear that thousands of child migrants were grossly exploited as cheap, virtual slave labour and were emotionally, physically and

frequently sexually abused. The Bean and Melville study highlights how checks on the care and treatment of migrants were minimal and usually non-existent.

We know that some of the worst treatment of migrants has taken place since the last world war—in the lifetime of most hon. Members present. It is of the utmost concern that the powers of successive Governments in the Children Act 1948 to control the immigration arrangements of voluntary organisations were not used. It was not until the implementation of the Child Care Act 1980 in January 1982 that the consent of the Secretary of State was required before agencies could send children abroad.

In my recent question to the Prime Minister, I referred to the fact that, in a couple of weeks' time, a British woman, Mrs. Margaret Humphreys, will become the first British citizen—apart from members of the royal family —to receive the prestigious Order of Australia medal. She is to receive that award because of Australia's recognition of the unique role that she has played in helping migrants to be reunited with their former families and to adjust to the trauma that they have experienced.

Mrs. Humphreys established the Child Migrants Trust in 1987 after uncovering the extent to which migrants exported under the scheme were desperately seeking help. Clearly, many of the migrants felt unable to seek such help from the agencies that originally exported them because of the very damaging experience that had resulted. I pay sincere tribute to Margaret Humphreys and her colleagues at the Child Migrants Trust for their work.

I also feel that the country owes a great debt to the Nottinghamshire county council social services department for substantially funding the work of the trust. I pay tribute to the chairman of the social services committee, Councillor Joan Taylor,and to the support given to her by her Conservative shadow chair, Councillor Brenda Borrett and the Liberal Democrat spokeswoman on the committee, Councillor Sue Bennett. The Minister is well aware that this is not a party issue. There is all-party support in the House, as in Nottingham, for the proposition that we should attempt to address the issue seriously.

I am grateful that the holding of this Adjournment debate has resulted in the trust being visited for the first time in six years by a representative of the Department of Health. I hope that an important consequence will be a substantial increase in the funding made available by the Government for the work of the trust. The current grant, although welcome, goes nowhere near to paying for even a small part of its very important work. I hope, too, that the Minister will tell me why his Department suggested in its press release of 24 August that the child migrant issue would be considered during the Secretary of State's recent visit to Australasia, when in subsequent parliamentary answers on 25 October and on 1 and 4 November, we have been told that that would not have been appropriate.

Will the Minister comment, too, on the Government's obvious reluctance to make available to those concerned with rehabilitating migrants all the relevant records within his or other Departments or the agencies concerned? It has been put to me that the Government are reluctant to be more open and active on the matter because of their contacts at the very highest level with some of the voluntary organisations concerned, which fear the possible implications for their current activities and fund raising if more information were made public. I hope the Minister agrees that it would be very wrong were such attitudes to prevent former child migrants from obtaining the information necessary to repair their lives.

By an interesting coincidence, on 15 July—the day on which the BBC showed the first part of its drama documentary on the child migrant scheme, "The Leaving of Liverpool", which shocked and angered many people in Britain—the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster was standing in the Chamber with the Prime Minister at his side, launching his White Paper on open government. If the Government are genuinely committed to open government, they will without delay establish a full public inquiry into the British child migrant scheme, surely one of the greatest scandals of our time.

10.13 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) for allowing me a few minutes.

These important issues are not just history. Some argue that, as the events took place 20, 30 or 40 years ago, they can be forgotten. That clearly cannot be the case. The children who went abroad want to understand their history. They need to understand and make sense of their past and look forward to their future. Many families here in the United Kingdom still grieve about that past and it is important that some action should be taken. People are aging, memories are fading and records unfortunately are not being released.

The Minister will know that on 18 May I came with representatives of the Child Migrant Trust to see his predecessor at the Department of Health, who undertook to have discussions with the child care charities involved in those activities.

The present Minister wrote to me on 2 July to say that he shared the concerns of the trust, that there was an issue and that there would be speedy action. I hope that the Minister will not mind my reminding him that six months have passed since that initial meeting at the Department. I should be grateful if he would tell us what discussions there have been with the child care agencies involved.

Many child migrants will not accept help from those former charities. They believe that the charities are in the dock and they accuse the charities. They will not take help from a party that they feel is implicated in events from which, although history, many people still bear the scars.

It is important to fund the Child Care Trust adequately. I note the enormous help that the Australian Government have given the Child Migrants Trust. That organisation is extremely highly regarded in Australia and it would be fitting if it had similiar recognition here.

The Government could help immediately by making sure that records are available. They could put pressure on the child care charities that have been involved. They could provide finance, as they have in the past. I believe that £45,000 has been made available from the Department of Health over recent years. However, the real funding for and the real commitment to the Child Migrants Trust has come from Nottinghamshire county council. Over the past seven years it has made almost £200,000 available to the trust. It really is time for action. It really is time for the Department of Health to match the commitment of the trust, its volunteers and Nottinghamshire county council because it

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

is vital that, for people to have a future, they must make sense of the past, and the Child Migrants Trust can ensure that.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on choosing to remind the House of the work of the British Child Migrants Trust and on drawing our attention to the problems of former child migrants. I also acknowledge the contribution by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping).

Child emigration had its origins, as hon. Members know, in the latter part of the 19th century. At that time, it was mainly to Canada and linked to employment opportunities on farms and as domestic servants when industrialisation was depopulating rural areas in this country. In more modern times, Kingsley Fairbridge founded the Child Emigration Society with a vision in 1909 to bring future farmers to Rhodesia by, as he said, "shifting the orphanages of Britain to the shores of Greater Britain."

His vision was that

"little children would shed the bondage of bitter circumstances and stretch their legs and minds amid the thousands of interests of the farm."

Western Australia presented the first opportunity to contribute to what he said was the problem of

"how to combine the work of Child Rescue with that of Emigration".

Churches and other voluntary and charitable organisations took up the idea and ran migration schemes approved by the Parliaments of the day. In the 1930s, the schemes flourished, perhaps partly because of the depression. It was accepted then that orphans or poor children around the age of 10 could go to the dominions, learn to farm and have a better chance of securing permanent employment and finding a decent life than if they remained in institutions in the home country.

In Australia, there were about 1,000 applications for the 100 or so children who were leaving the farm schools each year. I stress that at the time the schemes were seen as opportunities and not as dumping grounds for unwanted children. Child emigration continued after the war and on into the late 1960s. I have no doubt that most of those involved in the church and voluntary organisations that ran the schemes had sincere motives and the best interests of the children in mind. No Government of any party at any time questioned the schemes.

For most former child migrants, there is little doubt that their life chances were improved. It is certainly apparent that many, and perhaps most, children who emigrated over the years managed to settle well, flourished and led contented and successful lives. Indeed, many reached the top of their career trees in their new countries. But some did not prosper and, alas, it is clear that some suffered at the hands of those in whose care they were placed.

Attention has recently been drawn to a darker side of the story, dramatically portrayed in the television film "The Leaving of Liverpool". Looking back over the last century, of course we can now say that it was clearly insufficient to have good intentions, and we now have the stories of cruelty and abuse related by some of those migrants.

We now have a more civilised and caring framework for child welfare. The Children Act 1989 makes the welfare of the child paramount. It reminds us that parents are the best people to bring up their children and requires local authorities to help parents bring up their children at home whenever possible. Most importantly, the child's voice must be heard when decisions about his or her future are being taken. The courts now have responsibility for approving the emigration of children in care.

The United Nations convention on the rights of the child underlined those points. It is not sufficient to think what would be best for the child—children must have the right to say what they think about anything that affects them. Attitudes have changed and the law has changed to protect today's children from those aspects of the treatment of former child migrants which we now find distasteful. Our recent White Paper on adoption, coupled with current practice on inter-country adoption, takes that protection a stage further.

Unfortunately, no law can eradicate all forms of abuse, as we know only too well from recent incidents in children's homes in this country, when children are supposedly in the care of local authorities. It is salutary to be reminded of what can happen today and what happened on occasions in those distant lands to which the children were sent. The abuses that occurred there are of course a matter for the authorities of the country concerned to investigate and take appropriate action. But there are ways in which authorities and agencies in this country can respond to some of the wishes of the migrants themselves. The Government's main concern now is to ensure that former child migrants who wish to make contact with their families are able to do so.

Both hon. Gentlemen referred to the files. I have looked carefully at this issue. My officials have examined all the files on child migration kept in the Public Record Office in class MH 102 and those transferred from the Home Office. There are 122 such files. Fifty-one are already available at the Public Record Office under the 30-year rule for anyone to inspect. Another 15 are still subject to the normal 30-year limit. There is a third group of 56 files which are being held at the Public Record Office on extended closure under standard rules.

It is unlikely that information in the third group of files could be of help to the Child Migrants Trust in its work of counselling former child migrants and tracing their origins.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bowis: I shall give way when I have completed this point.

Nevertheless, the recent White Paper on open government encourages Departments to reconsider the need for extended closure of files. We have therefore looked again at all the files. My view is that 30 of the files could be opened now and I intend to ask my departmental records officer to seek the Lord Chancellor's approval for accelerated opening.

I have also decided to recommend that the Child Migrants Trust be given privileged access to all 26 remaining files in this group held by the Public Record Office, subject to certain safeguards to ensure confidentiality for those who do not want their names to be known as former child migrants.

That leaves the 15 files that have not yet reached the 30-year limit. By definition, they include matters relating to the final years of the scheme from 1964 to 1968. After

careful consideration I have decided to recommend the early opening now of 12 of the 15 former Home Office files. To ensure that there is no doubt or speculation regarding the remaining three, I have also decided to give privileged access to the British Child Migrants Trust to the remaining three, which refer to individual migrants.

In that way, the British Child Migrants Trust will have access to all the files held at the Public Record Office or transferred from the Home Office. I hope that that significant step towards open government, while safeguarding the interest of private citizens, will be welcomed by the House and the migrants themselves.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to speak again. I thank him genuinely for his response tonight. I shall briefly mention one other subject that he may or may not want to touch on—the records that we know exist in certain voluntary agencies. Would it be possible, in the spirit of attempting to do something about that issue—which I believe he is—to obtain those documents through the Department of Health so that they are in the public domain, rather than leaving it to the Child Migrants Trust or to the individual child migrant to approach the agency concerned for the information that they require?

Mr. Bowis: The hon. Gentleman is asking me to go a little further than it is in my power to go. I am sure that the organisations to which he referred will have heard his request that the records be passed to me and to my department. I hope that they will also have heard the lead that perhaps I have been able to give in terms of openness with those files, but it is on privileged access and we must protect the interests of individuals who may not wish their names to be known. I will leave it by saying that I have heard what the hon. Gentleman said and no doubt others outside the House will have heard, too.

The Government support the work of the British Child Migrants Trust and the Australian Government support work in that country. Government funding for the current year is £25,000. Total funding has so far been £45,000. Like all funding for voluntary organisations, we expect the Child Migrants Trust to seek other funding sources and it has been most successful in doing just that. The Government grant currently contributes to about one third of its expenditure.

A further application for a three-year section 64 grant is now being considered, together with similar applications from many other voluntary organisations. The House would not expect me to give any specific funding commitment today either to the British Child Migrants Trust or to any other voluntary organisation working in that area, but I will of course take into account the views that were expressed by the hon. Member for Wakefield and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the visit to Australia by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I simply say that, although my right hon. Friend has taken a close interest in the problems of former child migrants, in that brief visit she did not need to mention the subject because it was a matter that I was raising directly with my opposite number in the Australian Government. Happily, as a result of that, we have agreement with the Australian Government that our officials can work together to seek co-operation and to further the work.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman rightly paid tribute to Margaret Humphreys on being awarded the Order of Australia medal. I join him in congratulating her on that. The hon. Gentleman referred to other organisations. Following his meeting with my predecessor, contact was made with other organisations in an attempt to get them working together with the trust, given all the problems that there may be in encouraging that to happen. Many of them, such as Barnardo's, the Children's Society, the Catholic Child Welfare Council, the National Children's Homes and Fairbridge have contributed to giving us all a much clearer understanding of the history of these schemes than we would otherwise have had.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the measured way in which he introduced the debate and for the way in which he clearly accepted the high standing of those organisations today. Nothing that we say today must undermine that in any way. Many former child migrants are grateful to those organisations for reuniting them with their families and their roots and that remains our closest wish as well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 23 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Export Orders

1. **Mrs. Browning:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce the latest defence export orders won by British defence companies this year.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): The most recent major export order was the sale of Warrior armoured vehicles by GKN to Kuwait. With this and other major orders, it is now clear that this year's defence export performance will exceed even last year's record-breaking figure of £5·2 billion.

Mrs. Browning: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply. He will be aware of the importance of the defence industry to the west country. Will the Government give whatever support they can to Westland Helicopters, which was recently disappointed by the loss of the order for the EH101 helicopter from the new Liberal Government in Canada? It is an important industry, so will my hon. Friend do all that he can to sell these helicopters, both abroad and at home?

Mr. Aitken: I am well aware from the persuasive advocacy of my hon. Friend and many other Members on both sides of the House that Westland is extremely well regarded, and rightly so. As for future orders, at home we are making some progress internally on this matter, but all that I can say to my hon. Friend is watch this space.

Mr. David Clark: Bearing in mind the fact that any contract gained by fraud is itself fraudulent, and following the conviction of Gordon Foxley, will the Minister terminate the contract of the three foreign companies named in that court case—Fratelli, Raufoss and Junghans—and award the work to the royal ordnance factories, which would have won the original order if it had not been for fraud in his Department?

Mr. Aitken: I share the hon. Gentleman's sense of concern and outrage about the events to which he referred. They are deplorable. They happened some years ago—Mr. Foxley having retired in 1984—but there are still some current issues. We will not be placing new contracts with the firms concerned until all the facts have been fully investigated in the light of the current appeal. We are reviewing what scope there is to recover the money paid by those firms to Mr. Foxley and are urgently examining the legal position on that and a number of other related matters. We are at one with the Opposition that it is a deplorable matter and we will take steps to remedy it as far as we can.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. Friend accept that areas such as Chelmsford are heavily reliant on defence orders and have an excellent record of exporting first-class products and services? Does he agree that there would be substantial job losses if we were to adopt the policy of a 50 per cent. cut in the defence budget between now and the end of the century, as advocated by the Liberal Democrats? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend has hit the bull's eye, judging by the indignation coming from the Opposition Front Bench. He is right to stress the importance of the defence industry to many towns, including Chelmsford, which he so ably represents. I concur with his view that the policy of massive defence cuts advocated by both Opposition parties would result in severe job losses throughout the realm.

Independent Nuclear Deterrent

2. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future of the independent nuclear deterrent.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The Government remain committed to maintaining the minimum independent nuclear capability required for our security needs.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's announcement last week—taken together with the decision to cancel the tactical air-to-surface missile, which he announced in the defence estimates debate—marks a welcome change in the Government's policy. Will he go further, without prejudicing the security of the United Kingdom—if the policy is truly one of minimum nuclear deterrence—and say why it is necessary to deploy Trident with more warheads than are deployed with Polaris, which it is to replace? Trident has nearly twice the range of Polaris and is accurate to within 250m and, unlike Polaris, its warheads are capable of being independently targeted.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. and learned Gentleman has forgotten two important factors. First, the total explosive yield that will be carried by Trident will be approximately the same as that carried by Polaris; secondly, I have said that Trident will have a sub-strategic as well as a strategic role. The comparison that the hon. and learned Gentleman has made is therefore even less valid than it would be otherwise.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the fact that non-proliferation is, sadly, breaking down in the world—and the fact that there are likely to be another six nuclear powers by the end of the century—make it even more vital for us to maintain our independent nuclear capability? Is not it about time that Opposition Members woke up to those facts?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed important for non-proliferation to be encouraged by every available means. We shall soon be entering detailed negotiations on the continuation of the non-proliferation treaty.

My hon. Friend is right to point out that, sadly, we remain in a nuclear world which contains major nuclear powers. There will be thousands of strategic nuclear warheads for the foreseeable future. In those circumstances, the arguments that were used to explain the existence of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent in past years remain equally valid now.

Mr. Frank Cook: The Secretary of State said that non-proliferation is a move to be supported and encouraged throughout the world. If that is so, can he explain why we continue to manufacture new warheads when we already have stockpiles?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that the warheads required for the Trident system are not the same as those that were required for Polaris. That factor should convince him, as it has convinced everyone else.

Mr. Donald Anderson: In what way is the decision to base the sub-strategic nuclear capability on Trident related to the decision, announced last week, to increase the number of warheads? What would be the additional cost of the decision relating to the sub-strategic nuclear capability?

Mr. Rifkind: First, let me welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities.

One of the attractions of using the Trident system for sub-strategic nuclear purposes is the fact that it will involve very little extra cost. Trident clearly has a capacity that we can use in both sub-strategic and strategic roles. Our decision was based on a careful and cool assessment of our overall needs.

Infantry Regiments

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to amalgamate or disband any midlands infantry regiments.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): We have no plans to amalgamate or disband any infantry battalions beyond those already announced.

Mr. Fabricant: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. He will know that the Staffordshire Regiment was only recently reprieved from amalgamation with the Cheshires. Can he give an unequivocable assurance to the people of Lichfield and Staffordshire as a whole that there are no plans to amalgamate or disband that important regiment, now or in the future?

Mr. Hanley: I can give both an unequivocable and an unequivocal reply. As my hon. Friend said, the amalgamation of the Staffordshire Regiment with the Cheshire Regiment was cancelled in February, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State decided to revise his plans for the future size of the Army because of extra commitments in Northern Ireland and for the United Nations.

Armed Services

4. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the capacity of the armed services to meet their current commitments, including UN peace keeping and peace making roles.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government's plans for force restructuring recognised that new peacetime commitments, including United Nations operations, could arise in the changed strategic setting. Britain's armed forces are currently engaged in a number of commitments, which they are fulfilling in a very satisfactory manner.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Secretary of State's answer. Will he tell us what evidence was used to decide on the instructions to troops to remove their protective headgear and patrol in berets, in the face of continuing sniping in Northern Ireland? Does he believe that he would be able to redeploy troops in the light of the GOC's 60-point de-escalation plan?

Mr. Rifkind: The matters to which the hon. Gentleman refers were considered very carefully by the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland. He was clearly anxious to bring about a gradual return to normalcy, wherever possible and wherever sensible. If in his judgment it is appropriate to move in that direction, I am sure that we shall all welcome it; no doubt he will examine these matters in a very careful and considered fashion.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the crucial ingredient for effective support of United Nations operations on the part of the United Kingdom around the world is a modern air transport force and is he conscious of the bravery of the Royal Air Force crews who fly airlifts into Sarajevo in winter weather? Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that the Royal Air Force will obtain at an early date the C130J version of the Hercules, which offers greater economy, payload and range and has the important benefit of substantial British industrial participation?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the remarkable and courageous work of the RAF pilots and their crews landing in Sarajevo under some of the most difficult circumstances to arise for many years. We are actively considering the future of the transport fleet and the points to which my hon. Friend has rightly referred.

Mr. Jim Marshall: In the light of the Belgian Government's decision to join the Euro-corps and the likely possibility of a similar Spanish decision, does the Secretary of State have any intention of changing his view that Britain should not be an active member of the Euro-corps?

Mr. Rifkind: Many of our criticisms of the original proposals were shared by a number of other NATO countries and were made as a result of valuable negotiations that took place between the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and the French and German Governments, which made it clear that the Franco-German corps would be able to assist NATO in any operations that may be required. We have no intention of joining the Franco-German corps. We have an important commitment to the rapid reaction corps, which is central to NATO's strategy and we see the useful contribution that the Franco-German corps may make to NATO's overall requirements.

Mr. Elletson: Since the Bosnian Muslims now appear to be so grateful for Britain's role in the peacekeeping force in former Yugoslavia that they are threatening to sue us for genocide, since the Croats are now blocking the delivery of essential supplies to the Coldstream Guards and since the

Serbs appear to be the only people in former Yugoslavia who want us to deliver humanitarian aid, is not it time that we stopped wasting taxpayers' money in Bosnia and brought the troops home by Christmas?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is certainly correct to imply that the humanitarian operation of providing food, medical aid and shelter can proceed only it it receives the co-operation of those for whom it is intended. I deplore, as I am sure does the House, some of reported remarks of representatives of the Bosnian Government. Clearly, it would be intolerable for forces to continue to provide humanitarian aid if those whom it was meant to benefit were proving so obstructive to troops doing that valuable work.

National Parks

5. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy towards military activity in national parks.

Mr. Hanley: Use of national parks remains vital to our defence. They provide essential facilities that cannot be dispensed with and could not easily be replicated elsewhere.

Ms Quin: Is not it the case that only about 3 per cent. of national parks are in use for military activities at any one time, yet for the Northumberland national park the figure is 20 per cent? Does the Minister agree that that percentage should not be increased because if it were the character of the park would be greatly damaged?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Lady is absolutely right that over 97 per cent. of national parks are not used by the Ministry of Defence. The 3 per cent. that we use is used efficiently and in an environmentally conscious manner. It is important that our troops are properly trained. About two thirds of the land that we use is used for live firing from time to time. I am conscious of the hon. Lady's interest, especially in the Otterburn range, and I can assure her that we will not increase our acquisition of national park land or use it more than is absolutely necessary.

Mr. Jenkin: Will my hon. Friend confirm that we are increasingly short of space in which to exercise our troops? May I especially draw his attention to the plight of the 24 Air Mobile Brigade, whose headquarters is based in my constituency, and whose airborne attack capability requires a large area in which to exercise? There is nowhere, not even Salisbury plain, where they can effectively exercise.

Mr. Hanley: I agree with my hon. Friend. The problem arises not just because of the shortage of land in Britain that is available for the training of our troops, but because the drawdown in Germany has resulted in the loss of valuable training grounds there. That has put additional pressure on the use of land within the United Kingdom. We continually look for appropriate sites for training because it is vital that our forces are properly trained to fulfil the roles for which almost the whole world is grateful.

Dr. Marek: Is the Minister aware that it is commonly perceived that military low flying is heavily concentrated in certain parts of the country? Are not some of the heaviest concentrations in our national parks? If that is the case, will the Minister publish information about how much military low flying, in excess of the average, occurs in national parks? If that is not the case, will he publish information to show that?

Mr. Hanley: It is clearly more suitable that low flying occurs over areas of low population. During the six months that I have been in my post, I have answered almost 100 questions about low flying tabled by two of the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are careful to take into account the disturbance caused by low flying. However, it is natural that areas of low population are used the most. The information on where low flying occurs is published on a map that I recently placed in the Library.

Trident

6. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect he expects from the reduction in the Trident submarine firepower; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The announcement of a revised ceiling of 96 warheads per Trident submarine is based on our current assessment of our minimum deterrent needs.

Mr. Hendry: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Can he confirm that when Trident is fully deployed, the total nuclear firepower held by the United Kingdom will be 25 per cent. lower than it was in 1990? Does not that show that the Government continue to have a coherent nuclear defence policy? Is not that in sharp contrast to the Labour party, whose spokesman—the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)—has told the world at large, or at least that portion of it which reads the *New Statesman*, that even if a Labour Government kept Trident they would not use it?

Mr. Rifkind: It is certainly correct that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has a curious understanding of the meaning of deterrent. He said clearly and unequivocally that a Labour Government would never use a deterrent, but would keep it simply so that it would be available.

My hon. Friend is correct to say that there has been a 25 per cent. reduction in nuclear firepower compared with 1990. In addition to the measures that we have proposed for Trident, there has been a 50 per cent. reduction in the number of Tornados carrying sub-strategic weapons. We have also abolished the nuclear artillery facility as well as nuclear tactical weapons carried on surface ships. The United Kingdom has made a substantial contribution to the reduction of nuclear weapons throughout the world.

Mr. Flynn: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman list the circumstances in which Britain is likely to use its nuclear weapons?

Mr. Rifkind: The circumstances are precisely the same as those that existed when we first acquired nuclear weapons. If this country were faced with an attack by a nuclear power or by a country that had nuclear weapons and was threatening to overwhelm us, the United Kingdom, either by itself or as part of NATO, would be determined to use the power at our disposal to protect our citizens and our territory.

Yugoslavia

7. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom troops are currently engaged in support of United Nations operations in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hanley: On 15 November, there were 2,267 British troops in Bosnia. In addition to those on the ground, Royal Navy ships and RAF squadrons are providing support to United Nations operations, including the humanitarian airlift into Sarajevo.

Mr. Viggers: Although the whole House admires the courage and skill that our troops bring to their role in Bosnia, does my hon. Friend agree that they are effectively tasked with mission impossible because they are spectators in a civil war? Has my hon. Friend noted the recent comments by Lord Owen that intervention can, in some circumstances, make the position worse? Will my hon. Friend undertake actively to keep open the option of withdrawal?

Mr. Hanley: One of the things about a mission impossible is that so often we look with admiration at those who are able to achieve what others might think is a mission impossible. Our forces have been achieving the impossible for the last few months. They have been delivering aid and keeping alive hundreds of thousands who would otherwise now be dead. I believe that what they are doing is not only in the highest order of humanitarian tasks but something of which we should be proud. They will continue to do that task until either they have an unacceptable risk put on them or there is peace. That will be a different situation.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister recall receiving a letter a couple of months ago from the Secretary-General of NATO asking how many troops Britain could contribute towards a United Nations peacekeeping operation in Bosnia following a permanent ceasefire signed by all three sides? Why has he not bothered to reply to that letter?

Mr. Hanley: We have not yet got a peace. I hope that soon there will be one. In the meantime, we are preparing what our reaction would be if there were peace. Therefore, the time will come when those figures will be announced.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that no one would not wish to pay tribute to the British troops for what they are doing? Will he remind the House that, while those troops have been there, more than 100,000 of the 200,000 killed have died in Bosnia? Will he further remind the House that the thrust of the blame should still be directed at Serbia? Will he do what he can to ensure that the mandate of our troops is increased so that they can help to make Sarajevo a truly safe city?

Mr. Hanley: I do not believe that it is desirable to try to apportion blame in an area where horrendous acts are carried out by all sides. It is a most distressing set of circumstances that has brought us to the present position. As part of the United Nations Protection Force, British troops are carrying out a role that is greatly desirable in the interests of those who cannot fight for themselves.

As to Sarajevo, we continue to work with the other nations which provide troops for UNPROFOR to try to ensure that humanitarian aid is distributed. If it is difficult to distribute that aid, it is merely because of those who try to be unpleasant, not only to innocent people, but to the people who are trying to provide that humanitarian aid. We will use whatever force is necessary, but it must be kept to a minimum.

Nuclear Weapons

8. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department is giving to the implications for (a) the United Kingdom and (b) NATO of the declaration of a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons by the United States of America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: A declaration of no first use plays no part in the United Kingdom's or NATO's nuclear deterrent policy. We are giving no consideration to a revision of that position.

Mr. Gapes: That is an amazing answer. Is not the Secretary of State aware that last year the United States Secretary of Defence, Les Aspin, wrote a book calling for a move from deterrence to denuking and at the same time called for a policy of no first use, and that the United States has introduced a comprehensive review of its defence strategy, including its nuclear strategy? That will have huge implications for NATO and this country, yet our Government complacently are doing nothing. When will the Secretary of State consider that issue seriously?

Mr. Rifkind: I have had several meetings with Mr. Aspin since he became Secretary of Defence. There is no question but that the United States continues to support current NATO strategy with regard to no first use. The hon. Gentleman appears to be totally unaware that, in their recently published new military doctrine, the Russian Government, for the first time, have stopped applying a policy of no first use. Their policy is now the same as that of NATO.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the essence of the nuclear deterrent is that any potential aggressor must remain uncertain as to our intentions and whether we would use it? Would not it be quite wrong for him to be tied down by Opposition Members, who still do not realise that peace has been kept through the deterrent rather than through their hot air?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is correct. The simple reality is that a no first use declaration would take us out of the realms of war prevention and into the realms of war limitation. That is not a policy which should appeal to Opposition Members any more than it should to anyone who wishes to serve the cause of peace.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Secretary of State give an absolute commitment that Britain will never use nuclear weapons or even threaten to use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state?

Mr. Rifkind: We have already given such assurances with regard to any non-nuclear state unless it is in alliance with a nuclear state and is party to aggression by such an alliance.

Eurofighter

9. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the Spanish Defence Minister to discuss the progress of the Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Aitken: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to meet the Spanish Defence Minister to discuss the progress of the Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Robinson: As my hon. Friend will be aware of the employment implications of Eurofighter 2000, particularly for subcontractors such as Normalair Garrett in the west country, will he undertake to do all in his power, with our partners in that important project, to ensure that it moves forward and to remove some of the uncertainty that surrounds it?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the employment implications of this important project. Normalair Garrett, that excellent company in my hon. Friend's constituency, is one of 300 companies in the United Kingdom that have won contracts for the development of the Eurofighter project, thus securing some 9,000 jobs. In the production phase, that work would expand and secure some 30,000 jobs. I share my hon. Friend's wish that, if value-for-money contracts can be placed and all other things are correct, we should be able to move to that production phase.

Mr. Martlew: The Labour party has always supported Eurofighter 2000, even when it was known as the European fighter aircraft, but it is concerned about the current drift in the project. The aircraft should have flown two years ago, but it has not yet done so, and I understand that it is considerably over budget, perhaps by up to 25 per cent. As Britain's future defence depends on that aircraft—as do our aircraft industry and 40,000 jobs—when will the Government get to grips with the project and stop the drift, and when will the aircraft fly?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman's rhetoric about drift is unfair and misplaced. Of course, I share his and everyone else's concern about the delay in the aircraft's first flight. The industry's leaders told the German State Secretary and me last week that the first flight was now scheduled for April next year. However, the delays are understandable, not only because this is a highly complex project operating at the limits of new technology but because a certain amount of double checking has been necessary as a result of problems with the flight control software, which caused a Gripen aircraft to crash earlier this year. We must be doubly sure that no such flaws or snags occur in the project. There is no sign that they will, but it is understandable that the industry should be doubly cautious. That is the only reason for the delay, so the hon. Gentleman's criticisms are unjustified.

Mr. Hawkins: As my hon. Friend will be aware that many of my constituents are employed building the Eurofighter 2000, will he say whether he has recently had discussions with other of our European partners' Defence Ministers on their commitment to, and the progress of, this crucial project, which shows every sign of producing an aircraft that is even more effective than the Tornado and which will earn even more in export pounds in the future?

Mr. Aitken: Yes. I met my opposite number, State Secretary Schönbohm, in Munich last week, and there was complete unity between the British and German Governments on the various pressures that we are placing on industry at this time and the questions that we were asking it. We are all determined to give the project a fair wind, not least because we are aware of its enormous positive implications for aerospace technology and employment in Britain and throughout Europe.

Commitments (Review)

10. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to initiate a full-scale review of the United Kingdom's defence commitments; and if he will make a statement.

12. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his North Atlantic Treaty Organisation counterparts concerning a British defence review.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no plans to initiate a defence review and therefore have not discussed the matter with our allies.

Mr. Hughes: None the less, will the Secretary of State review that part of Britain's security that would be affected if we were to go ahead with the nuclear waste reprocessing plant at Sellafield in the light of a recent Pentagon report that said that, if we were to go ahead, it would put other countries within days of acquiring the nuclear bomb? Will the Secretary of State consider whether a British decision to go ahead is compatible with the statement in the Queen's Speech that we are against nuclear proliferation and increasing the risks of it occurring?

Mr. Rifkind: The report to which the hon. Gentleman refers was not a Pentagon report, but a report by a private company that was presented to the Pentagon.

The hon. Gentleman also refers to the matter of plutonium processing by the thermal oxide reprocessing plant, if that were approved. It is our intention that any plutonium that is processed will be made available only to countries that are signatories to the non-proliferation treaty and meet the International Atomic Energy Agency's guidelines. I believe that the plutonium in question could not in practice be adapted to nuclear use without considerable expense and difficulty.

Mr. Olner: Surely the Secretary of State will recognise that it is gross negligence on the part of the Government —[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—not to match the resources and capabilities of our armed forces—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—with their commitments? Perhaps if Conservative Members would listen instead of chanting, "Reading", they would understand that the defence of this nation is most important.

It is grossly incompetent of the Government not to recognise that a full defence review of the capabilities of our armed forces is needed. When will the Government recognise that America is now turning towards the Pacific rim as its sphere of influence, and that that will leave a gaping vacuum within the Atlantic area? When will the Secretary of State look at our commitments, introduce a defence review and do something for defence of this country?

Mr. Rifkind: I have always understood that whenever the Labour party calls for a defence review it is because it does not have the faintest idea what defence policy it would like to propose. Whenever the Labour party is asked to state what it believes should be the ingredients of a Labour Government's defence policy, it simply parrots the phrase, "We must have a defence review." That proposal is simply an attempt to mask the nakedness of the party's own thought, and should therefore be treated with derision.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: May I reduce the temperature in the House, Madam Speaker? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the military band is one of the successes of this country's armed services' tradition? Does he further accept that the cut in military bands by some 56 per cent. and in the number of bandsmen by 43 per cent. is causing concern? Will he review the decision, which has apparently been taken, to do away with regimental military bands? Do not those bands bring tremendous benefits, not only to individual regiments but to the morale of the people of this country?

Mr. Rifkind: I share with my hon. Friend the view that regimental bands can make an important contribution to the morale and the motivation of our armed forces. He will be aware that the background to the review that was announced some time ago was that the vast majority of such bands were greatly under strength because of their inability to recruit to their ranks. We have therefore proposed an alternative system of regimental bands which, while reducing the number of bands, will enable their links with regiments to be maintained in a credible and effective fashion.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the Opposition that, of the hundreds of millions of people who died in war in his and my lifetime, almost all were killed by conventional, and not nuclear, weapons?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend also please save the Gordon Highlanders—founded by my ancestors—from amalgamation?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. and learned Friend is undoubtedly correct to emphasise and to remind the House that conventional weapons can cause many millions of deaths, as we have seen to our cost throughout the centuries.

With regard to the latter part of my hon. and learned Friend's question, I believe that the Gordon Highlanders is a fine regiment. I believe that it will continue to have a proud identiy when it merges with the Queen's Own Highlanders. The process of amalgamation can be taken forward in a way that will enable both regiments to preserve much of their identities, as has occurred with previous amalgamations in previous years.

Dr. Reid: The irony of the Secretary of State accusing anyone of lacking planning, forethought and strategy in defence will not be lost on the people who serve in the British armed forces. Does not the MOD now have three sets of statistics—one to deceive the public, one to deceive Parliament and one to deceive itself? When will the Secretary of State accept that he cannot keep increasing our forces' commitments while reducing their resources at the same time?

Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman tells us that we have got it wrong, does he recall that we told him that he would cancel the tactical air-to-surface missile? He said no, but he has done so. Does he recall that we told him that he had too few regiments? He said no, but then reinstated them. We told him that he could do without nuclear testing. Although he said no, he has now admitted that we could. We told him to back a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. He said no, but has now done so. We told him that we needed more infantry. He said no, but we now have them.

Today we are telling him that he needs a defence review. Why does he not stop wasting everyone's time and accept that we and the British armed forces are right and that we need a full comprehensive defence review?

Mr. Rifkind: If the hon. Gentleman wants to carry credibility with his expostulations, he should remember that when the Labour Government left office they left our armed forces with their poorest morale at any time since 1945. Recruitment to our armed forces was in a parlous state and, as usual, it required a Conservative Government to restore the armed forces' confidence in the Government.

Aircraft

11. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give details of aircraft allocated by his Department for strike duty.

Mr. Hanley: The RAF currently has eight squadrons of nuclear-capable Tornado aircraft and one squadron of nuclear-capable Buccaneer aircraft. The Buccaneer squadron will disband on 31 March next year.

Mr. Walker: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that, in the light of experience in the Gulf war—when strike crews of the Royal Air Force performed their operational tasks magnificently and with great courage—it would be naive, indeed irresponsible, for anyone to suggest that the Royal Air Force, especially its strike capability, should be compared with the Israeli air force, which has no worldwide capability?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on both counts—first, to pay tribute to the role of the Royal Air Force in the Gulf conflict and, secondly, to differentiate between the Israeli air force and our Royal Air Force in that, as he says, the former patrols its borders, whereas we have a worldwide responsibility.

Mr. Home Robertson: Does the Minister accept that simulated strikes against golf courses for the entertainment of pilots' families are not tolerable? Following the embarrassing failure of his Department's attempts to cover up such an incident over Gullane in my constituency on 16 September 1992, will he institute proper disciplinary proceedings to ensure that the tiny minority of pilots who indulge in such conduct are dealt with properly?

Mr. Hanley: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The matter is being investigated.

Drug Trafficking

13. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance the Royal Navy and Royal Marines are now giving to tackling the threat from drug trafficking.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence does not provide dedicated resources for anti-drugs operations, but we are prepared to give the armed forces assistance when asked to do so by other Government Departments and where operational commitments and resources allow.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend accept that we welcome the role of the Royal Navy in trying to defeat drug smugglers at sea and congratulate the Royal Navy on the way in which it has recently apprehended a number of ships on the high seas? Does he also accept that we hope that the Royal Navy will be given all possible support to ensure that the south American drug dealers are dealt a nasty lesson and told that they cannot import drugs into this country, as they have been doing, and that we should show them that we mean business?

Mr. Hanley: I thank my hon. Friend for that tribute to the Royal Navy, which is richly deserved. The House may be interested to know that in the past month the Royal Navy has helped to recovery more than £120 million-worth of drugs. Not only was nearly 1 tonne of cocaine recovered earlier this month by HMS Active, the West Indies guard ship, but, in a most remarkable episode, to which my hon. Friend referred, HMS Avenger, Royal Fleet Auxiliary Olna and HMS Guernsey helped to recover almost £20 million of cannabis off our shores. That is a most useful role for the Royal Navy, but it is not one of our dedicated commitments. We shall, however, continue to help the Home Office and Customs and Excise whenever possible.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that the way in which British armed forces can help to deter drugs smuggling is by retaining the British garrison in Belize? Does he agree that he and his Home Office colleagues must carry out a full evaluation of the impact of the arrival of cocaine and crack in our inner cities and north American inner cities if the British garrison is withdrawn from Belize, as the Government intend? I am sure that he will accept that the withdrawal of the British garrison from such a poor country as Belize will leave it wide open to the depredations of the Colombian cocaine cartel.

Mr. Hanley: The reason for our defence presence in Belize is that, since its independence, Belize has needed us to take on its defence responsibilities. Belize has now grown and has agreed with us that it should take on its own defence responsibilities from next year. In the meantime, we have our West Indies guard ship which, as I explained, helped to recover £100 million-worth of cocaine earlier this month. We will continue to use our defence forces and the remaining forces that will be carrying out jungle training in Belize for whatever purposes they are best suited. I hope that that will include managing to stop the evil trade in drugs which flow through from south America.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Ward: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming today's cut in interest rates, which will be a great help to industry? Does he agree that the most effective way of creating jobs is to have a flexible, deregulated work force and not to have artificial job sharing or 35-hour weeks? Will he continue to resist such proposals, whether they come from the socialists in Brussels or the socialists in Walworth road?

The Prime Minister: I can join my hon. Friend in welcoming the latest reduction in interest rates. The last time interest rates were this low was in 1977—[HON. MEMBERS: "Under Labour."] Exactly so, but at that time inflation was 13 per cent. and pensioners and savers were robbed of 7 per cent. So I am happy to repeat it: the last time the base rate was 5·5 per cent., inflation under Labour was 13 per cent. and savers were being robbed. I entirely agree with the other aspects of my hon. Friend's question. The right way to create the new jobs we want is through the policies of deregulation, low inflation and making sure that British business is not overhampered with burdens. Telling people that they cannot work the hours they want and raising costs will simply destroy competitiveness and, with it, jobs.

Mr. John Smith: Will the Prime Minister confirm that, as a result of the Bill announced in the Queen's Speech which will increase national insurance contributions from 9 to 10 per cent., most wage earners in Britain will pay an extra £3 to £4 a week?

The Prime Minister: Self-evidently, with an increase in national insurance contributions, people will pay more. That is certainly the case, but it is necessary to make sure that we reduce the fiscal gap about which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has spoken in the past. He pays lip service to reducing the fiscal gap, proposes extra expenditure and gives no indication of how it would be met.

Mr. Smith: Why does the Prime Minister find it difficult to admit that the figure is £3 to £4 a week for most wage earners? Does he not recollect that, before the last election, he promised unequivocally that he would not increase national insurance contributions? Is this not yet another shameless betrayal of tax promises?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a very selective memory. He forgets, for example, his own plans to extend national insurance right through the scale at substantially greater losses for millions of people.

Mr. Smith: The Prime Minister said in the House at Prime Minister's questions:

"I have no plans to raise . . . the level of national insurance contributions."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 808.]

On top of national insurance contributions, there is also increased VAT on fuel, the freezing of income tax allowances and the cuts in mortgage tax relief. Does the Prime Minister not admit that all the tax increases will amount to another £8·50 a week for a typical family in Britain from next April? What on earth has this to do with the Tory promises on tax?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman came back from Brussels last week, having signed up to a range of extra environmental taxes, which

means—if they mean anything—value added tax on fuel. Week after week, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has criticised the Government over VAT on fuel. It is no good his sitting smugly there when he goes to Brussels and signs up to the same thing.

Q2. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend carry out an inquiry into why the infant mortality rate in Bolton in the past five years has risen to twice the national rate, when infant deaths elsewhere have been falling? Will he reassure parents and publish an action plan to discourage expectant mothers from smoking?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the problem that he raises. Infant mortality is particularly heart-breaking. In the past 10 years, the number of children dying under the age of one has, thankfully, fallen by some 40 per cent. I understand that Bolton health authority agreed last Friday to appoint an additional consultant obstetrician and to provide additional neo-natal nursing staff. My hon. Friend will also be pleased to know that the health authority has just agreed to fund a study into the prevention of smoking in pregnancy, which will be carried out in Bolton. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will publish an action plan setting out measures being taken by the Government to improve health targets.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Prime Minister remember that, as a junior social security Minister in 1986, speaking on the issue of fuel poverty, he argued that there should be clear rules for help, and a certainty and immediacy of response to people in those circumstances? Not only because we have a cold snap now, but because the Government plan to introduce VAT on domestic fuel, does he recognise that there is now a clear need to have automatic and continual payments to the most vulnerable in society throughout the winter months to eradicate the fear faced by many people?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady will know, we introduced the current cold weather payment scheme. It was a vast improvement on its predecessor, which we inherited from the previous Government. We also introduced automatic, quicker and more generous payments. In 1991, we made more than 6·5 million payments worth more than £39 million. That is a record of quick and efficient help given by the Government, on which we propose to build. We shall, of course, enhance the present cold weather payment scheme and the House will hear the details next week.

Q3. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alexander: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite the knowledge that it is about to be privatised, British Coal is continuing with proposed colliery closures? Would any other industry about to be sold dispose of, give away or close a significant proportion of that industry before a buyer could be found? Will my right hon. Friend intervene to prevent the further desecration of a fine industry and the coalfield communities involved?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, we all wish to keep pits open wherever practicable—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition, who have perhaps closed more pits than anyone else, may not accept that, but it happens to be the case. Under current legislation, the future of individual pits is a matter for British Coal, which has a commitment to offer to the private sector pits that it does not intend to keep in production. I expect it to do that.

Mr. Hain: Is the Prime Minister aware that thousands of decent couples feel nearly suicidal because of oppressive and arbitrary claims for maintenance payments on second marriages by the Child Support Agency, often in defiance of court orders? My constituent, Mrs. Diane Eynon, is considering divorce in order to escape plunging her family into poverty because of a claim on her income through her husband. Surely the Prime Minister should intervene immediately, order a freeze on such maintenance payments and have a proper debate in the House of Commons on the future of the Child Support Agency.

The Prime Minister: As the Opposition spokesman said when we introduced the regulations, the Opposition very much support the principle behind the Child Support Agency, which is that parents should contribute to the cost of bringing up their children. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State told the Select Committee a day or so ago that we are looking at the comments and criticisms that have been made and testing them against the basic structure and principles that are in place. We intend to ensure that what was previously a very poor system becomes better. If, after examination, we think that we can make the scheme better, then we will do so. We are examining it at the moment.

Q4. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend should be aware of the widespread support for his efforts to achieve an end to violence in Northern Ireland and to obtain a political settlement. He is absolutely right to explore new opportunities. Will he assure the House that it is not the Government's intention to undermine the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to repeat that assurance, yet again, to my hon. Friend. The Union is important to us. We are not in any way in the business of securing the break-up of the United Kingdom. As I made clear to the House a day or so ago, we are looking for peace if it is available, but we are not looking for peace at any price. I wish to know whether the IRA is prepared to end its violence for good and enter the political arena using only democratic means. It is right for us to put that question when there seems to be some suggestion that the IRA may be thinking of an end to violence. We need a clear and unqualified answer from the IRA which respects the vital principle that there can be no change in Northern Ireland's status without the freely expressed will of its people.

Q5. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: Is the Prime Minister aware that, by the age of five, the average child in the United States will have seen 20,000 homicides broadcast on television? Does he not agree that in this country, too, the culture of violence involving television violence and videos showing horrific and graphic scenes is far too easily available? Does he feel that stringent measures should be taken by the broadcasters and those who make available these videos to stop young children having their minds infected by them? If there is not such a correlation between violence and videos and television violence, why does he think that advertisers spent £1·7 billion last year trying to promote their wares on television?

The Prime Minister: I have considerable sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has said. There are some responsibilities that rest with broadcasters—they accept some, but we may not always agree with their judgments. However, we must recognise that the principal responsibility lies with parents in the home to ensure that, first, the videos are not available to children and, secondly, that children are not in a position to watch them freely, as they frequently are at present. I accept some responsibilities for broadcasters and the hon. Gentleman was right to make that point.

Q6. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Lait: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the decision by the United States Congress on the North American Free Trade Agreement? Will that lead to an agreement on the general agreement on tariffs and trade? Can my right hon. Friend see the way forward for France on those negotiations?

The Prime Minister: I warmly welcome the vote in the United States Congress in favour of the North American Free Trade Agreement. We have constantly stated our support for free trade agreements and I think that NAFTA will contribute to the liberalisation of trade. It will, of course, have to contribute to GATT rules. I trust that that vote will add to the impetus in the United States and elsewhere to ensure that we get an agreement in the Uruguay round by 15 December. There will be a number of important meetings in the next three weeks and I hope that they will lead to a satisfactory outcome in time for 15 December.

Q7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: Does the Prime Minister recall writing to me in July of this year, wishing Cleveland Guest Engineering well? Is he aware that today that firm, employing more than 100 highly skilled engineers in aerospace, called in the receiver? Is it not the case that every time the Prime Minister wishes a manufacturing company well, it is the kiss of death for that company?

The Prime Minister: I am very sorry to hear of the difficulties faced by that company. Although the hon. Gentleman may have concern for that company in his constituency, might he just once forget the point-scoring and welcome the good news about employment? Unemployment in this country has fallen by 137,000 this year, and last month's fall of 49,000 was the largest monthly fall for four years. Long-term unemployment fell in every region, among men and among women, and last year nearly half a million people left the unemployment register and found themselves work. Why does not the hon. Gentleman consider what is really happening to unemployment?

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for the Environment launched a consultation document about the future of London, entitled "Making the Best Better". As a London Member whose constituents have suffered, and continue to suffer, from the Government's inability to create a present for this capital city, with rates of unemployment higher than the national and European average, 9,000 small businesses failing last year and crime and homelessness rates increasing, I awaited my copy of the document with no small interest. I have not received such a copy.

Is it not disgraceful that, yet again, the Executive announce their decision to the press but fail to inform the House?

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does it relate to this point of order?

Mr. Riddick: No.

Madam Speaker: In that case, let me answer the hon. Lady's point of order. So far as I am aware, no new policy has been announced to the public. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Order. The hon. Lady has asked me for a response to this. No new policy has been announced. It is, I believe, as she says herself, a consultation document. Perhaps the hon. Lady would ask the Secretary of State—it will no doubt be relayed to him—for copies of his document, or perhaps he could make it available in the Library so that we might all see what he has to say.

Mr. Riddick: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I imagine that you will be aware that, last night, the Liberal Democrats used a device in the House to stop my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales from making his speech at the end of the debate on local government in Wales and Scotland. That follows hard on the heels of similar—indeed, worse—tactics of disruption that were perpetrated by the official Labour Opposition three weeks ago, at the tail end of the last Session of Parliament.

Is there anything that you can do to put a stop to those tactics of disruption? Are you able to tell us the outcome of the inquiry that you carried out into those tactics of three weeks ago?

Madam Speaker: I was certainly aware of what happened last night. Indeed, I have gone through *Hansard*, and I found that yesterday, a number of Members who wished to speak were disappointed because speeches took so long. Therefore, I was not able to call a number of Members who had a right to speak. The tactic, as the hon. Gentleman calls it, of last night, of saying, "I spy strangers," is perfectly legitimate. The hon. Gentleman may not like it—some other Members may not like it—but it is a perfectly legitimate procedure. I must say that I was disappointed myself, because I know that the House had been waiting for the Secretary of State's statement, and he had, in one minute, to rush it through very rapidly—a statement for which the House had been waiting for quite some time.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It has been suggested that the House survives on a degree of hot air. Can you use your good offices to discover why there is no hot air wafting its way to the Norman Shaw buildings, where our staff are suffering considerable cold? In September, the heating system is not turned on and it is extremely cold; in October, the heating is turned on and it is too hot; now, in November, our staff are suffering from inadequate heating in the building.

Madam Speaker: I take my job very seriously, but the hon. Gentleman need not have wasted time on the Floor of the House with such a matter; he could have gone directly to the relevant committee. However, I take my job as porter, caretaker, or whatever it may be, seriously, and I shall make the inquiries for which the hon. Gentleman asks.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In connection with your inquiry into disturbances in the House, will you tell us whether you are considering the appointment of lady Serjeants at Arms, who would be able to root out the Opposition lady Members who hide in the gentlemen's lavatories in order to disrupt the proceedings of the Chamber?

Madam Speaker: So far as I am aware, there are no vacancies in the Serjeant at Arms' Department at the moment.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you tell us when we are likely to learn the outcome of your inquiry into the tactics used by the Opposition in the House three weeks ago?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman reads carefully the *Hansard* report of that day, he will see that I said that I was making my own inquiries. I have done that, and I have received the necessary assurances for which I asked at the time. I shall take matters into my own hands in future.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.]*

Question again proposed.

Home Affairs and Education

3.36 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): The Gracious Speech includes three Home Office Bills. Two—the Police Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill—will play a key role in our fight against crime. The third measure—the Sunday Trading Bill—is intended to clear up once and for all the question of Sunday opening. I hope that the House will have an early opportunity to debate that measure in full and to reach a decision that will put the law on a satisfactory basis.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Has my right hon. and learned Friend had an opportunity to see the item in today's *Financial Times*, in which it is made clear that Sainsbury's link promotion to the willingness of staff to work on Sundays? Does that not negate the Government's promise to shop workers that working on Sundays will continue to be voluntary for all staff, both those already employed and those who will be employed in the future?

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Madam Speaker: If the Secretary of State will forgive me, I should like to make a short announcement that I had forgotten to make. So many Members seek to speak today that I have had to limit speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock to 10 minutes. I hope that those speaking outside those limits will also consider the other hon. Members who wish to speak and will make short speeches if possible. That did not happen yesterday.

Mr. Howard: If my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman) studies schedule 4 to the Bill with great care, as I know she will, she will find that it provides the answer to the question that she asked on the basis of the report.

When I became Home Secretary, I said that we must reject the view that we are helpless in the face of rising crime. In October, I set out the most comprehensive law and order package ever announced by a Home Secretary. Today, I want to explain how the measures that I propose fit into our overall strategy to fight crime.

I have always said that we need to take action right across the board. It is no good simply concentrating on one area alone. We must do all we can to prevent crime, to catch criminals, to ensure fair justice and to give courts the power they need to pass appropriate sentences. The measures in the Police Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill will help us in all four respects.

The police response to my proposals has been very encouraging. The Association of Chief Police Officers has said that the proposals would

"help to redress the balance in favour of justice for victims, witnesses and the mass of law-abiding citizens".

The Police Federation said unequivocally that my proposals would

"help tremendously in the fight against crime".

What a contrast is the reaction of the Opposition. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has, characteristically, uttered a torrent of words but, equally characteristically, his words are totally hollow. The hon. Gentleman is prepared to pronounce on everything except my proposals, ducking and weaving as he attempts to avoid committing himself to being in favour or not in favour of any of my 27 points. Finding the Labour party's policies is as difficult as finding Michael Jackson, but I can say that it will take a good deal longer to detoxify Labour's policies when and if they are ever found.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield seems bent on squeezing every ounce of advantage from the right to silence before we finally deal with it, but I must caution him. Everything that he says will be used in evidence, and the evidence is overwhelming that the hon. Gentleman has not the faintest idea of what he would or would not do if he had any responsibility for these matters.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown)—*[Interruption.]* One cannot expect the right hon. Gentleman to be present for a debate on a subject as unimportant as law and order. The right hon. Gentleman said that reforming the criminal justice system was irrelevant to tackling crime. What on earth does he mean —tackling offending on bail; ending cautions as a substitute for prosecution for serious offences; dealing with the so-called right to silence that is abused by terrorists and hardened criminals?

The right hon. Gentleman may think that those matters are irrelevant, but I can tell him that the police and the victims of crime do not agree with him, and nor do we. Yet again, when it comes to the vital national debate about crime, the Liberal Democrats remain true to their long tradition of utter irrelevance.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way so early in his speech. Does he agree that whether the reform of the criminal justice system is relevant depends upon the content of the reforms? The 64 Bills already passed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Government have shown them to be singularly inept.

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman will have to pay rather closer attention to the words of the leader of his party. The press release on 25 October by the right hon. Member for Yeovil made the point that any reform of the criminal justice system was irrelevant. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the press releases emanating from his party, he will see that my comments were entirely justified.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We are all trying to understand the Home Secretary's thinking. Would he

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

regard it as a reasonable defence if some thug explained in court that his crime of violence was caused because his grandmother was lonely during the war?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman seems determined to trivialise a serious debate. I do not propose to descend to his level of triviality: I propose to deal with the real issues as they arise.

I shall take the main elements of my strategy in turn. The first of them is preventing crime, and this Government put crime prevention on the map. We set up and funded Crime Concern, which levers in private sector money for crime prevention schemes. We encouraged neighbourhood watch schemes, which now cover more than 5 million households. We are doubling the number of safer city projects, providing better security for housing estates, improved street lighting and more secure car parks.

There are many things that can be done, and under the Government they are being done. We are spending £200 million across Whitehall on all aspects of crime prevention, and that figure excludes what the police spend. Crime prevention, is a natural and continuing ingredient in the work of almost every police officer, whatever else the police are engaged in. The patrolling officer who tests the lock on a door is engaged as much on crime prevention as on anything else, and let us not forget the money that the private sector invests in crime prevention. That runs to billions of pounds.

We must also tackle the menace of drugs, which is a factor in a great deal of crime. That is why we have 20 drugs prevention teams across the country to prevent the spread of drugs misuse, and why we have legislated to seize the profits of the drugs barons.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): On the question of drugs, has my right hon. and learned Friend seen the report in today's issue of *The Sun* that yet another major prosecution for drugs offences has collapsed because the defence wished to know the names of the informants? What action does my right hon. and learned Friend propose to deal with that?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend identifies a very serious problem, which was carefully considered by the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice. The commission made certain proposals, and we are considering them very carefully. I assure my hon. Friend that I am entirely sympathetic to the point he raises, and I am determined to take action to deal with it.

We will do everything we can to prevent crime, but no society has ever managed to eradicate it. That is why we need to do more to catch and punish criminals. The main responsibility for crime detention will always lie with the police.

One of my recent critics had some interesting things to say about that. He said that the police should be weaned off the silly, old-fashioned idea that their main job was detecting crime and catching criminals—"the canteen culture", he called it derisively. Now, apparently, I have come along and ruined everything. The boys in blue are starting to go back to the bad old days, when they enjoyed nothing so much as feeling collars. To those coppers in their canteens who see their main job as clearing villains off the street, I have a simple message: "Carry on, constable: I will back you all the way."

My job is to sweep away the obstacles that stop the police getting on with the job of clearing up crimes and arresting criminals. That is why, under our Police Bill, I will set key objectives for the police service. I want to give the police a clearer focus for their work. That is why I have accepted all the proposals of the inquiry to cut police paperwork, which will free as many as 2,300 police officers for front-line work. That is why we must give the police the modern equipment and technology that they need to beat the modern criminal.

Next year, the national collection of criminal records will be computerised, and the police national network will also be in place, saving up to £100 million over 10 years. Next year too, if Parliament approves, wider DNA profiling will be available to help the police to catch criminals.

The police do a difficult and dangerous job, frequently putting their own lives at risk to help others. We need to make sure that they have all the protection that we can give them. When I became Home Secretary, the police asked to undertake trials of a new expandable side-handled baton, which could give police officers better protection. I said that they could go ahead, subject to scientific evaluation. I can announce today that that evaluation has now been successfully completed, and that trials of the side-handled baton will go ahead as soon as possible in many parts of the country, including London.

We also need to make sure that the police service is managed efficiently, and that police officers are rewarded properly. That is why my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, set up the Sheehy inquiry. The reaction of the hon. Member for Sedgefield to the Sheehy report told us a lot about Labour Members. It would not be quite right to say they do not have a policy towards the Sheehy report; in fact, they have four.

When the Sheehy inquiry was announced, the hon. Member for Sedgefield welcomed it, saying that it

"may . . . come out with sensible reforms".

When it was published, he said that it was entirely right for me to consult about its contents. No sooner had I started consulted and listening than he said we should scrap it altogether. Writing in the *Daily Express*, as he frequently does, he said that the slate should be

"cleaned of these unnecessary matters".

Then, when I announced my conclusions, he simply could not bring himself to say whether he agreed with them or not.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield's counterpart in another place had no such difficulty. At the very moment when the hon. Gentleman was engaging in one of his rambling responses in this House, the noble Lord McIntosh took quite a different line:

"our fundamental reaction . . . it is in fact a very welcome basis for future discussion of the way forward for the police service." —[*Official Report*, House of Lords, 28 October 1993; Vol. 549, c. 943-4.]

The hon. Gentleman could not bring himself to say that.

We know what happened to one Labour spokesman —Lord Desai—when he disagreed with his party's policy on value added tax. When the Leader of the Opposition finally noticed what had happened, Lord Desai got the sack. On this occasion, if there were any justice in the world, it would not be Lord McIntosh who got the sack but the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The fact is that Lord McIntosh was right to welcome my statement. It was good for the police, good for the taxpayer and good for the public. They want the most effective police force possible, and that is exactly what they will get.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): In the spirit of not adding to the burdens of the police, will my right hon. and learned Friend reconsider the proposal in the Queen's Speech to make ticket touting a crime? Does he agree that we are in danger of scapegoating touts for more serious crimes, such as ticket forgery or failing to manage football grounds properly, which are not rightly the responsibility of people who happen to be selling a few tickets outside the grounds?

Mr. Howard: It pains me to disagree with my hon. Friend. Perhaps her disappointment will be lessened when I assure her that the police have supported the proposal to which she takes exception. I do not think that she need worry too much about additional police burdens in that context.

The Police Bill will also help to build the close partnership between police and public that we need to fight crime effectively. It will give us strengthened police authorities, working with their local police to respond to local needs. All our police reforms are directed towards one goal: ensuring that we have the most professional and effective police service possible. The British police are the best in the world, and I want things to stay that way.

Nothing saps police morale and public confidence more than breakdowns in the criminal justice system. The need for reform is widely accepted. Our approach to the report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice is to follow up its 352 recommendations as quickly and carefully as we can. We are looking at the report as a whole, but some proposals can be taken forward sooner than others. I intend to deal with those matters—including almost all the proposals that I announced in Blackpool on 6 October—in the legislation planned for the current Session.

Some action does not need legislation—for instance, cautioning. At present, there is too much of it. A recent survey commissioned by General Accident found that 60 per cent. of those aged between 13 and 17 thought that offenders committed crime because they believed that they could get off with a caution. It take that very seriously; we need to put a stop to cautioning for serious offenders and repeat cautions, save in the most exceptional circumstances. That is what the new guidance will achieve.

Of the 27 measures that I announced in Blackpool, 18 that require legislation will be dealt with in the Criminal Justice Bill. We will take action to crack down on the widespread abuse of bail. About 50,000 offences are committed by people on bail every year, and more than 40,000 people breach police bail. We will reform juries by banning those on bail from serving on them: no one wants someone on a jury one week and in the dock the next. We will introduce a new offence of witness intimidation, and allow retrials to take place if juries have been nobbled.

We will also deal with the so-called right to silence. That does not mean that those cautioned by the police must answer questions, but it does mean that their refusal to do so can be taken into account in a court of law. When the commission's report was published, the hon. Member for Sedgefield said that he supported retaining the right to silence. Why? After all:

"No one has anything to fear from being asked reasonable questions about where they were."

Those are not my words, but those of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), a shadow Cabinet colleague of the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Does the hon. Member for Sedgefield agree with his colleague? I think it is about time we were told. I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to lay any doubts to rest. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is continuing to take advantage of the right to silence; we will let him do so for as long as he can.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin) *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I see that there is a bolder spirit on the Opposition Back Benches.

Mr. Grocott: Perhaps, during the few remaining minutes in which the Home Secretary's words are transmitted live on television, he will answer the question that the public outside are asking. It is not the question with which he has been dealing so far: as usual, his speech has simply been part of his leadership bid.

Will the Home Secretary answer a very simple question? Why has crime rocketed under his Government, and why have all his attempts—and those of his predecessors—to reduce the level of crime been so hopelessly inadequate?

Mr. Howard: The House will have noticed that even the prospect of television could not bring the hon. Member for Sedgefield to his feet to address the question of the right to silence.

The hon. Member for the Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) asks about the measures that have been taken by the Government over the past 14 years. I shall tell the hon. Gentleman about the past 14 years. The Government have been passing measures to increase the powers of the courts and the police, and the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends have voted against every one. We shall not take any cackle from Opposition Members, because during the past 14 years they have attempted to thwart every measure that we have taken to deal with those matters.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Has the Home Secretary considered getting rid of remission, rehabilitation and parole? If somebody is sentenced to ten years imprisonment, let them serve it. If they misbehave, give them extra years, and if there is no room in the prisons, why not open up the army camps to keep prisoners under lock and key so that they cannot burgle our homes and break into our cars? Then we shall begin getting to grips with law and order.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend's point chimes perfectly with that of the hon. Member for the Wrekin. One of the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which the Labour party voted against, was to increase the proportion of the prison sentence that the people detained there served. We wanted to increase the time spent by people in prison, and the Labour party voted against it and have voted against every measure that we have taken over the past 14 years.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith) *rose*——

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman who rises to ask a question was present during the entire 14-year period and went into the division Lobby on every occasion to vote against those measures.

Mr. Soley: That is precisely the point that I wanted to put to the Home Secretary. In answering my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin, he still has not told us why all the policies have failed, which is why we voted against them.

More importantly, why is the Home Secretary now bringing forward legislation that asks us to overturn many of the Acts that the Government have introduced, such as parts of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which I and other Opposition Members warned him would be bad for police efficiency, without doing anything to improve the accountability of the police, as the Government said that they wanted to do? Why throw that Government Act out now?

Mr. Howard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not seeking to misrepresent matters by suggesting that he was in favour of any of the tough measures we took, or that he voted against any of the measures that we have again considered.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. It does not amount to opposition to those measures, to say as the hon. Gentleman has consistently said, that the police should be under the control of local authorities. If he thinks that that would have produced more effective policing, he stands alone in the country on that issue.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I am coming to the Liberal Democrats, and shall give way when I have said a word or two about them.

We should be told about the attitude of the Liberal Democrats to the proposal to deal with the right to silence. Last week on Channel 4 news, the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) took the place of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who was not allowed out on that day. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye affected outrage that I was not proposing to follow instantly and unquestioningly the majority recommendation of the royal commission. "What an outrageous way" for a Home Secretary to behave, he said.

What a revealing comment. The Liberal Democrats have joined *The Guardian* in the anti-democratic league. How outrageous, they say, for democratically elected politicians to take decisions. They urge that the responsibility should be given to others such as the royal commissioners and civil servants—to anyone but those who stand directly accountabe to the people.

We will have no truck with such drivel. We shall listen, but in the end it is for Ministers accountable to this House and to the people of this country to decide.

Mr. Don Foster: A minute ago, the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to misrepresentation. Will he confirm that he referred earlier to a press release issued by my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and, in effect, claimed that my right hon. Friend had said that the reform of the criminal justice system was an irrelevance in the fight against crime? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirms that, will he tell the House to which press release he was referring?

Will he now reflect on the words actually used by my right hon. Friend:

"the criminal justice system is quite clearly not reducing crime —and it has not been reducing crime for the last twenty years"?

In particular, my right hon. Friend was referring to the rise of 120 per cent. in the level of crime during this Government's administration.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should have turned over the page of his leader's press release. He would then have seen the words:

"The extent of crime completely dwarfs the capacity of the criminal justice system to deal with it."

If that is not saying that the criminal justice system is irrelevant in dealing with crime, I do not know what is. If the hon. Gentleman had looked at the whole of his right hon. Friend's press release, he would realise that it entirely supports my point.

Mr. Foster: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is it in order for the Home Secretary to mislead the House as he has just done?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should understand that the Secretary of State is not deliberately misleading the House. All hon. Members, Ministers and Secretaries of State are responsible for the comments they make. That is part of what robust debate is about. I hope that there will be an opportunity to call the hon. Gentleman or his party's spokesman, who can then rebut remarks as he wishes.

Mr. Howard: I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is sensitive about his leader, I dare say that it is not the first time, and I am sure that it will not be the last.

It is not enough to catch criminals if the courts do not have the powers they need to punish them effectively. Many of my measures will help the police to catch more criminals. I hope that they will have the support of everyone in the House. Other measures will enable the courts to convict more criminals, and I hope that they, too, will have the support of every hon. Member.

Some of those caught and convicted will be sent to prison—not by me, not by the Government, but by the judges and magistrates whose task it is to pass the appropriate sentence upon them. That is why I said in my speech at Blackpool that I am not prepared to judge the success of our policies by how much the prison population falls.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that for too long there has been a presumption that magistrates will not send people to prison. Will he assure the House that that presumption is now for the birds, and that in future magistrates will be allowed to use their powers rather than have them constrained?

Mr. Howard: Magistrates and judges must use their discretion. One of my objectives is to remove as many as possible of the fetters on that discretion.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield has said that he wants to be tougher on crime, and that he wants to catch more criminals. However, at the same time he criticises my policy of building more prisons. Perhaps he can tell the House where the courts would put the extra criminals if they were caught and convicted through the hon. Gentleman's approach to being tough with crime. The fact is that he has not got a clue.

Prison, of course, is only part of our strategy. I will review the national standards for punishment in the community, which will continue to play an important part

in our strategy. It must be effective and rigorous. Courts must always be free to send dangerous, violent and habitual offenders to prison. That is the protection that the public demand, and that is the protection that I am determined to provide. Prison sentences should be a real punishment. That is why I have said that conditions in our prisons should be decent but austere.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): My right hon. and learned Friend is getting a lot of silence from the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Is he aware that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) recently made an important announcement—important from the point of view of the Opposition—of a major policy on how to deal with young criminals? The hon. Member for Brightside proposes that young criminals should be tracked, and that tracking should be the new Labour party policy on how to deal with young criminals.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend say how tracking will reduce crime, because there is no evidence whatever that just keeping track of a criminal will reduce crime?

Mr. Howard: I am not sure about that particular suggestion—*[Interruption.]*—but in answer to my hon. Friend, I have a good deal more respect for the views of the hon. Member for Brightside on matters of law and order than I have for the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

I said at Blackpool that prison works—and it does. First, it deters many people from crime. If the sanction of prison were not available, who can possibly doubt that many more would be tempted to commit crimes? Secondly, while they are in prison, criminals cannot commit further crimes against the public. That can have a real and quantifiable effect. Our research into a sample of burglars given community service orders in 1987 suggested that, had they been in prison for a year, we could have prevented between three and 13 crimes per burglar.

A recent survey in Watford showed that just 25 burglars admitted between them to committing 1,124 offences—more than 44 offences per burglar. Of course prison is expensive. Of course it does not prevent all criminals from offending again, any more than fining, cautioning or punishment in the community.

What are those who oppose prison saying? Are they saying that society cannot afford to protect itself; that, to save money, dangerous criminals should be allowed to walk free; or that, because prison does not always stop offending behaviour, we should never send criminals to prison, irrespective of the rest of the public?

Those questions are particularly relevant to the small group of persistent juvenile offenders with whom the law as it stands simply cannot deal effectively.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those who say that, if persistent young juvenile offenders are locked up, they will learn how to be criminals completely ignore the fact that those youngsters have learnt everything there is to learn about crime, without ever having been in custody?

Mr. Howard: I fear that there is a great deal of truth in what my hon. Friend says. We are all familiar with the problems caused by that group, who terrorise their local communities and offend again and again, in spite of all attempts to contain them. That is why we will introduce a new secure training order for 12 to 14-year-olds, which will provide the education and discipline they need, while protecting the public from their criminal behaviour.

We intend also to raise from 12 months to two years the maximum sentence for detention in a young offenders institution for 15, 16 and 17-year-olds, so that courts have the flexibility they need to deal with that age group.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Returning for a moment to adult offenders, is the Secretary of State criticising the judiciary for not sending enough people to prison for long enough? Is that the import of his remarks about sentencing?

Mr. Howard: It is clearly necessary to use words of only one syllable to explain matters to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon). I have said—and will say again for the hon. Gentleman's benefit—that my measures are intended to increase the number of criminals caught and the number of criminals convicted. In such circumstances, the courts will want to send some of those criminals to prison. That is why it is necessary to provide additional prison accommodation. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): My right hon. and learned Friend has criticised the Opposition for attacking the six new prisons that he has announced, but are they not being only consistent? The last time that a Labour Government were in power in in 1979, they cut capital expenditure on prisons by 20 per cent.—at a time when the prison population was rising.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. That is why we had to engage in a massive prison building programme, which we did shortly after we were returned to office.

We have a packed agenda of measures to tackle crime. Contrast that with the Opposition. The hon. Member for Sedgefield has been shadow Home Secretary for 16 months, but we have not heard one policy from him. All we have heard is a single sound bite—tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime. The hon. Gentleman resembles nothing so much as a cracked record, going endlessly round repeating a meaningless mantra.

What proposals does the hon. Gentleman have for getting tough on crime? The nearest he has come to a reaction to my proposals is to describe them as gimmicks. Last week, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) described them as born of rhetoric.

Gimmicks? Rhetoric? Are my proposals for the increased use of DNA gimmicks? Are they simply rhetoric? Is cutting down on cautioning a gimmick, or rhetoric? Are my proposals for longer sentences for young offenders or for secure training units gimmicks or rhetoric? Is my proposal to deal with the misnamed right to silence a gimmick or rhetoric?

It is time that the hon. Member for Sedgefield faced up to his responsibilities. It is nearly two months since I announced my 27-point plan at Blackpool. It is time that we and the country knew where the Opposition parties stand on those important matters. Do they agree with them, or do they not? The time for prevaricating, evading and trivialising is over. We want answers from the hon. Gentleman, and we want them this afternoon.

The Government stand four square behind the police. We give priority to the victims of crime. We want the criminals, not law-abiding members of the public, to live in

[Mr. Howard]

fear. We are putting more police officers on our streets. We are building a partnership between the police and local people to prevent crime. We are cracking down on bail bandits, squatters, trespassers and all those who break the law. We are protecting the public from juvenile offenders who blight their communities, and we are toughening up punishments to step up the war against crime.

That is what the British people want. That is what the Government will provide. That is what the measures contained in the Gracious Speech will achieve, and I commend them to the House.

4.12 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): That was the speech that we expected of the Home Secretary. He never fails to disappoint us in these matters.

Two things are clear. There is no greater public concern at present than rising crime. It is the elderly, the weak and the most vulnerable who suffer most, not just from the commission of criminal offences but in the daily round of intimidation, harassment and abuse that is the lot of many people, not only in the inner-city estates, but in towns and villages throughout Britain. It is the first right of any citizen to live free from fear in safe communities.

However, the second thing that is clear is that up to now Government policy has singularly failed to deliver that right. We have had 14 years of Conservative promises of effective action and tough rhetoric, 14 years of the Government claiming that they will put the victim back at the heart of our concerns—14 years of new laws and talk, and 14 years of failure. That is the record on which the Government now stand.

The Government are right to signal, as they have done in virtually every Queen's Speech since they have been in power, that fighting crime should be at the heart of any new legislative programme. The question is, however, whether the Government now have a strategy to fight crime that is any more effective than the strategies which have gone before.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman respond to the question that was put to him by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary? The hon. Gentleman wants more criminals to be caught; yet he has criticised the fact that the Government intend to build more prisons. Where would the courts put the extra criminals who are caught?

Mr. Blair: I have not criticised the notion that those who are a danger to the public should be sent to prison. What I have criticised and will adumbrate at length in my speech is the notion that prison works as the centrepiece of the Government's strategy. There is no evidence that prison works as the main element of a strategy to fight crime.

Mr. Howard: Can the hon. Gentleman cite a single statement of mine in which I have said, implied, or hinted that prison is the centrepiece of my strategy? I have said repeatedly that prison is an important part of the strategy, along with all the other measures that I am proposing. Why must the hon. Gentleman rely on misrepresentation to make his point?

Mr. Blair: It is pretty rich for the Home Secretary to accuse me of misrepresentation after what he did to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

I find it extraordinary that the right hon. and learned Gentleman tells us that prison is not the centrepiece of his strategy, and that it is just an element of it. That was not how the Home Secretary sold his speech at the Conservative party conference. That was not what his political advisers were telling the press on 6 October. That was not what he was saying night after night during the Conservative party conference. The Home Secretary said —it was the centrepiece of his speech—that prison works. The truth is that he is now running away from that statement, because he cannot sustain it.

We believe that there should be four elements of a successful policy on crime. The first is a strong criminal justice system which protects the innocent and which convicts the guilty. The second is a comprehensive strategy to prevent crime and promote safer communities. That is vital, given that only one crime in 50 results in a conviction. Thirdly, we should develop local and accountable community policing. Fourthly, it must be recognised that there are underlying causes of crime which must be addressed and which require a co-ordinated policy across Government Departments, rather than the subject being left to the Home Office.

Added to those elements should be a prison service regime which is, of course, disciplined and challenging but which is also humane and dedicated to the reform of those who are in prison. The average term of imprisonment on any basis, although it has risen during the past few years, is still around two to three years. Therefore, prisoners and how they conduct themselves after leaving prison will be a vital component of whether we are successful in fighting crime.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): During the hon. Gentleman"s earlier remarks, he said that it is the weak and the vulnerable who are often the victims of crime. In considering the causes of crime, does he at least accept that it is an unacceptable excuse for a criminal to say that poverty is the cause of crime when the victims are often poorer than the criminals?

Mr. Blair: I accept that absolutely and unequivocally. There is no excuse for crime. We do not believe that poverty, unemployment or any of those matters is an excuse for the criminal. We do say—I will deal with this later in my speech—that any sensible strategy should take account of the influence of social conditions in the breeding ground for criminality. I will attempt to establish that, not by referring to what Labour people have said, but by referring to what policemen and Conservative politicians have said.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Home Secretary's failure to mention the incidence of racial attacks and the resurgence of racism and fascism in Europe was a most startling omission? In that context, does my hon. Friend support the introduction of a new law to outlaw incitement to racial hatred?

Mr. Blair: As we have already said, we believe that a new law would send the important signal from Parliament that racial attacks should not be tolerated and that those

responsible for them should be weeded out and brought to justice as soon as possible. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Let us be quite clear that we are not saying that all the measures advocated by the Home Secretary are wrong. We have not said that, nor have we criticised every measure that he has introduced.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh) *rose*——

Mr. Blair: May I continue for a moment?

The Home Secretary will recall that we co-operated in getting the latest Criminal Justice Act, which dealt with drugs and drug trafficking, through the House so that it gained Royal Assent before the summer break. As and when he publishes the details of his proposals, we shall comment on them. Our criticism is that they focus on only one element of a successful strategy to fight crime—the criminal justice system. Whatever lip service the Home Secretary pays to crime prevention—since the conference, he has started to introduce it to a much greater extent than before—he effectively ignores it and has downgraded it. He ignores the causes of crime and, in relation to the police and the policing of our communities, his proposals would make matters worse, not better.

Mr. Bates: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of the abolition of the right to silence—yes or no?

Mr. Blair: I did not intervene on that point when it was mentioned earlier, but the hon. Gentleman and the Home Secretary must show why the royal commission's conclusions, which abrogate the right to silence but retain it in the police station where there are no proper safeguards for the accused, were wrong. Everyone agrees that there should be a duty of co-operation. The question is at what point that duty arises and under what conditions. I support the royal commission's recommendations in this respect, which were to ensure that—*[Interruption.]* Would hon. Members please listen?

The right to silence is used in two quite different respects. One is at trial and leading to the trial and the other is at the police station. At the present, the so-called right to silence applies throughout. The royal commission's proposals were that it should be abrogated, that one should be able to comment on silence once the charges are known and that there should not be an ability to have ambush defences. If people remain silent at trial, there should be an ability to comment on that fact.

The royal commission found, however, that there was no evidence that if the right to silence at the police station were removed it would lead to more convictions of those who were guilty; and it did believe that it might lead to injustice for those who were innocent. The Home Secretary must show how the royal commission's proposals, which were worked out after detailed consideration, are wrong. I do not think that that is an unreasonable proposition.

The right to silence is a complicated and difficult issue. It has formed the subject of previous royal commissions, and a working party from the Home Office was set up a few years ago to look into it. To deal with such issues with throwaway lines at a Tory party conference says something about the responsibility of the person who occupies the office concerned.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intrude on his adumbration. While he is being specific, will he give us his views on the Bail (Amendment) Act 1993? He has also had time to study the proposed changes. Does he support them?

Mr. Blair: We gave our answer when the Home Secretary announced the details of his proposals the week before last. We said that we support changes that would make it more difficult for people to offend on bail. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) co-operated in getting legislation through the House to toughen the measures relating to bail.

While the Conservatives were telling us that juvenile offending was declining and that the Criminal Justice Act was a good Act, we were pointing out the problems. We have said throughout that any strategy to fight crime must deal not only with the criminal justice system but with prevention, causes and policing. While the Conservatives have a one-sided, one-club policy, it will not work for the reasons it did not work before.

Let us reflect for a moment on the history of the Government's crime policy because that history is in the process of being rewritten fairly dramatically. It must be clear that the Government do not start from a position of any great credibility on crime. Their record is appalling by any standard.

Apart from the period 1988-1990 when crime actually fell, it has risen by 124 per cent. since 1979. Violent crime has gone up by 113 per cent., burglary by 179 per cent. and car crime by more than 200 per cent. Since 1990, the so-called party of law and order has presided over a rise in crime of more than 50 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of offences leading to a conviction has fallen.

After 14 years, the Government are clearly in bad need of an explanation. In the past few days, two have been tendered. The first, by the Prime Minister in opening the Queen's Speech debate, is that all western countries have experienced a similar rise in crime. That will not do. In fact, on any comparable basis, Britain is at top of the crime league in Europe and the western world, and has been throughout the 1980s.

The other and most extraordinary claim is that somehow the party's previous leader, in the 1980s—the noble Baroness Thatcher—missed out on crime as an issue until the firm hand of the present Prime Minister was brought to bear upon it, and that she ignored crime as an important issue because she was too busy concentrating on other things.

Let us leave aside the inherent implausibility of the notion of Baroness Thatcher as a weak-kneed liberal who was rather soft on crime. It is nonsense. In fact she put crime at the heart of what the Conservatives were talking about in the 1980s. Their rhetoric was on the same lines as "back to basics".

Crime was a recurrent feature—one of the central planks of the 1979 Conservative manifesto. Eleven years ago, the noble Lord Whitelaw said:

> "For the past 20 years the courts have been dangerously hampered by the law . . . we are seeking to mobilise our whole society in the battle against crime . . . Criminal behaviour has been too readily excused."

Sir Leon Brittan said:

> "There is today a great wave of anger against the wanton violence which disfigures our society. It is real, it is genuine and I share it to the full."

The present Foreign Secretary said in 1986:

> "It's time to bring the victim back to centre stage".

[Mr. Blair]

A former Home Secretary, the noble Lord Waddington, said:

"If you want the fight against crime to be pursued with all vigour . . . put your trust in the Prime Minister and the Government".

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: In a moment.

In the 1980s the prison population rose and there were no fewer than 60 pieces of Home Office legislation. The truth is not that the Conservatives have had no policy on crime in the past 14 years, but that their policy has failed despite the hype given to each succeeding initiative.

Central to that myth is the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Contrary to what the Conservatives now say, it was not the culmination of the strategy pursued over 12 years; it represented a shift in policy due to recognition that the strategy of the 1980s had failed. That is why the present Education Secretary when he was at the Home Office put out in April 1990 a press release headlined,

"Fewer young adult offenders imprisoned"

which stated:

"I am pleased to be able to announce that the number of"

young people

"given custodial sentences . . . has fallen . . . I feel very strongly that criminal prevention is often the key to dealing with young offenders. Time spent in prison sometimes only serves to reinforce the criminal tendencies of some young people . . . With punishment in the community young offenders can be confronted by their offending behaviour and taught to appreciate the consequences . . . I am hopeful that our new initiatives aimed at reducing further the adult prison population will enjoy similar success".

That was, of course, why the Act represented a major change in policy.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: In a moment.

The problem of the Criminal Justice Act was twofold. First, it went too far in certain key aspects, particularly the exclusion of previous convictions, and the desire to use it as a vehicle for cutting costs led to the wrong messages being given to the courts. In addition, the programmes of crime prevention that the hon. Gentleman rightly stressed, which are an integral part of the package, were not developed, so that the strategy also failed. The basic reason for the change in strategy was that, until then, there had been a huge rise in the prison population. But the crime rate had risen at the same time. What we have now under the new Home Secretary is not a new strategy but simply a reversion to the old one. It lunges from one extreme to the other and we never get a balance.

Ten years ago the Home Secretary told us that we must make more use of prisons. Three years ago we were told in a White Paper that prisons were an expensive way of making all criminals worse. Now we are told that prisons work. That is why the Government's policy has failed over 14 years.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): In giving an historical account, the hon. Gentleman alluded earlier to the importance of breadth and co-ordination in policies to tackle those problems. Will he say whether Labour has any policies in this area?

Mr. Blair: Had the hon. Gentleman been listening a moment ago, he would have heard me say that we put forward policies on many of those issues long before the Home Office had woken up to the importance of the difficulties.

Mr. Clappison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No, I shall give way in a moment.

The sensible, balanced policy is that prison is necessary but it does not work as a strategy to fight crime except in the limited sense that a criminal who is caught, convicted and imprisoned cannot commit a further crime while in prison. I do not understate the importance of that, but let us set it in context. In only one out of 750 offences, excluding motoring offences, will the criminal go to gaol. That does not mean that there should not continue to be prisons, but simply that we should not kid ourselves or the public that to cut crime all we need to do is force up the prison population.

The Home Secretary seems desperate to deny that he ever laid emphasis on prison.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: In just a moment. The Home Secretary was running around Blackpool telling people that he had discovered the new slogan of the 1990s, "Prison works". Now he wants to deny it. He did not deny the slogan when Jeremy Paxman questioned him on "Newsnight". The first question to him was, "You say that prison works; tell me a country in which it has worked." He did not say, "That is not my policy; I don't know where you got that idea from, Jeremy." He said, "The United States of America." And he was pleased with himself and repeated it a couple of days later.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is being absolutely absurd. Of course prison is an important part of our policy. That does not mean that it is the only part or the centrepiece of our policy, but it is an important part.

Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of building new prisons? If so, would prison be the centrepiece of his strategy?

Mr. Blair: I have made it clear that prison should not be the centrepiece of a strategy, for the very reason that I gave. The Home Secretary puts that question as though I had not already made the position clear, as I have on many occasions. Prison is necessary; those who ought to go to prison should be put there, and if that means more prisons, more prisons must be built. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] We have never said anything different from that. We have disagreed with the notion that prison works as a strategy for cutting crime, which is where the Home Secretary has fallen down.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I shall give way in a moment. I enjoy conducting a seminar.

When the Home Secretary was asked on "Newsnight" to say where his policy has worked, he gave as an example the United States of America.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman simply must get his facts right. I was asked on "Newsnight" a specific factual question. Jeremy Paxman asked me, "Can you name one country where the prison population has gone up and the crime rate over the same period has gone down?" The

factual answer to that question is the United States of America. He did not ask the question which the hon. Gentleman suggests that he asked. It was a different question and I gave a specific and entirely accurate answer.

Mr. Blair: The notion that the interview was merely an attempt to elicit various pieces of factual information that were unrelated to overall policy or strategy is an absurd bit of wriggling. The Home Secretary said that prison worked. If he reads his speech again, he will find that it contained barely a word about crime prevention: it was all prison, prison, prison.

The Secretary of State and his political advisers briefed the press like mad with the new slogan, "Prison works". When he was asked for an example of where that occurred, he said the United States. Now he wants to run away from that because the notion that the United States should serve as an example of criminal justice strategy has been greeted with incredulity by everyone.

I believe that I am right in saying that a couple of nights later the Secretary of State repeated the line that the United States was an example of where that policy worked. He did not tell Mr. Paxman that he was only giving pieces of factual information and that no policy conclusions should be drawn from them. That is absurd, and he knows it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Blair: Conservative Members should wait until I have finished my argument because their education on this matter is important.

The Home Secretary did not even get his facts right. Over the past 12 years, the prison population in the United States has risen threefold. In the US, there are now more than 1 million people in gaol. That is proportionately six times as many as in Britain. The cost is more than $22 billion per year, and some states now spend more on prisons than on education. Yet violent crime has carried on rising. That is why everybody in the United States, from the Attorney-General and the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation downwards, is saying that we need to consider causes and prevention as well as dealing with the criminal.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman is coming to an interesting point in the debate. He must accept that there has been much improvement in community penalties and disposals in the past 14 years. However, for serious and persistent offenders, where other methods have been tried and have failed, there has to be a sentence of custody. Courts have to be free to protect the public by giving that sentence of custody where appropriate.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that courts should have the power to send 12, 13 and 14-year-olds to secure accommodation if they are persistent serious offenders? Courts do not have that power now. Does he support longer sentences for 15, 16 and 17-year-olds who commit serious offences? At present, the courts can only give them one year. What is his policy on those two matters?

Mr. Blair: We have given our policies on juvenile offenders at length. I believe that it was the Oppositon who first said that it was important that there should be secure accommodation for persistent juvenile offenders who are out of control. Our disagreement with the Government is that we want that policy to be built into existing provision so that the range of provisions in local communities will include secure accommodation as well as other measures.

Three years ago, the then Minister of State, Home Department—now the Secretary of State for Education —promised a further 60 places of secure accommodation, but not one has yet been built. The idea that the Conservative party can talk about these matters with any credibility is utterly absurd.

Mr. Shersby: On the matter of juvenile offenders, will the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to tell the House a little more about the alternative proposals on custody outlined by his hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who said:

"custodial sentences for young people should be replaced by a system of 'tracking' . . . 'Tracking' involves extremely close supervision of the individual at all times, accompanied by a positive programme of education, employment and social support."

I am interested in that comment. Would the hon. Gentleman care to elucidate?

Mr. Blair: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that the problem with reading from Conservative party briefing papers is that they are usually rather less accurate than the briefs that he received from the Police Federation. I am surprised that when the hon. Gentleman intervenes he does not ask me about the continuing concern of many serving police officers about the way in which the Home Secretary is conducting consideration of what replaces the Sheehy proposals.

In relation to my hon. Friend's statement, he was not saying that young people should not be put in secure accommodation, but that when young people are persistently in trouble there needs to be some multi-agency approach between social services and others so that the behaviour of those young people can be tracked to ensure that they do not re-offend. That seems entirely sensible.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): A few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman reminded me that I promised the House, three or four years ago, that we would make about 60 extra places available to deal with young offenders. He is right; that is exactly the promise that I made to the House. Is he aware, however, that I was too trusting and a bit naive? I put my faith in Labour-controlled local authorities up and down the land, which have persistently refused to give planning permission and to co-operate with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that that is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary's new plans for secure training units will not depend on local authorities, which have done nothing to help the drive against crime?

Mr. Blair: That briefing is thoroughly out of date. It is completely untrue. When that allegation was first made by the previous Home Secretary it was rebutted in detail. Labour local authorities have been trying to ensure that secure accommodation is built—in Leeds, for example. I appreciate that truth has become a pretty scarce commodity in what is said from the Government Front Bench, but the allegation is absolute and utter rubbish. *[Interruption.]* Labour local authorities and indeed others, including some Conservative ones, have been desperate to obtain Government agreement to build secure accommodation, but they are being given neither the capital nor the revenue funding. I have seen correspondence between Ministers and local authorities which bears that out.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I am delighted that my hon. Friend wishes to intervene, because the Home Secretary should listen to what he says on the subject.

Mr. Gunnell: When I was chair of social services, the Leeds local authority entered into an agreement with the Department of Health for the provision of an extra 10 secure places—there already being 27, which was the largest number of any local authority. We had an agreement for a further 10 places, but they were not delivered by the Department of Health, which had promised to honour that agreement.

Mr. Blair: What my hon. Friend says is absolutely right.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Blair: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman please have a little patience?

What my hon. Friend says is right. Indeed, that experience is replicated around the country. I will give the House one example.

There was a debate in which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland)—I am sorry that she is not in her place, but I did not realise that the subject would be mentioned—spoke about juvenile offending in relation to the Sutton and Cheam local authority. A debate ran in the newspapers for days about how that local authority had failed to take action against those kids. It did not have the secure accommodation available.

If the right hon. Gentleman obtains the figures from the National Bed Bureau in Leeds, he will see that there is an excess of demand over supply for secure accommodation for young people every day of the week. The idea that that could be laid at the door of local authorities is therefore utter nonsense.

I shall give way to the Home Secretary, but I will treat with a fair amount of caution any facts that he gives me.

Mr. Howard: The facts are these. In the current year, nearly £4 million of capital funding has been made available by the Department of Health to local authorities. Next year, £6 million will be made available for the building of those units.

If the hon. Gentleman wants some specific, factual examples, I draw his attention to what has happened in Leicestershire, which has been ruled by a Lib-Lab pact since about 1983. In 1983, when it first came to power, the administration refused to open a secure unit which had been built by the previous, Conservative, administration. It had to repay its grant because it would not open that secure unit. At a council meeting in Leicestershire on 25 March this year, that Lib-Lab council failed to endorse proposals to provide a new secure facility. As the Government wanted to act quickly, the capital grants that were available to Leicestershire county council were removed and allocated elsewhere. That is what is happening in this country, and it will not do for the hon. Gentleman to seek to deflect criticism elsewhere.

Mr. Blair: I understand that that is not the position in Leicestershire. The subject was mentioned before by the previous Home Secretary and it was very well rebutted at the time by Leicestershire county council. However, we can go into the facts another time.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is saying that yes, this year capital allocations have been made, although, as I understand it, there is still a dispute about the revenue funding, which is also important. That shows that many local authorities are willing to build secure accommodation. The problem is that they are not being given the resources to do so.

Mr. Dickens: I think that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased because I happen to think that his speech is quite clever and entertaining, and it is the type of speech that I hope that I would make if I were in the Opposition. May I, however, present him with a scenario? If the sentence that the court gives to someone who is convicted is supposed to be retribution, punishment and deterrent, and if all those things have not worked, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only solution is lock and key —prison—so that the person cannot re-offend and burgle people's homes and steal their cars? I think that he believes that because obviously he believes in a prison-building programme.

Mr. Blair: I have made it clear that who the courts put in prison is a matter for them, and that I accept that those who require to go to prison should go to prison. The difference between us is the idea that one focuses all attention simply on "prison works" as the strategy in the criminal justice system.

I will mention the Home Secretary's conference speech in a moment, but I can tell hon. Members that it bears out exactly what we have been saying. Indeed, it goes further. If we intend to increase the strength of the criminal justice system, one major part of that is surely the treatment of victims in it. The Government are about to undermine the position of victims in the criminal justice system in one crucial respect and I shall spend a moment discussing that.

At present, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board assesses compensation on the same principles as common law damages—the actual loss to the victim. That is now to be replaced by a rigid tariff scheme, based solely on the type of injury suffered, without regard to loss of earnings. The minimum award will be increased to about £1,500.

According to our calculations, thousands of people—perhaps as many as 20,000—will not receive an award if the minimum is raised in that way. The new tariff system will also cause manifest injustice, since the huge variations in individual circumstances will simply be lumped together. Indeed, as the chairman of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board has said, the loss of an eye for, for example, an elderly man as a result of a criminal offence is plainly different from that for a youth of 18 with his working life ahead of him. There should surely be provision to take account of the distinction between those two sets of circumstances.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House his authority for the assertions that he has just made? Will he promise, here and now, to give a full and unreserved public apology if they turn out, when we publish our proposals in full, to be incorrect?

Mr. Blair: The authority for those propositions is the letters between the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and Ministers. Whether the position has now changed may be another matter. If it has changed, no doubt the right hon. and learned Gentleman will tell us, but he will surely not tell us that the notion of a tariff scheme replacing the compensation on the basis of common law damages was never considered. He will not tell us that.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman answer the question that I asked him? We have not made an announcement yet. We shall make an announcement in due course. If the assertions that the hon. Gentleman has just made prove to be wrong in the light of that announcement, does he promise, here and now, to make a full and unqualified public apology?

Mr. Blair: What I have just put forward is the basis of the proposals that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is at present advocating. If he is going to change those proposals, I am delighted at the change. But I note that he has not denied that those were the proposals at one stage, whether or not they have now been changed. If those proposals are to be changed, I am delighted.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is it not equally worrying that the consultation proposals also suggest withdrawing the concept of payment for trauma? Will trauma no longer be one of the factors to be taken into account? For example, people working in postal and security services are regularly attacked, yet now they may get no compensation if their lives are ruined in future. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Government if they will wake up, withdraw their stupid proposal and come up with something sensible?

Mr. Blair: I entirely agree. If, by implication, the Home Secretary now suggests that he will not accept the Government's earlier position—he must mean that, or he would have not been silly enough to intervene in that way—I am delighted, and will give him the welcome now.

There are no serious new initiatives on crime prevention. For example, although the Government again pay lip service to the crucial issue of crime and drugs, yet nothing is to be done. It is clear that what works is local agencies striving, in partnership with local people, to target and prevent crime in their areas. We could point to examples of that all over the country. It is always said, even by Government reports such as the Morgan report, which was published a few years ago, that there must be a lead body—the Morgan report advocated the local authority—to co-ordinate crime prevention in each area. The Audit Commission confirmed that opinion a few weeks ago.

Not only are the Government failing to adhere to the proposals of their own committee, but—even worse—they are dismantling many of the programmes that have a key impact on crime prevention. Safer cities crime prevention projects are being cut; the urban programme is being run down; drug education officers' posts are being cut; two thirds of local authorities are cutting their youth services because of cuts in their funding. The Government are reneging on the promise to ringfence funding for residential care homes for alcohol and drug abusers; residential care places for disturbed young people are being closed. All those actions will have a dramatic adverse impact on crime further down the road.

The proposals on policing will make all those factors even worse. There is not a scrap of support anywhere for the Government's policy of replacing those elected by local people to police authorities with Government appointees. In particular, the chairman will no longer be an accountable person elected by local people, but will simply be appointed by the Government. The proposals are bigoted, undemocratic and regressive, and they will take policing in the opposite direction from that in which it needs to go.

This country has had enough of basic local services being taken out of local people's hands and turned over to unelected bureaucracies, unaccountable to anyone but Conservative Ministers sitting in Whitehall. In policing, that is most important of all. Community policing is about much more than bobbies on the beat, although that is part of it. It is about integrating the police service into the local community so that the police are regarded no longer as experts coming in from outside to clear up the consequences of criminality, but as partners in the community, helping, with others, to prevent crime and to deal with its causes. Let no one be in any doubt that, taken together, the proposals on policing threaten much local policing and will move us away from local community policing, in precisely the opposite direction from that in which we need to go.

I shall devote the last part of my speech to another fundamental difference of approach to crime. The Opposition believe that it is important to tackle the causes of crime, too. Let us be clear what we mean by that. No one excuses crime simply by talking of its causes, and we do not mean that people who are poor or unemployed simply rush out to commit criminal offences. That is not the concern. The concern is rather that we are developing within our society a subculture outside its mainstream and impervious to its rules of conduct, whose hallmarks are low educational opportunities, low job prospects, unstable families, drug abuse, truancy and crime. That is why any strategy to fight crime should tackle that subculture and its casues, especially in relation to young people.

It is not only Opposition parties who say that. Sir John Woodcock, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, said:

"Police Officers in many inner city localities fear that a substantial number of young people in these areas are becoming detached from social norms".

Sir Peter Imbert said:

"The crime map fits all too closely over the map of disadvantage".

Last week the chief constable of Avon and Somerset said:

"It is only by tackling the root causes that we can make an impact."

Even the Secretary of State for Employment, a week ago, said:

"We have to . . . bring young people on board and give them motivation and the will be become fully paid up members of society . . . before they are blooded into the criminal fraternity".

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and Lord Walker, like everyone else, say that we should also tackle the causes of crime.

Even the Home Secretary implicitly accepted that there are causes of crime when he said that its roots could be traced back to the absent fathers in the second world war. As a piece of social analysis, that was unique—a rare feature in that area. Leaving aside the curious fact that there was no such effect after the first world war, and the equally curious idea that the children who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s whose fathers had been absent were apparently fine, yet stored up their psychological defect for onward transmission to their children, let us try to put the matter in a consensual way.

Let us accept that poor parenting can lead to crime; it certainly can. However, if one factor can lead to crime why cannot other factors—such as poor education, poor employment opportunities and poverty—lead to crime? Once we accept that individuals are in part influenced by the world around them, why must we stop at the family?

[Mr. Blair]

Do families not live in broader communities? Will not the circumstances of those communities also affect the families?

Is that not best expressed in the Cabinet Office papers presented to the Home Secretary and other Ministers before he made his speech at the party conference? Those papers said:

"There is a temptation to make a connection between single-parent families and criminality, but the evidence from research suggests that it is factors which often accompany lone parenthood, such as poverty, rather than the absence *per se* of the second parent, which are associated with a propensity to offend."

If that is true, surely policies on education, employment, housing and drugs also become central to the fight against crime. However, the Government will not accept that, because if they do, they must accept their responsibility for the state of our country today. For too long crime policy has swung between the twin polarities of punishment and prevention. We focus either on crime or on its causes. In reality any sensible strategy needs to do both.

The Home Secretary should re-read his conference speech. Only one of his announcements had anything to do with crime prevention, and that was an old announcement. A few weeks ago on the "Today" programme, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said that no one knew how to prevent crime. His is a one-club policy. The argument between him and others is not between those who want to be tough on crime, and penal or prison reformers; it is concerned with whether his strategy, relying on that one track, will work, to make our communities safer.

We require a strategy that both deals with the criminal justice system and, with common sense and with our purpose as a community, creates a society in which rights and responsibilities, opportunities and obligations, go together. That is why social responsibility is not a substitute for individual responsibility, but is the best way of giving it a chance to be realised. That is the difference between the two parties. That is why our strategy has a chance of success, and why we believe that the Government's strategy has none.

4.58 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): To be fair to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I must say that he made an impressive debating speech and handled a range of interventions most plausibly. However, I cannot extend my bouquet to him much further, for two reasons. The first is that as I listened to his speech and the way in which he dealt with interventions, I could not help feeling that the cause of law and order, and of improving the quality of life for the majority of law-abiding citizens, would be greatly advanced if politicians of all parties would forbear to misrepresent each other's positions on the subject. Although it may be uncomfortable to hear it in a debate such as this, there is much that unites us on the diagnosis of the problem, although some of the prescriptions have different emphases depending on the starting point.

The approach of the hon. Member for Sedgefield hinges essentially on what is called the multi-agency approach, which envisages all the relevant parties taking a share of the responsibility for dealing with and preventing crime. That approach is admirable in political rhetoric, but it is probably more expensive and certainly more ambitious than one that is narrowly focused on dealing with crime principally through detection and punishment.

If the hon. Gentleman accepts that, he must talk long and hard to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to find out whether the shadow Chancellor agrees with the considerable expenditure commitments that are implicit in what the hon. Gentleman has said. That might justify a future Labour Government raising taxation or borrowing more to pay for such worthy ends, but the hon. Member for Sedgefield should realise that his proposals have a big price tag.

Mr. Blair: Many studies here an in the United States have shown that prevention is much more cost-effective than simply dealing with the consequences of criminality and embodying them in a strategy that says that prison works.

Mr. Forman: I agree, but as long as the Treasury has to deal with expenditure annually—and the hon. Gentleman knows that that is how affairs are conducted—the saving, if that is the right word, often occurs well into the future, whereas the up-front cost is considerable.

I welcome the fact that the Government have decided to make law and order central to the legislative programme in this Session. People expect us to respond by giving an even higher priority than we have been able to give over the past 14 years or so, first, to preventing crime—I agree that one must have a strategy for crime prevention—and, secondly, to catching criminals. It is sobering to note the tiny proportion of people who are convicted in relation to the total volume of crime.

Thirdly, we must ensure that the courts have all the powers they need for appropriate sentences. Our next criminal justice Bill will address that. My proposals are especially relevant to the need to deal more effectively with the minority of recidivist young offenders, who cause our constituents a great deal of concern.

I agree with the hon. Member for Sedgefield that effective action on law and order needs co-operation between all who have influence and responsibilty for such matters. In that context one can recite the usual litany of parents, teachers, the police, the courts, the probation service and the media—which has not been mentioned much in the debate—and politicians in local and national government. In that context I welcome and draw to the attention of the House the action plan for a safer Sutton. That plan has been introduced in the area covering my constituency and is but one example—I am sure that there are many more—of how these issues can be tackled effectively at local level.

To some extent that plan is a microcosm of what could and should be replicated more widely. It involves positive co-operation between the police and the local authority and there is also a considerable input from the local Members of Parliament. It emphasises the action that the law-abiding majority can take to safeguard themselves and their property. As the House knows, a great deal can be done under the auspices of bodies such as insurance companies.

I draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education the fact that the plan embodies a much greater effort to eliminate truancy in all its forms and to ensure that education welfare officers have adequate legislative powers to return truants to school. I have some information to the effect that those officers may

not have the full powers that they need for that purpose. All schools, whether they are in difficult areas or slightly easier areas, should give much higher priority to ensuring constant attendance during the school day. I welcome the recent tables published by my right hon. Friend which focus on that.

It is also right to back efforts such as Sutton's Youth at Risk scheme which, through admirable voluntary action, is designed to divert susceptible youngsters from crime at a timely stage before they embark on what would otherwise be criminal careers. One method by which that thrust of policy can be bolstered would be the early introduction of statutory identity cards. Initially, they could be introduced for those under the age of 18 and that could have many applications to problems such as under-age drinking and the ability of the police to deal with potential juvenile offenders.

However, the justification for identity cards is greater in the sphere of law and order than in social security, which is the one that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has mentioned as one of his justifications for such a scheme. If proved to work well in the context of law and order and for those who are under 18—as I suspect it would—it could later be extended to everybody. There would be widespread acceptance of that. The Home Secretary should not be frightened of some rather noisy causes and interest groups such as the National Council for Civil Liberties and others who create disproportionate decibels but do not reflect majority public opinion on this issue.

In dealing more effectively with crime and anti-social behaviour, there is a role for the media in avoiding sensationalising and fanning the fear of crime beyond all reasonable limits. There is an important distinction between the reality of crime, many categories of which have been declining rather than increasing—many people do not realise that—and the fear of crime, which has undoubtedly been increasing, fanned by sensationalism.

For example, local papers, which have a considerable influence, should give at least as much prominence to sentences, even though some of them are passed months or even years after the offences, as they do to crimes, awful though some of them are. Any measures that we could take to increase the feel-safe factor as opposed to the feel-good factor among the law-abiding majority of our constituents would do more than almost anything to improve the quality of their lives. I have tried to be constructive because I think that the hon. Member for Sedgefield realises, if the truth be told, that there is much common ground between all parties on the vital issue of law and order.

I shall deal briefly with education because it is the other subject of the debate and I have some experience of it. By all means let us try to reform teacher training in the way that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education intends by encouraging a great deal more emphasis on classroom skills and experience. That is at the heart of his policy. However, in doing that we must be careful not to reduce too far the role of higher education institutions. They have a great deal to contribute and are not all like the institute of education in London university. Many of them are quite sensible, and not all speak with the voice of Professor Wragg.

Our established objective of raising the status of the teaching profession must continue apace. In that contect I hope that we shall press forward with our earlier drive to encourage graduate entry and participation in the profession as widely as possible. That should be backed by frequent and timely in-service training and retraining which are vital in a world in which the needs of education change frequently.

We must concentrate, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education intends, upon what I would describe as the long-term education agenda of implementing the national curriculum, broadening the subject range post-14 and not just post-16, and encouraging parity of esteem for vocational education. That can be done by boosting such excellent qualifications as GNVQs, which are now beginning to catch on. That will improve people's chances of getting and retaining good jobs.

Against the background of the long-term agenda, it is worth mentioning that the reform of student unions, although set out in the Queen's Speech, is a relatively small measure that may well distract from the bigger issues. I should like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education to put it into its proper perspective. Now that he has decided, rightly, to legislate for the voluntary principle —something that I have supported, on the public record, from the Dispatch Box—let us at least try to make the new arrangements as simple and workable as possible. Otherwise, we may suffer from the law of unintended consequences which so often dogs all legislation.

I should like to hear from my right hon. Friend—I shall be staying to listen closely to his winding-up speech—why his desirable objective of introducing the voluntary principle for student unions cannot be just as well met by the proposals put forward, for example, by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forman: No, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not, as I am about to conclude.

I am glad to say that, in going back to basics—at any rate, in law and order and in education—Ministers are doing exactly the right thing. Even if, in the opinion of some of my constituents, some of the developments are overdue, they are nevertheless welcome to Conservative Members. Ministers should know that they will continue to have our strong support in their efforts under those two vital headings.

5.11 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): Many years ago, Aneurin Bevan used a vivid phrase, when he said that we live on an island made of coal and surrounded by fish and it would need an organising genius to create at the same time a shortage of both. That may still come to pass. Our problem now, which would do credit to the same organising genius, is an escalating crime wave and empty courts, particularly Crown courts.

The Home Secretary said that the Government will do all that they can to catch and punish criminals. I should have hoped that, before coming to punishment, he would mention prosecution. That is what is wrong today. It is all very well for the Home Secretary to adopt the posture of being tough on crime. I invite him to walk around the criminal courts to see exactly what is happening, to talk to the Crown Prosecution Service and get it to explain its policies, and—I am sure that he does this anyway—talk to policemen.

[Mr. John Morris]

The Home Secretary said that if there were too much use of the caution, he would issue new guidelines. We have been asking for that for a long time. There has been a mushrooming of cautioning over the years. It has a proper and important place in the treatment of young people. The statistics show that the overwhelming majority of those cautioned do not come back to the attention of the courts. However, its use has got out of hand and it is being used for serious offences, so there should be guidelines.

Why has cautioning, over the years, come gradually to be used on a wide scale for repeated offences and against the background of the complete absence of a national register? A person can be cautioned in south Wales today and again a week later in Cumbria without anyone knowing about the first caution. Why has it taken so long for this great light to dawn on the Home Office? Every policeman to whom the Home Secretary deigns to speak will agree about the use of the caution. I am with the Home Secretary about new guidelines. I asked for them the other day and I shall look at them carefully when they are published.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The guidelines were published about three weeks ago. We are now consulting on them. I should be happy to send another copy to the right hon. and learned Gentleman and equally happy to receive his comments.

Mr. Morris: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. It must be less than three weeks, because I tabled a parliamentary question, which has obviously been forgotten about, the reply to which said that the guidelines would be coming soon. I look forward to examining them.

I support the policy of less paperwork for the police which was ventilated earlier. However, a great deal of their paperwork has been given to them as a result of previous Government legislation—to begin with, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—making a substantial inroad on the time that a policeman can be on the beat. Why should a policeman have to spend so much time summarising what has been given during an interview that has been tape recorded? He is not the best man in the world for that job anyway. I have raised the matter with police officers throughout the country and I suspect that every one would agree that, if that chore were taken from the shoulders of police officers and given to the CPS, much time would be saved.

My constituents want more policemen on the beat. When the chief constable of the South Wales constabulary asked for an increase of 40 in his establishment, the request was turned down. I suspect that he knows a great deal about the needs on the ground, but obviously someone knows better. I should like the Home Secretary to explain to me why the repeated request of my police force, and I suspect those of many others, for an increase in establishment is turned down time after time by the Home Office.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that when chief constables have more control over their budgets, they will be able to address that point in the way most suited to their area?

Mr. Morris: I suspect that, even then, the establishment will have to be agreed by the Home Office. If that is not so, I should be surprised. Total budgets will still be constrained and the process may give only an illusory freedom.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: The hon. Gentleman knows that Madam Speaker enjoined us to make short speeches. I have already given way twice, and I must get on.

We all know of the crime wave set out so clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). There has been a 50 per cent. increase in recorded crime since 1985, and a 124 per cent. increase since 1979. If we knew the way to solve the problem, no one would be more overjoyed than Labour Members and, I am sure, Conservative Members. Sadly, there is no complete answer. However, while the crime rate is escalating, the courts remain empty.

How does the Home Secretary explain why it is that, when I checked at the end of September as to how many empty courts there were in the south-east circuit, I was told that it was not exceptional for 24 Crown courts to be empty in any one day? I asked again this morning; on average, each day this week on the south-east circuit, about 19 courts are empty. I suspect that the same goes in circuit after circuit throughout the country. That is why I invited the Home Secretary to include the words "to prosecute" between his desire to catch and his desire to punish criminals.

Over the three financial years from 1990 to 1993, the number of cases received by the Crown courts has dropped, on average, by about 10 per cent. The number of offences committed to the Crown courts in the first five months of the last financial year fell by 14 per cent. compared with the same period in the previous year. On the south-east circuit, the number of cases received by the Crown court in the first five months of this financial year was 22 per cent. down on the number in the corresponding period last year. In the last month or so, there has been a slight resurgence and the figure is now down to 17 per cent. on the number in the corresponding period last year. That is the reality of the world of the Crown court against the background of an escalating crime wave. It is no wonder that the Home Secretary did not introduce the word "prosecute" into his vocabulary.

To a lesser extent, the position is mirrored in the magistrates courts, where the CPS case load has fallen by about 2·5 per cent. each year from 1990 to 1993. Magistrates courts dealt with 15 per cent. fewer indictable offences in the first quarter of 1993 than in 1992. It is against that background that we note that the number of notifiable arrests by the Metropolitan police were down by 22 per cent. in the last quarter of 1992 compared with the year before.

The combined effect of a smaller overall case load and a smaller proportion of cases ending in a hearing or a committal was to reduce the number of hearings and committals by nearly 6 per cent. over one year. That is an extraordinary state of affairs—an Alice-in-Wonderland situation. Against the background of an escalating crime wave, perhaps one day we will have a proper debate about what exactly is happening in our courts.

The number of cases that the police are instructed to drop by the CPS has increased by 78 per cent. in five years. Some 32 per cent. of cases are dropped on public interest

grounds. When I asked the Attorney-General the reason for that, all he could say was that it was not in the public interest to prosecute the elderly, the frail or those suffering from injury, or to prosecute when there was insufficient evidence.

No one disagrees with that principle, but the Attorney-General did not seem to understand that the cases dropped for lack of evidence are in addition to the public interest cases. A further 54 per cent. of cases were dropped on evidential grounds. That is not to be rejected—it is what the CPS was set up to do—but, when we look at the totality, how do we arrive at that substantial 78 per cent. increase? Are 32 per cent. of the people charged frail, elderly or injured? Against a background of escalating crime, we need to look at exactly what is happening in that regard.

Are financial considerations becoming more and more important in deciding what cases are committed to court?

Mr. Shersby: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morris: No, I have given way already.

Can we ignore the suggestion that there is a Treasury-led economy drive that may have an important effect on decision making? In addition, there are disquieting anecdotes about cases which can be tried either way, where the CPS is offering lesser charges in order that cases can be tried in a magistrates court rather than a Crown court. I fear that the financial considerations and the Treasury's hidden agenda are the reasons for that.

The Home Secretary and the Attorney-General should conduct a proper inquiry and tell the House why, on the one hand, there is a huge crime wave, which goes up year by year, and, on the other, we have empty Crown courts and empty magistrates courts. It does not add up. Why is there not an increase of work in our courts to match the current escalation in crime?

The escalation in crime is causing my constituents, and the constituents of every hon. Member, very grave concern. Something is very wrong indeed.

5.23 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I agree with much of what the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) has just said, and I will return to it in a moment. I do not agree with much of what the hon. Member for Sedgfield (Mr. Blair) had to say. He treated us to 50 minutes of hot air, however attractively it may have been presented.

Of course we must tackle the sub-causes of crime, but there is nothing useful in saying so, because we are already doing that—in education, in speeding the end of the recession and in countless other ways. Of course we must tackle crime prevention through community policing, but there is nothing useful in the hon. Gentleman saying that, because we are already doing so.

What we had hoped to hear from the hon. Member for Sedgefield—and what the public may have expected to hear—is what more the Labour party would do if it were in power. The most immediate question is whether Labour Members will support my right hon. and learned Friend's measures to reduce crime. It appears from the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield that they will not. If they do not, they will be the encouragers of crime, and their claim to be the party of law and order will be exposed as the utter nonsense it is.

One of the basics that we must get back to is a society in which there is less crime—for everyone's sake: the old, the weak, all of us. Media coverage of serious crime is greater than ever, and more people read newspapers, watch television and listen to the radio. The fear of crime referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) is substantial and must be reduced.

The fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, with the wholehearted support of the Prime Minister, has made the tackling of crime the top priority will be welcomed by everyone, except the criminals.

In what must be one of my shorter speeches, I would like to make two points. First, I am fed up with hearing, as we have this afternoon, the quite unfair and absurd statement that the Conservatives have been in power for 14 years, that crime is worse than ever and that we have done nothing about it. The situation is not as simplistic as that.

The world is not static, but in a constant state of flux and change. Despite the obvious fact that we are unfortunately part of a international crime wave, which has spared very few countries, Britain is one of the safest countries in the western world in which to walk the streets. The murder rate in Britain is half that of France; our violent assault rate is half that of Australia—to say nothing of the United States, where the murder rate of 24,000 is five times greater than ours.

We are now a far more prosperous society, with more colour television sets, videos, personal computers and mobile telephones to steal. There are more home owners, and 5 million more cars on the road—more houses and cars to burgle and to steal from—than there were a decade ago. The temptations are much greater today than they were 14 years ago.

We have seen a disintegration in family life, with more single-parent families and fewer fathers at home to guide their children on the difference between right and wrong. We have had a disintegration of some education standards, because schools have lost the power to discipline children, to teach them respect for others in society and to teach them that bad consequences follow wrongdoing. We should not be surprised at the upsurge in unpunished juvenile crime, particularly in respect of the small band of hard-core persistent offenders.

There has been a worldwide spread in the use of drugs, which has driven people to commit crime in order to pay for their craving. The worldwide spread of pornography has corrupted people and lowered respect for others in society, particularly women.

During the past 14 years, there has been an undermining of the criminal justice system as a whole, particularly with the relevations of miscarriages of justice, in which legally innocent people have been convicted or many serious crimes. It must be said that this has happened mostly under the last Labour Government, not us.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Would the hon. Gentleman explain to the House what he means by the "legally innocent"?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: We all know.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I would rather not explain it. We all do know precisely what I mean.

Few crimes seem to end in the offender being caught; if caught, the offender is too often cautioned, and no more; if charged, the offender is too often not proceeded against on the advice of the Crown Prosecution Service, as the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon has just said. If proceeded against, the offender is too often acquitted if he pleads not guilty. Some 60 per cent. of magistrates court and Crown court appearances on not guilty pleas result in acquittals. If he is convicted, all too often little in the way of a deterrent sentence is passed on the offender.

I suppose that the Government must take some responsibility for this state of affairs, although there has been an understandable reluctance to interfere in the sentencing process or in the judicial system generally—particularly when no other country seems to be doing it any better than we are, or achieving any better results. I think that the Government can be blamed to a much larger extent for allowing the sociologists to have a greater influence on the sentencing system than they ought to have had. As a result, a potential criminal rarely feels that the ultimate consequence of his criminal behaviour will be a long sentence of imprisonment.

Although there is an area in which Government must accept more blame, this Conservative Government cannot be blamed for most of the reasons for the increase in crime that has taken place over the past 14 years. To go further, and imply that the Government have done absolutely nothing to improve matters over that period, is too absurd for words.

We have increased the proportion of money spent on law and order more than we have increased spending on almost any other branch of the welfare state: it has risen by 87 per cent. in real terms. We have increased the number of police officers on active duty by approximately 30,000; we have paid, equipped, trained and led them better, to say nothing of giving them more powers in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Public Order Act 1986, the Criminal Justice Acts and the Prevention of Terrorism Acts.

We have poured money and resources into crime prevention, with 115,000 neighbourhood watch schemes covering 5 million households, 20 safer city projects covering 3,300 schemes and funds for estates action, city challenge, urban programmes and crime concern—all of which have achieved substantial successes in Rochdale, Manchester north Wales, Dorset and London, including London Underground. The amount of crime being committed has been substantially reduced.

We have also toughened sentences for violence, the carrying of weapons and child abuse. The average sentence for robbery has increased by about 25 per cent., and the average sentence for sexual crime by about 50 per cent. —to say nothing of the £1 billion that we have spent on the prison building programme, providing 18,500 extra places, and the change in the whole approach to victims and their support.

It is beyond me how anyone can say, or imply, that we have done nothing. Without those measures, crime would be very much worse. I hope that the idiocy of alleging that we have presided over 14 years of inaction while crime has flourished will now stop; it is a nonsensical argument if ever there was one, and it is no surprise that it continues to be peddled by the Opposition.

My second point is this. If we are to prevent crime in future, we shall have to bring back the element of deterrence. The sociologists have had their day. It is no coincidence that the abolition of capital punishment has resulted in a tenfold increase in crime involving weapons, and a fivefold increase in the number of killings. It is no coincidence that, since the abolition of the cane, our schools have become unruly places with a high degree of truancy, where teachers are frightened to discipline or control the rowdy troublemakers who go on to become the hard-core juvenile offenders.

It is also no coincidence that, since cautioning has blossomed and, in some areas, become the standard reaction of the system to wrongdoing, and since guilty pleas to lesser offences have begun to be accepted more and more by the Crown Prosecution Service in the magistrates court, so that cases do not go to the Crown court—another point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon—fewer offenders are frightened about what will happen to them if they are caught.

It is because bail has been given so freely that 50,000 offences have been committed by people on bail over the past year. Those villains are not frightened by the courts. It is because prisoners have had to serve no more than a third of the sentences imposed by the courts—we have now improved that to half—and because of lax regimes in some prisons that prisoners have been released before their proper time to commit crimes again, an example being the murderer who was convicted last week.

It is simply not correct for Ministers, judges or anyone else to say that the best deterrent is the likelihood of being caught. I was very pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary did not repeat that canard today. No one is deterred from crime by the fear of being caught if they have no fear of being charged, convicted and punished. It is not enough for a Home Secretary to say, "We will get tough," and then to persist in the old attitude to deterrence. We must return to a policy of deterrence that will really deter criminals: crime was almost always much lower in the years when we had such a policy.

Seen in that light, my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals for improving the situation even further are admirable, and should be warmly welcomed. Criminals will be deterred if more policemen are on active duty because we are increasing the number by reducing the paperwork, or because we are appointing more special and parish constables. They will be deterred if policemen are better managed and organised, so that they are even more efficient and effective. Terrorists will be deterred if the police have more powers to stop their activities, in the City of London or elsewhere.

Criminals will be deterred if the process of criminal trial is improved so that they cannot get away with intimidating witnesses or nobbling juries; if they are charged more often and cautioned less; if they are brought to trial more often, and not proceeded against less. They will be deterred if they cannot get bail so easily, and are not free to commit more crimes. They will be deterred if they know that they are more likely to be convicted if they keep silent when asked about their offences than they are now, with the right to silence.

Juvenile offenders and their parents—when those parents do little to control them—will be deterred if 12 to 14-year-olds can be taken out of circulation: taken away from the bad family background and the pressure of bad peers, and trained, educated, disciplined and given the

counselling that may stop them becoming persistent, hard-core adult offenders. Young offenders will be deterred if they can be made to serve two years in a young offenders' institution, giving the authorities some time in which to retrain and reprogramme them.

Can Opposition Members seriously deny that these measures will play a part in deterring criminals? To do so would be nonsense; if they do, the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield will be revealed as the hot air that we all suspected it to be.

Let me add just one point to the proposals that we have heard so far from my right hon. and learned Friend about deterrence. We must deter pornographers by redefining obscenity and bringing more charges. We must also give the power of arrest in cases of computer pornography, so that the evidence can be gathered for prosecution. We must find some way of deterring those who provide the constant diet of television violence that appears on our screens. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington that we can deter more villains if we introduce identity cards.

I have no doubt that the greatest single deterrent to violent crime that we could introduce is the return of capital punishment. With or without that penalty, however, there can be no doubt that a determined policy of deterrence through an even more effective policing policy, an even more effective policy of bringing people to trial, an even more effective and efficient trial system and even more effective punishment is the most likely way in which to reduce crime and make society safe again.

If we did that, we should have the grateful support of the British public. If the Opposition do not support us in that policy, the public will know exactly what to think of their boast to be the party of law and order.

5.38 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): My old friend, the hon. and learned member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), will be gratified to know that my party broadly supports what he has said, and what his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said earlier. The Minister of State, Home Office—the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean)—will be aware of my oft repeated view that, over the years, hon. Members collectively have somehow allowed the pendulum to be pushed far too far against those who have the task of enforcing the laws that we make in the House. Far too much attention has been paid to the anarchist textbook, paragraph 1 of which decrees that a complaint be made against the police in all circumstances, even if it is only against the minor offence of a faulty rear light.

We on this Bench broadly support the Home Secretary's measures. Those of us who represent Northern Ireland constituencies are able to offer advice on the basis of our unfortunate experience in the face of repeated chalenges to lawful authority in our part of the United Kingdom. I hope that the Minister will relay that expression of support to the Home Secretary. In turn, I hope that we will be supported by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who is present, and by one of his predecessors, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), both of whom have been aware of all the difficulties and have rendered great service to the people of Northern Ireland, despite occasional criticism.

I hope that hon. Members will understand if I direct my words toward the plight of Northern Ireland. I am somewhat gratified to know that, if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a former Minister for Northern Ireland, the Secretary of State for Education, shall reply. If, by any chance, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) finds himself deserted by the teaching industry, he has a vast reservoir of good will and many good friends in Northern Ireland that he faithfully served, to which he can turn.

On 20 March, I publicly invited non-paramilitary parties, groups and individuals to assist me in designing what I call a blueprint for stability. I have forwarded my conclusions to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, but I can tell the House that I found a widespread desire for the restoration of accountable democracy to the people of Northern Ireland.

It should be noted that such an objective was shared by a large percentage of what is sometimes called the minority, which includes many people who normally vote for the SDLP, but who, like many SDLP councillors, are keen to see democratic structures in place in which they can participate to render a real service to Northern Ireland citizens—a praiseworthy aim for any elected representative.

I reported my broad conclusions to my party executive at the end of September. Unfortunately, the following day, 25 September, saw an unsettling statement on what has become known as the Hume-Adams plan. In the intervening eight weeks, there has been a progressive hardening of attitudes in the professional and middle classes, and that is always a bad sign in Northern Ireland. Many of those groups have in the past taken no part whatever in politics, but they are now in such a state of anxiety that they disbelieve any assurance, and suspect betrayal in every sentence they hear or read.

I have no means of knowing how long such simmering fears can be contained, but I know that something must be done to reduce the fever, and that the two governmental machines in London and Dublin must carefully weigh their words and actions if a crisis is to be avoided.

Also on 20 March, I suggested that the British and Irish Governments should set about removing the standing reproach implicit in the Irish claim to the territory of a part of the United Kingdom. I have long held the view that that breach of international law could more easily be put right by the two sovereign Governments, but I was mistaken, for, in the intervening eight months, they appear to have made no progress whatever.

I had probably underestimated the strength of republican opinion in the south, which surfaced in the weeks preceding and during the annual conference of Fianna Fail, or the "soldiers of destiny" to use the English translation. That impossible barrier was described with great honesty by Prime Minister Reynolds when, in a television interview on Sunday, he patiently explained that, if he were to hold a referendum on the removal of articles 2 and 3, he would be defeated. We in this House have no right to question his judgment, nor should anyone assume that the approval of his electorate would be given in return for a British surrender to the demands of Mr. Adams—such a cave-in would merely transfer the force and meaning of articles 2 and 3 to Ulster shoulders.

The disastrous juxtaposition of discussions on political progress with the price demanded by the IRA in return for a halt to murder means, in effect, that Her Majesty's

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Government are being required to do a deal, not with Mr. Reynolds, but with Mr. Adams. No amount of diplomatic verbiage can conceal the uncomfortable fact that Dublin is merely the conduit.

In the light of Mr. Reynolds's weekend revelation of that stark reality, there is now a large body of opinion in Ulster—I have detected signs in London, too—that is convinced of the impossibility of any Irish Government freeing themselves of the embarrassment of being the one European Union member that lays claim to the territory of another member state.

It has been put to me that, rather than waste the opportunity for peace, many would prefer to use their energies and talents in drawing together the various strands of what, in the aftermath of the recent atrocities, has proved my contention that, in Northern Ireland, there is one community not two, as a result of them being drawn together by common suffering.

That is the real message of the thousands of people who have marched for peace over recent weeks. They are not demanding a surrender to terrorist demands, any more than Londoners expected Churchill to surrender to Hitler so that our capital city would be spared daily slaughter on a massive scale. Like myself, some hon. Members present had first-hand experience of that suffering, and took part in the rescue operations during the blitz.

By far the greater number—I have used that term before, and use it instead of "majority", lest anyone should imagine that I was referring to the Protestant or the Unionist majority—of Protestants and Roman Catholics want us to give a lead in rebuilding democratic structures. No right hon. and hon. Member can doubt the capacity of the Northern Ireland parties to co-operate and work together for the common good. We have frequently demonstrated our willingness to do just that in agriculture, health, industry, energy and the environment. How the news industry hates us for behaving in a way that puts our Great Britain counterparts to shame. We expect neither praise nor sympathy from those who prefer pictures of bloodletting and street violence.

It is probably for that reason that there is now a conspiracy of silence on the steady advances made over the past three months in Northern Ireland by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Minister responsible for political development. It is their endeavours, which are supported by the Prime Minister, that will succeed where high drama will fail—as high drama always fails.

With our co-operation, they can be successful in supplying the essential ingredient that will stabilise a dangerously volatile situation. Their low-key discussions during the past three months will have enabled them to identify the common ground between the parties in Northern Ireland and—perhaps just as important—that between the strands within that greater number in Northern Ireland. That ministerial team will not be at variance with their colleague the Foreign Secretary, who said during Friday's debate:

"We must be able to deliver what we undertake and not to undertake what we cannot deliver.—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1993; Vol. 233, c.114.]

It is patient, continuing well-doing rather than bursts of misplaced optimism and enthusiasm that must be a prerequisite for peace. I am confident that something resembling the strand one model structure for a reinstatement of durable accountable democracy can be accepted, just as that concept was widely agreed during last year's talks. I am convinced that trust between the four main parties, thus achieved, would enable them to reach out the hand of friendship to the sovereign Irish nation on our southern frontier. Our ambition would be to develop co-operation on matters of mutual interest and common concern.

I end with a sincere invitation to all citizens of the British islands to set their hands to the task of laying solid foundations for a real and enduring peace.

5.52 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Colchester, South and Maldon): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate. We all listened carefully to the speech of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). I hope that he will forgive if I do not devote my remarks to Northern Ireland. I am sure that all in the House wish for peace in Northern Ireland and wish him and all the parties to the talks well.

I also listened carefully to the speeches from both Front Benches. I was pleased to find at least one point of agreement between them—that the Government are absolutely right to make law and order the centrepiece of the Queen's Speech. However, although my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary spelled out a comprehensive package of measures to deal with crime, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), whose speech I enjoyed, left me unclear whether his party intends to support those measures and how Labour Members intend to vote in the weeks ahead. We shall monitor that closely.

The area that I represent is predominantly rural. It is not usually considered a crime blackspot. However, during the past few weeks, Colchester has suffered a wave of burglaries, a rising incidence of drug abuse and an attempt with a JCB to remove a cash dispenser in Maldon high street—which was prevented only because an alert police constable was on the beat. There have also been armed robberies in Burnham and Southminster. My constituents do not expect such incidents and they are rightly demanding action. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on responding to those concerns and on winning so much time in the legislative programme.

I want to say a word about the police and immediately welcome the proposed police Bill. I am sure that reorganisation will improve police effectiveness. Like, I suspect, many hon. Members, I spent the summer visiting all the police stations in my constituency. Although I found a fair amount of concern about the proposals in the Sheehy report, I was encouraged to find that there was also a general willingness to contemplate change. Some of the proposals in the Sheehy report were strongly opposed by the officers to whom I spoke—in particular, fixed-term contracts and officers having to serve 40 years before qualifying for their pension.

There was acceptance—certainly in principle—of other proposals in the report, in particular the reform of the rank structure and new arrangements for determining police officers' pay. I believe—and I think the police officers in my constituency believe—that my right hon. and learned Friend listened to the concerns expressed and that, in general, he has the package right.

I want to take this opportunity to urge one point on my right hon. and learned Friend. I think that I speak for every hon. Member in saying that we were shocked by the murder of PC Patrick Dunne during the summer recess. However, the sad truth is that police officers are assaulted every day. Recently, four police officers were attacked in one week in my constituency. The last of them, PC Bob Walsham, was set upon by eight youths when he went to question them, having spotted them hanging around a garage. He was subjected to a vicious assault and suffered serious cuts and bruises—yet within 24 hours he was back on the beat.

I pay tribute to the courage and dedication that he showed, which I believe all our police officers show every day. The police need every protection that we can give them and they will be immensely encouraged by my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement this afternoon that he is to authorise trials of side-handled batons. It is something for which they have been asking for a long time.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also continue to make clear to the courts the seriousness of any assault on a police officer. Assaulting a police officer is a most serious crime and it should carry a very heavy penalty. I hope that that message will continue to go out from the House and from the Government.

I want to say a few words about the proposed criminal justice Bill. Many of the measures that have been outlined are desperately needed, in particular those to deal with the problems of juvenile offenders and with the right to silence. There is a desperate need to be able to draw to the attention of a jury the fact that the person accused of a crime has refused to answer perfectly legitimate questions asked by police officers. There is also a need to impose some restriction on the availability of bail. Those are just three of the measures in the package announced by my right hon. and learned Friend and I strongly support them all.

I want to suggest two further measures that I believe would make a difference. The first relates to replica weapons. In 1991, almost 500 offences involved the use of imitation firearms. During recent years, there has been a steady increase in the use of imitation weapons in the pursuit of crime, but some of those incidents have not been recorded as offences.

In Colchester earlier this year, two people were spotted in a car in the high street, one of whom appeared to be loading a pistol. The police rightly reacted with a full-scale armed response. My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that Colchester is a garrison town and security is important. The police discovered that the pistol was not a genuine firearm, just an imitation. One of the two people concerned said that he had an interest in imitation firearms and was showing the pistol to his colleague. The police could do nothing because it is not an offence to carry an imitation firearm in a public place. I believe that imitation firearms are increasingly being used in committing crimes, and that is a matter that we need to examine.

At the moment, imitation firearms can be bought simply by picking up a telephone. There is no need to have a licence to possess them. It is easy to go out and buy an *Exchange & Mart* in which one will see plenty of advertisements for those weapons.

I accept that there are genuine collectors who have an interest in collecting firearms, or imitation firearms, and perhaps displaying them privately, but I do not see why people should be able to carry such firearms in public, with the police being unable to do anything when it is quite clear to them that in fact those firearms may be used to commit a crime.

Secondly, I should like my right hon. and learned Friend to examine the issue of car crime, which remains one of the biggest law and order problems. Although we have had considerable success over the past year in reducing the steady rise in car crime—a tribute to the success of Car Crime Year 1992, which has made considerable progress—car crime is still increasing.

Considerable progress has been made in fitting improved locks and immobilisers, and technology is developing that will enable devices to be installed, such as the new tracker system and trackback, which will allow the electronic tracing of stolen vehicles. All those things are bound to make an impact on car crime.

One simple change to legislation could also make a difference. Recently, a change was made to the procedure for MOT tests. It is now a requirement that a vehicle's identification number be checked when an MOT test is carried out. That is clearly a step forward. But it is not a criminal offence to tamper with a VIN, erase it or interfere with it. The police cannot touch people who do that.

The story is told of a warehouse in the north of England that was found to contain the stripped-down parts of 35 motor cycles, not one of which had a chassis or identification number that had not been filed down. Apparently the warehouse owner explained that he thought that those parts looked prettier if one removed that rather unsightly piece of identification. The police were unable to do anything because they could not trace the owners of those parts—the identification marks had been filed away. As a result, they were unable to take any action.

The case for making it an offence to erase, tamper or interfere with a VIN is absolutely overwhelming. If we were to do that, it would make a difference to the amount of car crime. Both the measures which I have mentioned are minor when compared with the essential measures that are contained within the package that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced.

In each case, I think that the measures would make a small but noticeable difference. They would make life for the police a bit easier in catching criminals, and make the life of the criminal a bit more difficult. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will give them consideration in the weeks to come.

6.3 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) has made a constructive and practical speech. I hope that the points that he made at the end will be noted by the Home Office.

I note that although the Home Secretary chided my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) for being absent for his speech, the Home Secretary has chosen to be absent during mine.

The Home Secretary is the seventh Conservative holder of that office since 1979. No one can be more aware than he that the criminal justice system, which is his legacy, is not delivering what the country requires. For too many people, crime and the fear of crime adds an unnecessary dimension of misery to their lives.

The Prime Minister stated, in opening the debate on the Gracious Speech, that the centrepiece of his programme for

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this Session is the criminal justice Bill. That is an acknowledgement that crime is a central concern in Britain today. But as the Home Secretary must know, where crime is concerned, to legislate is not to eliminate.

The measure of a successful criminal justice policy is that it enables the police, courts and prisons to work together within an adequate framework of law and with sufficient resources to reduce the level of crime. But crime in Britain has risen at unprecedented levels in the past 20 years. There were 5·7 million offences recorded by the police in the past year. The rise in crime now threatens to overwhelm all those charged by society with the duty to detect, try, punish and reform criminals.

The police clear up 25 per cent. more crimes than they did 10 years ago, but in that period the number of offences recorded annually has grown by 91 per cent. Our gaols are full, but the prison population is expected to rise. Indeed, a rise is now demanded by the Home Secretary. I understand that once more plans are being laid to float prison hulks on the River Thames. It is perhaps no wonder that, faced with such a daunting prospect, the Home Secretary appears at times to succumb to the sin of defeatism.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Can the hon. Gentleman say which of the Home Secretary's proposals he will accept and which of them he will not?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall deliver my response in detail to each of the Home Secretary's Bills as they are published.

The Home Secretary can wring his hands and remind us that crime is a worldwide problem. We heard that from the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). But the Home Secretary, rather wistfully, complained on the "Today" programme that no one knows how to prevent crime. Yet at other times he casts off such careworn thoughts. He says, like King Lear,

> "I will do such things,
> What they are yet I know not,—but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth."

Perhaps in his heart of hearts the Home Secretary knows that his measures will not deliver. His gloominess just keeps breaking through. We have, however, a duty to confront the problem of crime, not to wallow in it as Conservative Secretaries of State are wont to do. Lower levels of offending are achievable, but we need a different agenda if they are to be achieved. Our approach must be hard-nosed and practical.

The problem of young offenders is a prime concern. One young man in four now has a criminal record by the age of 21. The Government's narrow focus is on incarcerating the tiny proportion who are hard-bitten repeating offenders. We need to discourage all young people from turning to crime. We do not need to reinvent borstal.

We need to tackle the increased use of drugs, for addicts often feed their addiction from the proceeds of crime. Liverpool is not yet New York, where a study linked 90 per cent. of addicts with crime.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I should be most grateful if the hon. Gentleman would give way.

Mr. Maclennan: I am sure, but I have had a clear sign from the Chair that short speeches would be welcome.

The Home Secretary, rightly, is tough on traffickers and he has had our support in doing so, but he is not concerned enough about their customers. It is, for example, time to research the consequences for crime of the policy over the past decade of reducing the prescription of substitutes for heroin addicts.

We must have effective crime prevention measures across the country. Imitation is certainly the sincerest form of flattery and it is good to hear the Labour party spokesman today so trenchantly supporting the case that the Liberal Democrats and our predecessor parties have been arguing as the front line attack on crime since 1985.

The Home Secretary also did us the honour of coming quickly to the subject of crime prevention in his speech and highlighted a few successful pump-primed projects. But he has neglected to spread the best practice throughout the country, properly researched and properly funded.

We also need to increase the detection rate. For that we require police forces not only locally managed but determining their own key objectives and attuned to local needs. We need to increase the proportion of offenders who are tried and convicted in court. Last year the Crown Prosecution Service discontinued 193,000 cases. We must back the CPS not only with adequate funds but with laws that are clear and enforceable.

We also need to speed up process in the courts. The average period of time from charge to completion for an indictable offence in the magistrates courts has risen to 86 days—almost two weeks longer on bail or in custody than five years ago. That fact is rather more important than some of the measures to which the Home Secretary alluded in his short discussion of the problems of bail. Shortening the period between charge and completion would reduce the number of bail bandits.

We need to secure care and support for victims of crime and adequate compensation for the harm that they have suffered. I deplore the Home Secretary's suggestion that he contemplates standardised token payments to victims which disregard the actual impact of the crime suffered.

But if we must care for the victim, we must seek to correct the criminal. That requires a different approach to sentencing. The Home Office has calculated that a 25 per cent. increase in the prison population would be required to reduce the crime rate by 1 per cent. Yet in Germany, a fall in the prison population throughout the 1980s led to a fall in crime rates. Increased use of prison will not, by itself, reduce offending. Only the improved use of prison for correction will do so. In short, we need real solutions to the real problems.

That agenda seems far removed from the agenda proposed by the Home Secretary in his contribution to the debate on the Gracious Speech. He would have done well to avoid the trap into which his six predecessors stumbled. We have had streams of impulsive legislation in response to outbursts of public anger. Many Home Office Bills have arrived with built-in obsolescence. For example, Parliament passed the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 in record time, as it was asked to do by the then Home Secretary. Yet just this weekend a child was killed by a dog which did not even qualify under the law as a dangerous dog.

The same failure is true of the legislation to ban joyriders. Only two weeks ago, another child was killed on a zebra crossing by a joyrider travelling at 70 mph outside his school in Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I shall give way when I have completed the point.

Evidently, the boy racers are not impressed with the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Act 1992. However, they do respond to programmes such as crime concern motor projects, for which the Government are less ready to offer nationwide support.

Mr. Nicholls: What extra specific law would the hon. Gentleman's party propose to stop joyriding?

Mr. Maclennan: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I was saying instead of bouncing to his feet before I had completed my remarks, he would have heard the answer to his question. We could have backed the motor projects throughout the country that are designed by a partnership of local authorities, the police and the voluntary agencies to divert the energies and interests of the young into more constructive projects, which the police themselves believe are the most effective way of avoiding the horrors of joyriding.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: No, I have already given way.

Mr. Beggs: I have a helpful intervention to make on this issue.

Mr. Maclennan: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he agree that the use of the term "joyrider" should be avoided by every hon. Member and that those involved in stealing cars should be referred to as car thieves?

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That was a helpful intervention which I strongly support.

Frenetic law-making by the Government in the area of criminal justice has included a succession of U-turns of policy, the most recent being the disowning of the core of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. We have seen borstals built, filled and dismantled as failures. Prisons have been employed as a routine punishment and then, under new Home Secretaries, as punishment of last resort. Now, under the rule of the present Home Secretary, who believes that prisons work, they are again to be used as a routine punishment.

Unit fines have been introduced and abolished within months. A responsible Government would have retained the principle but reformed the practice. But after one or two misreported cases, the then Home Secretary announced that he was the only Justice Minister in Europe who believed that no such system could ever work.

Hon. Members may not have spotted that the man who was fined £1,200 allegedly for dropping the famous crisp packet was in fact convicted of assaulting a police officer who had asked him to pick up the crisp packet.

The Government's record of tacking from one direction to another is among the reasons why they cannot expect to be believed when they claim that now at last they are on the right course.

By bringing crime to centre stage, as the Government have done in this debate, the Home Secretary invites us to look at their proposed treatment of the police, the CPS, the courts and the prisons—the four great pillars of the criminal justice system. If any of those is shaky, the edifice could fall. But at this time many are alarmed by the evidence that the foundations of all four are being shaken by the Government.

The police are caught up in uncertainty, false economies and centralised meddling. Chief constables asked for an extra 2,167 officers for this year. They received none. They have requested 2,475 more officers for next year. When the Home Secretary answers that call, I hope that he will remember his words to the Basingstoke Conservative Association earlier this month:

"we must never forget that our overriding priority is to protect the public."

The Home Secretary is also apparently hell bent upon the dangerous course of imposing his paid creatures on our local police authorities and requiring those authorities to implement his key objectives. Under the thin pretext of local management, the Home Secretary's Bill will go two thirds of the way to creating a national police force under political control. That is anathema to the police service and it is a million miles from being back to basics.

The problems of the CPS are being swept under the carpet by the Government. Barbara Mills, as *The Daily Telegraph* commented in a recent editorial, is the wrong target. The article argued that she is not to blame for her organisation being

"bureaucratic, under-resourced and poorly staffed."

But if she is not to blame, the Government certainly are.

We shall have to wait for the publication of the criminal justice Bill to judge whether the Government have the measure of the problems in the trial courts. Certainly their proposal to bureaucratise and centralise the magistrates clerks service appears as a dangerous derogation of judicial independence, unlikely to reduce court delays or the length of trials.

With regard to the substantive law, the Home Secretary has ducked a response to the Runciman commission's core recommendations to avoid miscarriages of justice which have disfigured our system. In oracular fashion, the Home Secretary proposes to tinker with the right to silence, something that is seen in the United States as a fundamental human right which requires explicit constitutional protection. The contradiction between what the Home Secretary said at the Conservative party conference and what the Attorney-General has said on the subject makes it imprudent to seek to divine what is in the mind of the Government, beyond raising cheers from a few shellbacks on the Benches of their conscience.

The lack of dedication of the Conservative Government to systematic law reform may be measured by their acceptance of 33 reports from the Law Commission during the past nine years, none of which, however, they have found the time to implement. Does the Home Secretary intend to give effect to the proposals of the Commission on violence against the person which were published recently? I would not ask him to answer today, for we have waited for some years for answers on the earlier reports.

I turn finally to the prison service. The Woolf report, it seems has been abandoned and we are hurtling instead towards a major catastrophe in our prisons. From January to August this year, the prison population rose by 5,270. The number of young offenders in custody rose by 17 per cent. between January and September of this year. The Home Secretary says that he will no longer judge the success of our system of justice by a fall in the prison population. I am not aware if anyone ever has made such

[Mr. Maclennan]

a judgment. It would seem to me that a reduction in crime should be the proper measure of a successful criminal justice system.

The Home Office's own research found no link between rising crime and lower sentencing in England and Wales in the late 1980s. The research also showed that, in police force areas where sentences tended to be tougher, crime did not in fact fall. The Home Secretary apparently no longer holds out privatised prisons as models to the prison service. Those prisons are also to be subject to the pressures of overcrowding and that will be more dangerous in the hands of the amateurs upon whom the Home Secretary intends to call to run them.

It is true that privately operated prisons were common in the 18th century and that prisoners had to find the cash to buy their way out of those gaols. The last of those private prisons was abandoned in 1878, due to overcrowding. That was a few years before the treadmill was abolished. Those are basics to which few people in this country would wish to go back.

The truth is that the measures which the Government are now proposing have nothing to do with the British sense of justice or fair play. The measures owe more to recent traditions, where public service must be forced into centralised and commercialised packages and sold off to the highest bidder.

Conservative Home Secretaries themselves are becoming something of a tradition, but it is a tradition that is marked by signal failure.

6.24 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I begin with the observation that we have heard some rather good speeches from the Back Benches today. I draw attention to the speech of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). I feel that hon. Members will read his speech tomorrow, since my hon. and learned Friend demonstrated that he knows what he is talking about.

I also draw attention to the speech of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). All hon. Members will look carefully at what he said about the difficult set of circumstances in Northern Ireland. That is particularly the case with regard to those hon. Members who take an interest in Northern Ireland affairs. *[Interruption.]* Some of my colleagues are trying to tempt me to make judgments on other speeches, but I will pass on to the next part of my speech.

Another point that I wanted to make about those two speeches was that, by and large, they were non-political. If I can divine anything from what I hear from my constituents on the subject of law and order, it is that they are not terribly impressed by the political ball going back and forth between the political parties. Both the Government and the Opposition will be judged at the next general election by what they do rather than what they say. That is why I have been impressed by many of the points which have been made in the 27-point plan that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary outlined.

I welcome the Queen's Speech on this occasion and I also welcome the fact that the centrepiece of the Speech is law and order. It behoves me to say that when I had to speak on the Queen's Speech last year, I was not able to speak with as much conviction or give it as much support. I will not mention why that was, but it related to a certain treaty whose name I am thoroughly sick of, as is everyone else.

Whatever I may feel about the Government's programme, my constituents are delighted that the Government are putting law and order at the centrepiece of their programme. Again, that point has been made by some of my colleagues. My constituents and the public in general are impatient for solutions, but, as with the Opposition, they do not offer many solutions.

I am no expert on crime and punishment and I speak as an ordinary citizen who is looking at the problem. There is far too much over-simplification on the subject of crime and we will do a disservice if we over-simplify the problem. It has also been made clear by others in the debate that the problem does not affect only the United Kingdom. This is the mistake that the Opposition make frequently because, in not making that clear, they take the argument back to party politics. The fact is, as has been made clear by other hon. Members, that crime is rising in all western states, and elsewhere.

I beware of the easy solution brigade, and I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend has not indulged in easy solutions. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) did us the service of introducing the question of back to basics into the debate. The Prime Minister is absolutely correct to crank up that debate. Again, that is not simply because I believe it, but because my constituents say precisely the same thing to me.

Hon. Members have mentioned respect for the law. I have, however, discovered that there is no longer a stigma attached to contravening the law. I did not discover that at a public meeting, but when I, too, regrettably, was summoned to a magistrates court. The offence was minor, I hasten to add, and happened a long time ago. I remember sitting in the waiting room of the magistrates court and I felt rather ashamed of myself despite the fact that it was a very small offence.

Mrs. Gorman: What was the offence?

Mr. Cran: I am not going to tell my hon. Friend what the offence was. I talked to others who were in a similar situation to me, their having broken the law. *[Interruption.]* I am being heckled from my own side. Most of the others were there for far more serious offences than mine. However, I found that they did not care too much about being in front of a magistrates court. It was en passant, something to fill in that morning.

That is why the Prime Minister's call to go back to basics is absolutely correct, and he has struck a chord with the British people. I know that my right hon. Friend will accept, as I do, that it will be a long haul because it concerns changing attitudes. We must have something for the middle term and that is why we will study the criminal justice Bill and the police Bill which will be presented to us.

I shall concentrate on three issues, the first of which is juvenile crime. Beverley is no inner city but a very delightful market town. I should be surprised to learn that anyone here has not been there; those who have not should go. In common with other areas, Beverley had a serious outbreak of juvenile crime. For example, the Keldgate children's home receives disruptive children from a wide

area. That home is in a residential area, but in one year, there were 83 incidents of crime. I am not talking about petty crime—far from it; I am talking of incidents such as section 47 assaults. Perhaps the Minister will tell me what that means——

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Actual bodily harm.

Mr. Cran: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying that. In other words, it is serious. I am also talking about breach of bail, breach of the peace, burglary, theft and the holding of offensive weapons, all occurring in the middle of staid, civilised Beverley. The community around the children's home was almost being terrorised.

I have been told of one occasion when a youth from the home, who was allowed out on demand, climbed on to the roof of the local library and caused £30,000-worth of damage. I believe that I should find it terribly difficult to do that amount of damage, but he did it easily and quickly. Needless to say, he was arrested, but then, alas, returned to the establishment. Of course, after only a few hours, he was able to open the door and walk on to another library roof. That is absurd, and I am delighted that the Home Office has recognised it as such.

As proof of the outrage felt in the community and of the fact that the Government are correct, I cite the community support group of the police authority in Humberside. It said:

"Committee members sought to identify factors contributing to the present situation and it was agreed that the policy of repeated cautioning of offenders, so freeing them to re-offend, coupled with the severe constraints placed upon staff at such residential homes by the Children Act 1989 as regards their ability to control the movements of resident young persons, were effectively removing any meaningful control over such persons."

I am absolutely delighted that the Government are to deal with that particular problem with what I believe are to be called secure training centres for 12 to 15-year-olds.

Speaking as an ordinary citizen, I hope that it will not merely be a "locking up syndrome", which cannot possibly be sufficient. I am pleased to see the Minister agreeing. There is a need for more education, training and the teaching of what used to be known as civics. I have discovered that not many people nowadays know what civics is, but it must be a component of the Government's approach.

The second issue that concerns my constituents is trespass by gipsies and travellers. It is an equally difficult problem for any community. In my constituency, land has been habitually occupied by 40, 50 or 60 caravans which blight the surrounding area. Anyone who has seen such sites will know how bad they are. Legal action was taken by the local authority and the caravans moved half a mile down the road. The problem was not solved and the community found itself to be utterly powerless faced with travellers who, there can be no doubt, knew the law better than many of us. In my constituency, the problem has now been solved by designation, but the problem will merely move down the road.

In his splendid speech last Thursday, the Prime Minister said:

"If squatters, travellers or trespassers occupy people's property, they should be able to get them out—and quickly. The new Bill will ensure that they can do so."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 33.]

I should like the Minister's assurance that that will indeed be the case, since it makes no sense merely to move the problem down the road.

Mr. John Greenway: We want to keep them out.

Mr. Cran: I agree with my hon. Friend.

The third issue on which I shall concentrate is the new police Bill. Like all hon. Members, I am being lobbied —quite rightly—by all the police organisations. They know the profession and they wish to influence us. I have told them that I welcome the opportunity that will be provided by the Bill, but we must not demoralise the police force. There was a great deal of good in the Sheehy report, but it was overwhelmed by the bad, and I was delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recognised that fact.

I start from the premise that there is no point in alienating any work force. We must have a dialogue and we must listen. Of course, at the end of the day the Government will have to take decisions and they may not be the decisions that the police would wish, but I hope that exhaustive consultation will take place.

I have checked, but no police Bill was available, or at least not to me. I am keen on fixed-term appointments and hope that they will be included. It has been suggested that the principle should apply only to senior officers, but I am keen that it should apply further down the ranks. I do not suggest that fixed-term appointments should apply to existing officers, but there is no reason why they should not apply to new entrants into the profession. I hope that the Government have an open mind on the subject.

I am also convinced of the need to simplify the rank structure. From a business point of view, it is overly complicated. I believe that everyone would benefit from its being simplified, but it has ramifications for the ranks which may be abolished, so the issue needs to be considered sensitively.

I am also keen on appraisal-related pay. It is odd that Parliament is the only place in which I am not appraised at all, except possibly by my constituents once every four or five years.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That is a form of appraisal and approval.

Mr. Cran: I am reassured by my hon. and learned Friend, but, if my colleagues are not careful, they will make me lose my thread. I am very keen on appraisal-related pay and this is the only job in which I have not been properly appraised. One cannot possibly run an organisation without appraising those in it. The police organisations have their views on the subject, but they are open-minded enough to accept that appraisal is coming. I hope that, in one guise or another, the Government will also accept it.

If it is included in the Bill, I should not be against the amalgamation of police forces. I observe, however, that big is not always beautiful and it is certainly not always efficient. I have heard endless stories implying that we may have five or 10 police forces. I gently worry about that because accountability to the people whom we represent is best attained if they can relate to the police entity involved. If one thinks about local authorities—in my case, Humberside county council—people do not relate to them in any way. Thus if the police authority were to be any

[Mr. Cran]

bigger, I would need a great deal of convincing that that was the right direction to take. I hope that the Government will consider the issue carefully.

I am not against changing the membership of authorities, but I believe that not all local authority representatives are bad and not all business representatives are good. I hope that the Government have an open mind about who should be represented on police authorities. I am not arguing for local authorities, but many people in the community who are not business men could give good service. I assume that that aspect will be in the police Bill, although of course I do not know.

Let me finish by saying—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] I am kindly being asked to go on, but I am mindful of the demands of others, having waited to speak at the tail end of countless debates usually to be knocked out at the last minute.

I am pleased that the Queen's Speech is not too heavy although the Session started later than usual. The Opposition propose far too much legislation and the Government indulge in it too often. They should take heed of what I always tell my constituents: that legislation does not necessarily solve all problems. Quite often it exacerbates them.

Looking again at the Front Bench, I hope that, when the inevitable charge comes from the Opposition that the Government have run out of steam—one hears such quotes so often—we should rebut this. We should remember that legislation should be thought through carefully for a considerable length of time before any action is taken. We should not react to every problem by legislating.

6.41 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I am sure that the House will understand why the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) could not bring himself to mention the Maastricht treaty at the start of his speech. The hon. Gentleman and I were often on opposing sides in the course of consideration of the treaty, but I find myself surprised to be in agreement with much of what he said today.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that our constituents are impatient for solutions to the problems of law and order, to emphasise that there is too much oversimplification and to tell us to beware of the easy solution brigade. I was surprised that he exempted the Home Secretary from membership of the easy solution brigade, as anyone who produces a 27-point plan for anything must fall firmly into that camp.

I shall concentrate on one of those easy solutions. The Home Secretary repeatedly mentioned the so-called right to silence. Whenever he referred to the right to silence he said that it was "so-called". I am puzzled as to why that should be the case as that concept is well understood and clearly recognised to such an extent that the Government propose to abolish it. Unfortunately, it is an easy solution for the Government because it is one of those technical issues which often concern lawyers and judges but have profound implications for the entire criminal justice system.

If the Home Secretary is to persuade the House of the force of his argument, he must be able to show conclusively that it will have a significant impact on the level of criminality and the conviction rate. We need to know the justification for a proposal to change a fundamental principle of our legal system.

The Government's argument appears to be that sophisticated and experienced criminals persistently abuse their right to silence to frustrate police investigations and are thereby able to avoid conviction. Their argument rests on the proper assumption that an innocent person has nothing to hide and will therefore co-operate with the police by explaining where he or she was at the relevant time and what he or she was doing with a view to immediate elimination from police inquiries. That is the way in which I expect that the Government will put their argument.

There is little objection to the idea of allowing a judge to invite a jury to draw an adverse inference from the failure of the suspect to offer some explanation of the evidence apparently linking him or her to the commission of a criminal offence. That is the simplified version of the Government's proposal. Unfortunately, the concept of the right to silence is not so self-contained. It is not capable of being introduced in such a superficial way. It is the easy solution against which the hon. Member for Beverley warned us, because it has implications that go to the foundations of our system of justice.

The central position which guides English criminal law is that it is always for the prosecution to prove the defendant's guilt. Not only is the burden of proof placed firmly on the prosecution, but that burden can be satisfied only by proof of a very high standard so that a jury or magistrate—or a judge in Northern Ireland—is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt of the defendant's guilt.

The proposition was set out in a celebrated way by Viscount Sankey in 1935, when he said:

> "Throughout the web of English criminal law one golden thread is always to be seen. The duty of the prosecution is to prove a prisoner's guilt".

Successive royal commissions—in 1929, 1981 and most recently in July 1993—have examined the argument and reached the conclusion that we should maintain the right to silence.

The abolition or abridgement of the right to silence would break that golden thread, as it would allow the judge to comment on the defendant's failure to answer police questions or to give evidence. The defendant's silence would thereby become potential evidence of his or her guilt. The jury would have to be told that they could interpret the defendant's silence as tending to show his guilt. The burden of proof that we have always placed firmly on the prosecution would therefore to some extent be shifted to the defendant and it would be necessary for the defendant to speak in order to show his innocence.

Such a change would have implications throughout our system at every stage in the process. The most significant effect, however, is likely to be at the first contact between the police and the suspect and it would obviously change the balance of any interview between a police officer and a suspect.

At present, the police officer is required to caution a suspect specifically in terms that the potential defendant is not obliged to say anything. That is the basic proposition of a caution. If the Government have their way, presumably it will be necessary for the police to warn a suspect that his failure to answer questions could lead to an adverse inference being drawn at any later trial. Police

officers would not need to press that fact, although some undoubtedly would do so. They would be able to coerce a suspect into answering their questions.

The mere fact of being approached and asked to answer questions by a police officer is generally sufficient to make most people nervous and confused and perhaps fail to give a proper account of themselves. That has long been recognised in common law. In the celebrated American Supreme Court case of Miranda *v.* Arizona, Mr. Justice Warren clearly set out the underlying problem. He said:

"Without proper safeguards the process of custody and interrogation of persons accused of crime contains inherently compelling pressures which work to undermine the individual's will to resist and compel him to speak where he would not otherwise do so freely".

Interrogations in police stations are inherently intimidatory, even to the most law-abiding and honest people. As a young law student I was required to accompany suspects to formal interviews conducted at local police stations. It was my job to ensure that suspects exercised their right to silence. Not only were they subjected to significant pressure to answer police questions, but I was frequently accused of obstructing the police in the execution of their duty. I was warned that if I continued in that way I would never qualify as a lawyer and the police would draw the matter to the court's attention.

Such formal and informal pressure is, sadly, commonplace in police interviews. Ultimately, and sadly, it leads to the suspect confessing to offences that are not proved in any other way before the court.

Mr. Heald: In the light of press coverage only today of a recent example of oppressive police questioning, the judge threw out the interview and the man was acquitted. Does not that protect the accused if the court can act in that way under section 78 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984? Given that that protection exists, what on earth is the point of the right to silence?

Mr. Hoon: On the hon. Gentleman's second question, the right to silence cannot be taken as a self-contained part of the process, because it is inherent in how we conduct trials. On his more general question of how the legal system will protect suspects and defendants, the issue is whether we are confident in the integrity of our police. Ten years ago, I might have had no doubt in answering that question but, sadly, many citizens are increasingly suspicious about police officers' integrity. That is a cause for great concern. Sadly, anyone who regularly attends jury trials, throughout the country but particularly in the metropolitan areas, will know that juries approach police evidence with profound suspicion simply because in previous cases the police have taken advantage of their position and intimidated suspects and potential witnesses.

I criticise the proposal to abolish the right to silence because it tilts the balance still further in favour of the police. The approach that I have set out has been confirmed on many occasions. In its response to the Home Office working group consultation paper, "The Right to Silence", Justice expresses its concern about abolishing the right to silence and says:

"It is worth noting here that in Justice's experience of over 25 years of investigating cases of alleged miscarriages of justice, a false confession . . . was the most common cause of wrongful conviction."

That is precisely the conclusion reached in the report of the royal commission on criminal justice under the chairmanship of Viscount Runciman and presented to Parliament as recently as July 1993. Its terms of reference specifically invited it to consider the right to silence and it was asked to conduct research to look into that question. It did so carefully and came up with thoughtful conclusions and recommendations.

Despite the considered process of a royal commission, however, the Home Secretary announced at his party conference—probably for easy applause—that the Government intended to abolish the right to silence. That is not a proper way for a Government to proceed on such a fundamental issue.

Rodger Leng produced a study in which he concluded:

"The right to silence is rarely exercised and . . . about half of those who exercise it are convicted. For cases which fail, there is little evidence to suggest that the prospects for conviction would be enhanced by inducing the suspect to speak or treating his silence as evidence against him."

That research was endorsed by the royal commission in a review carried out for it by David Brown, which is set out in paragraph 15, chapter 4, of its conclusions. I shall not read them into the record as hon. Members can read them themselves, but the conclusions made it clear that the commission's review of the research showed that there was practical advantage to no one in abolishing the right to silence. The Government must carry out as detailed research to justify their proposals as that carried out by the most recent royal commission on criminal procedure, in 1981, which came to exactly the same conclusion for precisely the same reasons.

Abolishing the right to silence will not only affect procedures in police stations. I assume that it is likely to have implications for the conduct of criminal trials. If the Government are to be consistent, they should propose to abolish the right to silence not only in police stations but during trials. If they allow someone who may be unrepresented to be coerced into answering questions from police officers on the basis that, later at the trial, an adverse inference may be drawn, why not—assuming that the suspect is legally represented and has been properly advised by competent lawyers—require him or her to give evidence in court? It surely follows that if the Government are determined to abolish the right to silence in police stations, a defendant should be required to give evidence in court. The principle appears to be the same. It would be interesting to see how the Government would tackle that problem.

If the Government are seriously considering abolishing the right to silence at trial, it will fundamentally change how our criminal system operates, because it is a basic proposition that it is for the prosecution to prove every element of its case. Under our present rules, a defendant cannot be required to assist the prosecution in proving its case. If the prosecution fails to prove its case, it is for the defence to submit that there is no case to answer. If that submission is rejected, it is still for the defence to call as much or as little evidence as it chooses. Its case for the jury might be no more than that the prosecution has failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt. By potentially requiring the defendant to give evidence, the Government would be saying that the defendant must assist in proving the case against him and where a defendant refuses to do so an adverse inference may be drawn.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I put to my hon. Friend the case of someone who is arrested, brought into custody and demands to see his lawyer. His lawyer

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

comes, there is a privileged discussion which cannot be inquired into later by the court, and the lawyer tells him to say nothing. In court, the reason for that advice cannot be inquired into, but the defendant may say that his lawyer told him to say nothing.

Unless legislation enables the court to inquire into privileged communications between solicitors and clients, professional criminals—who will always have their brief—will ensure that they use their right to silence and have the protection of that privilege, while vulnerable people who are not usually in police stations may be in a much weaker position and will not have the same advantages as professionals in exercising some spurious right in those circumstances.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting out one of a number of practical problems that will arise if the proposal is accepted.

Another problem may concern a defendant who chooses to answer some of the police or prosecution questions but not all of them. What will the judge then say if that defendant has avoided answering the difficult questions, as defendants are tempted to do in such circumstances?

Will an adverse inference be drawn in those circumstances? Will such an inference be drawn if the defendant has been silent for some, but not all, of the time? Those are difficult questions and we need detailed investigation of the problem such as that carried out by the royal commission. By introducing the proposal in this way, the Home Secretary is opting for the easy solution.

The change might be acceptable in a different type of legal system. Where there is independent investigation of facts, as happens in different legal systems around the world, the independent investigator is usually in a position to compel all witnesses to give evidence and answer questions. It does not matter whether that evidence supports the prosecution or the defence. However, our legal system is an adversarial one, which means that one side is responsible for the investigation of the facts tending to show the defendant's guilt. It is therefore wrong in principle to suggest that a defendant's refusal, in effect, to help the opposition in any way implies his guilt. That is the issue that the Government must grasp when they consider the matter.

We have a particular type of system that has developed in a particular way and these are rules which follow on from our adversarial system. We cannot tinker with parts of the system in the hope that that will somehow solve the problem of crime. We would be tampering with the cornerstone of our system and we would regret doing so—unless the Government are capable of explaining it in the depth and detail that the royal commission was able to bring to bear in the report that it published as recently as July this year.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I remind the House of Madam Speaker's decision earlier today that speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock will be limited to 10 minutes.

7.2 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I welcome the Government's initiative in putting the subject of law and order at the top of the political debate. My constituents would rather describe these debates in terms of crime and punishment, because they believe that the increase in crime is related to the fact that we have forgotten that punishment is a good way of deterring crime and that we have, to some extent, gone soft. We spend too much time worrying about the criminal and pretending that the criminal is the victim of society. That is one of those modish ideas that has been prevalent in our society for much too long and on which the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) dwelt for far too long.

For the general public, the right to silence is largely a matter of giving people, against whom the police have serious reason to believe that they have a sensible charge, the opportunity to say nothing. Therefore, in many cases those people are not properly tried. During the debate and discussion on the Bill, I hope that a great deal more attention will be paid to that issue. It is what people want to hear.

In my constituency, people expect their Government to protect them and their property. They believe that they have a right to feel safe in their homes and in their streets, but they feel that proper attention has not been paid to that right because we are too concerned with being soft on those who are deemed to be society's victims. They want to see that changed.

Burglary is the crime that has increased most seriously in Essex and in my constituency. I am pleased that the police force in Essex has got on top of a great deal of crime, but burglary is increasing at a worrying pace—so much so that people are installing in their houses protection systems which might be more appropriate for Fort Knox. They are spending an enormous amount of money on such systems because they are afraid to leave their homes without some form of defence. That is a measure of the feeling of insecurity which exists.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State winds up, I should like him to address the relationship between the growth of crime and the increase in the use of drugs. So much of our crime, both petty and not so petty, is linked to the growth of the drug distribution business which, as we know, is illegal. The large increase in the number of prisoners in American gaols, which has been commented on already, is related largely to the incarceration of people involved in the drugs industry. Yet despite that, the industry continues to grow. It is difficult to see how much money society can afford to lay out in the pursuit of criminals involved in the drug business and still have enough left over to deal with more important issues.

Before I leave the House, I should like us to debate seriously the issue of how to deal with drugs and the people who take them and whether we should consider decriminalising some of that activity, simply because the alternative is to fill our prisons and extend the number of victims in our society who suffer at the hands of drug addicts in pursuit of money to support their habit.

During the Conservative party conference I launched a book—the name of which I would not dream of mentioning in this debate—and I held a book-signing at W. H. Smith's book shop. While I was signing the books I noticed an extremely shifty character walking around the shelves. He was dressed in a scruffy manner. The manager

was standing beside me opening the books for me to sign as there was a very long queue of people waiting. *[Interruption.]* The book costs £5·99.

Mr. John Patten: An absolute bargain.

Mrs. Gorman: I said to the manager, "There is a shady looking character walking around the shop. Could he be a potential shoplifter?" The manager said, "No, he is the detective." He told me that in shops such as W. H. Smith they have to have full-time detectives because just outside the shop in the precinct were drug addicts engaged in business of some sort. He said that one or more of them would come into the shop looking to steal goods worth about £150 during one day in order to pay for their drugs.

If we multiply that throughout the country and think of all those criminals going around the M25 at night, shooting off into quiet suburbs and what were once safe country villages, stealing goods to sell probably at a car boot sale in order to support their habit, we can see the roots of the growth in burglary. We also have a problem with shop theft. Also, many serious assaults on elderly people occur when, for example, their handbags are snatched after picking up their pensions or they are attacked in their home because it is often assumed that elderly people will have a little money tucked away under the mattress or in the teapot.

Much of the crime in Britain which is causing great concern to many people is tied up with the drug problem and we cannot avoid facing up to it. It is no good saying that we will maintain the same attitude to or punishment for this crime. In the United States a huge number of people are in pursuit of drug criminals and there is almost warfare. Despite that, America has not been able to control the increase in drugs-related crime. We must address the problem. More money and more policemen will not necessarily solve the problem.

I raised with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary the creation of new crimes. He told me that the Gracious Speech contained provision to make ticket touting a crime. Although I do not like ticket touts—they are a lot of ratbags and many are disreputable characters —I regret that provision. Touts buy and sell tickets outside public events usually because somebody wants to get rid of tickets and I do not believe that we should look for ways of putting more people into our prisons. We should not be looking for ways of creating more crime when the police already have more than enough to deal with.

I shall address myself to the origins of the growth of crime, which partly rests in the family. I am pleased that, in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, we introduced the provision that parents have to come to court and accept responsibility for their children, and especially the cost of their crimes, and I am pleased that we are pursuing that line.

I also want to say a few words because the Secretary of State for Education is here and because, like so many people in this place, I have been a teacher in previous incarnations. I taught for 10 years in inner city schools in the London area. I assure the Secretary of State that the frustration that is felt by many children at their inability or inadequacy to cope with the syllabuses as offered and their total disinterest in academic work leads them, through boredom, to bad behaviour, which teachers no longer have the ability to control, as clipping children over the ear or spanking them on the bottom is a thing of the past. We now have a serious problem, which is related to education.

By pursuing policies—of which I greatly approve—of giving schools more autonomy and preferably independence through grant-maintained status, which will allow variety to develop in course work and will lead to children being more interested in their school work, my right hon. Friend will help to reduce crime. That is a serious part of controlling the growth of crime by young people.

Last but not least, I feel strongly that we must pursue the level of punishment against people who attack women and children. I am worried about the soft sentences that are often handed out by rather geriatric judges when women are violently attacked.

7.11 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I wish, if I may, to divert the debate, if only temporarily, to the subject of education, if for no other reason than to make the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) feel wanted. I fully intend to purchase the book by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) when it is remaindered.

The Prime Minister's great idea of "back to basics", insofar as it relates to education, seems to have its roots in a misreading of Dickens's "Hard Times", which Conservatives seem to believe is a denunciation of active education, symbolised by Sleary's circus, and embracing the educational philosophy of Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby.

The incessant experimentation with our education system in the past 15 years, especially since 1986, has been fuelled by an unelected, unaccountable and largely inexperienced small group, based on the Centre for Policy Studies, deriving change out of ideology, basing its assertions on myth and bar-room slogans rather than on any sense of rational planning for education, denouncing all opinion from practitioners in education as irrelevant because it comes from the educational establishment, whatever that is.

In *The Times Educational Supplement* in early October, the hon. Member for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton), my neighbour, for whom I have a great deal of respect on matters educational, described a Government in

"the grip of right wing ideologues."

That constant change and turmoil has led to demoralisation and bewilderment in schools and colleges. I have visited 52 of the schools in my constituency since I was elected, and in every one of them the message has been clear: "Leave us alone for a few years. Allow us to consolidate the changes that we have already under way."

Now the implications for further changes in the organisation of teacher education threaten further turmoil, not just in the higher education institutions but in schools themselves, again ideologically driven and devoid of research and rational planning.

"Back to basics" in education means, as Professor Paul Black writes,

"nostalgia as a guide to policy"

or, as Stephen Bold has said, "curriculum as museum". If the nostalgia of Ministers for the education of the 1950s, which we read about, is examined, it is nostalgia for a generation of schoolteachers who were, on the one hand, highly educated in their disciplines, often classics or

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history scholars with an enormous amount of knowledge to offer, and on the other hand, those rapidly retrained after the war, who called on immense skills and vast experience.

That was a great generation of teachers, but that generation has gone. The universities and colleges have been struggling to create a new generation of teachers who can combine the academic depth of those older teachers with all the contemporary demands for flexible skills, variety of delivery and social responsibility which we now properly demand of our schools.

Under the guise of reforming funding for teacher education, the Government are clearly bent on destroying it. It is not without significance that the Queen's Speech refers to funding teacher training and the Government's insistence on training rather than to "teacher education". There is a lot in a name. Teacher education is what one provides for human beings who are designed for crucial roles in the structure, morality and ethics of a whole society. Training is what one provides for human beings to undertake a specific task or set of tasks, with efficiency, to achieve targets in terms of output.

That is the role that is assigned to teachers by the radical right, and the curriculum packages that are forced on schools reinforce that role. It guides the Teacher Training Agency, a quango that is directly controlled by the Secretary of State, which has the brief to shift teacher education responsibility from the higher education sector to the schools themselves.

The consequences of that shift need to be examined before it occurs. We should not be left—as we so often are by the Government's education policies—like a small child thrown into a pool to learn to swim. "Act now, think later" is the Government's excuse for education policy.

The Government and their assorted Svengalis seem not to have examined the reality of what is happening in our teacher education institutions. Indeed, they persist in sneering references to teacher training colleges, which long since have transformed themselves into more mixed higher education institutions.

Some years ago, Sir Keith Joseph began asking pertinent questions about teacher education, and especially about the extent and quality of the student's education at his or her level. That produced a response from colleges in which they examined the fundamental nature of what went into the making of a good teacher. Most BEd courses were at least partially integrated with the subject-based courses that are taught for BA and BSc qualifications.

At the same time, student teachers were obliged to spend more and more time in schools, learning on the job —something that I have nothing against in theory. A four-year BA-QTS—qualified teacher status—student at Edge Hill college in my constituency spends, with attachments and block practices, more than 18 months in schools, and will have worked, during that time, in a wide variety of types of school, with different intakes and problems. In other words, the higher education institutions have already moved substantially towards what the Government seem to want, to the limits of what is possible without sabotaging the students' developing academic education.

The relationships of colleges and the schools they partner is two-way, and it is mutually beneficial. The complex relationships between West Lancashire schools and Edge Hill college, for example, have taken years to build and are highly valued. Tutors are not locked in their ivory tower, promulgating theory, but are in and out of a wide variety of schools in connection with their students' work and as individuals, learning from the schools and, one hopes, helping the schools in turn.

The Government's disdain for theory is of a piece with their disdain for research and planning in education. I said earlier that a teacher is not simply a performer of set tasks, much though the Government would wish that. She or he is, to put it grandly, perhaps a moulder of society, a purveyor of values, both social and ethical—a functioning part of our economy, a transmitter of cultural values.

She or he is responsible for health and safety, for relationships within the local community, for the carrying out of the law with regard to education, and the rights of children generally. She or he has to be a psychologist, not to mention at times a psychiatrist. She or he has not only to deliver blocks of curriculum but to understand what a curriculum amounts to and what its basis is or should be. All that, as well as the sheer mechanics of delivery, preparation and evaluation amounts to what is often sneeringly summarised as "theory". How can the teachers in our schools hope to deliver all that?

Most teachers, rightly, already return to their higher education institutions regularly to update themselves on those subjects, for the sake of their own survival. A teacher's life is increasingly crowded and pressurised, as all hon. Members know from their surgeries and postbags. The only way in which schools could sustain increasingly school-based training would be by employing extra staff, even to deliver the sort of Bell and Lancaster training with which the Government are content.

Is it not true that the Government will use the funding that they extract from higher education to shore up the process on which they are set—to divert a species of subsidy to private schools, city technology colleges and grant-maintained schools? They will ghettoise teacher education if we are not careful.

Whatever the arguments in which the changes in teacher education are wrapped, the proposals are really about educating teachers more cheaply in the service of a curriculum that is increasingly becoming a frozen canon of blocks of acceptable knowledge. The Government do not want creative teachers with a critical analysis of knowledge or of systems of knowledge; they do not want school students who are critical and experimental.

I noted with interest that that well-known expert on education, Sheila Lawler, has declared:

"There is no reason to imagine that pupils learn from talking".

I ask hon. Members to examine the total absurdity of that remark and the Gradgrind sterility of thought that underpins it.

One of the major benefits of higher education, as hon. Members will know from experience, is academic interaction with other students and staff. Unlike Ms Lawler, I believe that pupils and students learn massively from talking and comparing——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

7.21 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I declare an interest because, as the House knows, I am parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales.

I offer my warmest congratulations to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on his announcement this afternoon that there are to be trials of the side-handled baton in police forces throughout England and Wales. My right hon. and learned Friend has taken that decision quickly, and I am sure that every police officer in the country will note that the new equipment will be available. I hope that it will provide officers with the added protection that they so desperately need.

I am pleased that my constituents in Uxbridge will feel, as I do, that, because a criminal justice Bill is the centrepiece of the Government programme, many of their concerns will be dealt with, and that the Government will take further steps to tackle crime.

In my constituency, domestic burglary has decreased substantially over the past year, as have a number of the other crimes which beset people in towns and cities throughout the country. The reason for that decline is Operation Bumblebee, conducted by the Metropolitan police, which has targeted burglars and receivers of stolen goods. It has been enormously successful, and I hope that similar operations will be undertaken by other counties, so that the outright war against the domestic burglar and the receiver of stolen goods will continue successfully.

The legislation referred to in the Gracious Speech has the support of the Police Federation, which welcomes the measures clearly intended to strengthen the criminal justice system and to call a halt to an era which, in the opinion of many police officers, has put the interests of offenders before those of victims and of society in general.

I am president of Uxbridge victim support, and I am only too well aware of the stress and anxiety caused to those who are the victims of violent crime and domestic burglary, to name but two areas of criminal activity. That is why my constituents and the police welcome the measures designed to deal with the persistent young offenders who are, there can be no doubt, responsible for much of the violent crime and burglary that are the scourge of our society.

It is right and timely that the Government should crack down on those who re-offend while on bail. As the Prime Minister said last Thursday:

"Some people seem to think that bail is a licence to commit crime."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 32.]

He is right. That perception must be changed.

Surely it must be right to legislate for the provision of new secure units for persistent young offenders. That is a far better system than the tracking proposals by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), to which I referred earlier. However, I ask the Home Secretary, which Department of State will pay for the much-needed new facilities?

I believe that the initiative should come from the Home Office rather than from the Department of Health, as has happened until now. The problem that the House must face is that the Department of Health is responsible for the care of juveniles, and that consequently that Department has been expected to provide secure places for those who, until the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, would have been sent to prison.

The Department of Health and the local authorities have provided very few places; every police officer knows how difficult it is to arrange for a juvenile offender to be confined in secure accommodation. I therefore believe that the time has come for the Government to grasp the nettle and to transfer the responsibility for secure accommodation for juvenile offenders from the Department of Health to the Home Office and local authorities, so that it can be provided quickly.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will be able to tell the House how many new secure units will be provided, what new resources have been earmarked for their provision, and where they are to be located. We need that information. I have heard generalisations about providing more secure accommodation too many times in this place; it is facts and figures that I want to hear tonight.

I welcome the announcement of changes in the criminal law to deal with those persistent nuisances, squatters, travellers and trespassers, who occupy other people's property and interfere with their lawful activities. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to say something to give the police grounds for hope that there will be sufficient resources to enable them to deal with that extension of their existing activities.

I greatly welcome the reference to action to deal with child pornography, which is one of the greatest evils of our time. Any hon. Member who attended, as I did, the exhibition organised by the police at the Palace of Westminster on the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), any hon. Member who had the misfortune to see the disgusting and disgraceful material displayed there, will know that the stronger powers of search, arrest and seizure that are to be provided will help the police to fight those wicked people who are distorting and corrupting young people. The proposals should have the full support of every Member of the House, and of every decent man and woman in our society.

With reference to the proposals for improving the organisation and management of the police to make them better able to combat crime, it is only right for me, as parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation, to tell the House candidly that the federation has expressed concern about the idea of changing the way in which police authority members are to be chosen. When we see the Bill, the federation will want to consider carefully, as I shall, how the proposals for the appointment of chairmen and other members of police authorities by the Home Secretary are actually to be effected. Those changes are a considerable move away from the present composition of police authorities, which are based on local councillors and local magistrates.

To which body or authority will those police authorities be accountable? If the Government are determined to persist with this proposal, people appointed by the Home Secretary to serve on police authorities should have their candidatures vetted, and should be appointed by statutory instrument subject to the approval of the House. That would preserve the essence of democratic accountability, which many people believe is important in police authorities.

While the Police Federation warmly welcomes the fact that chief constables, together with their authorities, will have to determine spending priorities on equipment, personnel and so on, it is concerned about the setting of national objectives. There is a feeling that those objectives may give the Home Office too much control over police forces and chief officers.

Could there be a conflict between the evident desire of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to

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decentralise decisions on the manpower and equipment needed in a particular police force, and perpetuating Home Office control through the setting of national targets and the appointment of police authority chairmen and members? We shall need to examine that when we debate the Bill.

I shall deal briefly with student unions. I am a member of court of Brunel university. I consulted the student union last week, and it gave me a number of reasons why it believes that the Bill's provisions are heavy-handed and in some cases unnecessary. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education will give us a clear explanation of the purposes——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I call Mrs. Anne Campbell.

7.31 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) did not have time to finish what he was saying about student unions, because I dare say there is a great deal on which we would agree.

I have received hundreds of letters from students about the Government proposals to reform student unions. Although we have heard a great deal in the debate about the right to silence, my constituents are concerned about the right to make as much noise as possible. I have received letters not only from students, but from heads of colleges, university authorities, eminent academics and members of the local business community. To a person, they have condemned the Government's proposed reforms.

The Government seem to have concocted proposals for student union reform which range from the malign to the ridiculous. They are malign in intent and in their effect, and many of the so-called reforms appear to be designed to prevent student unions from functioning effectively and, more particularly, to deprive students of an effective voice in the community.

Furthermore, the Government's proposals are ridiculous in their distinction between core services, which would be eligible for public funds, and non-core services, which would not. As the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has rightly said in its formal submission to the Department of Education:

"The list of core services omits an astonishing range of positive and legitimate functions undertaken by student unions."

The Department for Education's consultation note on student union reform says that it is the Secretary of State's view that publicly funded student union activities

"should be limited to the core areas of welfare and advisory services, catering, sport, and student representation in institutional affairs."

Sports clubs and societies are given the blessing of the Government, but all other student clubs and societies are excluded.

Are we seriously to believe that academic, music, drama and debating societies are less deserving of public support than sports clubs? The Government are in serious danger of undermining an important part of the educational experience of being a student. I can put it no better than in the words of the principal of Newnham college, Dr. Onora O'Neill. In her letter to the Secretary of State for Education, Dr. O'Neill states:

"Students learn not only in the lecture hall, the laboratory and the library, but from a range of more active experiences in which they develop both confidence and the organisational and entrepreneurial skills which are vital both for their careers and for their future employers. If in the future, student unions were not able to support any clubs except sporting clubs, a wide range of club activities that contribute greatly to the quality of education would be undercut. In this College we have nearly five hundred women students who will be going on to professional, business and academic careers of great variety for whom club activities provide important opportunities for training and support as they move into the fields which, in some cases, are still not very easily accessible to women. Among the clubs and societies whose financial basis would be swept away by the proposed changes are the Law Society, the Engineering Society, the Medics and Vets Society, the History Society, the Geography Society and the Environment Group. We also have a large number of students clubs which are less disciplinary in their orientation, but contribute in many ways to the confidence and skills of our students. They include the Music Society and the Drama Society. Sport alone will not provide the range of extra-curricular activities that we would all wish students to undertake."

I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that we would wish all students to undertake those activities. Why, then, has he sought to undermine them—or are we to assume that the proposals are half-baked in spite of the extended period of so-called consultation that preceded them?

Another glaring omission from the list of core areas is student community action. Surely we would wish to encourage students to contribute to the wider community through voluntary work and fund raising for charities. One of the letters that I received is from an organisation in my constituency called Bridget's, which provides care and accommodation for disabled students at Cambridge and Anglia polytechnic universities. Bridget's is alarmed at the threat to rag activities, which contribute significantly to its funds as a charitable institution.

Another organisation, Emmaus UK, which provides accommodation and work for the long-term homeless and unemployed, is similarly alarmed. I have received a letter from its founder, Mr. Selwyn Image, who is a well respected local business man. He has asked me to do what I can to preserve the fund-raising activities of student unions.

The Government are right to identify welfare services as central to the work of student unions, but even here there are important omissions. There is no mention in the consultation note of welfare services for students from ethnic minorities or for homosexual students, both of whom continue to face prejudice and need particular support. We might regard the omission as careless, as another half-baked section of this half-baked document.

I hope that that is the explanation, because the alternative explanation is prejudice or worse, and there is some evidence for that. The briefing produced by Conservative central office for Conservative Members when the Secretary of State made his statement earlier this year cites the mere passing of a resolution in support of lesbian and gay rights by University college London student union as an "abuse" of public funds.

Many proposals in the forthcoming Bill will be seen as political oppression. The Government's proposal to restrict the ability of student unions to engage in any activity that might be deemed political raises serious questions in a democratic society. Many student unions are already charities and are subject to the law of charity, which clearly precludes political campaigning. However, charity law does not preclude the promotion and encouragement of political ideas, as is clearly established in case law.

In seeking to place greater restrictions on student unions than already exist under charity law, the Government threaten the basic rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech that are enshired in articles 10, 11 and 14 of the European convention on human rights. I hope that that will be taken on board. It is foolish effectively to deny students the ability to represent their interests in the wider community. As the National Union of Students has cogently argued, many decisions that directly affect the education and welfare of students are made outside the institution's structures.

No Government who had confidence in their policies and the strength to take criticism would ever dream of putting forward such a small-minded and vindictive set of proposals. I can do no better than end with the words of Dr. Peter Mathias, master of Downing college, writing to the Secretary of State as chairman of the Colleges Committee, the forum of heads of houses in Cambridge. He said:

"All colleges in Cambridge have examined the proposals in great detail and every college finds itself in opposition and every Head of House personally. I have seldom known such unanimity in the Colleges Committee. We are speaking primarily for our college JCRs"—

the colloquial term for student unions in Cambridge—

"As far as collective memory knows, there have never been any significant problems about the misuse of public funds by these bodies. Yet the proposed legislation will impose elaborate bureaucratic and accounting procedures, where we consider existing legislation governing charities, and external checks with the college concerned, fully adequate to assure accountability. By virtue of the proposed division between 'core' and 'non-core' activities, JCRs will be inhibited in fulfilling normal college functions which are the essence of collegiate life—i.e. supporting through their normal budgets such activities as college academic societies, music, drama and other activities which fall outside the current definition of 'core' activities.

We are asking that the proposed legislation, in its current form, be withdrawn as counterproductive, with consequences which will be much worse than the alleged problems which the proposals are supposed to cure."

I echo that plea.

7.41 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Over the past 14 years, the Government have massively increased resources on law and order and expanded the police service. Quite rightly, they have repeatedly strengthened the law and extended the range of sentences available so that there are longer sentences for sexual offences and violent crime and maximum life sentences for attempted rape. However, despite all those measures, crime has inexorably risen, from 500,000 recorded offences in 1950 to 1·6 million in 1970, 2·5 million in 1980, 4·4 million in 1990 and 5·6 million in 1992. That has led to increasing public concern about the growth in crime.

Whereas, 10 years ago, few people had personal experience of crime, now most people have either experienced it directly or know people who have. People fear leaving their homes at night because they might come back to find them burgled and they fear leaving their cars parked in empty places at night because they might be vandalised or stolen. That is a serious issue and, rightly, the Government are tackling it in a positive way with the measures outlined in the Queen's Speech.

I want to examine some of the reasons why the public have lost confidence in the system of criminal justice. The system has shown itself unable to cope properly, in particular with persistent young offenders. There is a widespread perception that young offenders can cock a snook at the law and walk free from the courts. We know that the clear-up rate on crime is poor, particularly in relation to burglary. We also know that the courts, in dealing with crime across a broad range of offences, often seem unable or unwilling to give tough enough sentences and certainly not the sentences that most reasonable and sensible people would like to be given. We have seen a regrettable growth in violent crime, which greatly concerns people.

I probably shall not have time to develop the argument that the problems of law and order go very deep and reflect a much deeper malaise in our society and western society in general. The criminal justice system is in need of radical reform. Therefore, I welcome the measures that the Secretary of State has announced. I welcome the move to reduce the number of cautions used. There is no doubt that cautioning has been used far too often and in inappropriate cases. I also welcome the attempt to reduce the amount of paperwork that the police have to do.

It is ironic that, at a time of rising crime, apart from the increase this year, the prison population had been dropping. There was also a drop in the number of cases being brought to court. I should have thought that that was unacceptable. Earlier, we heard the Opposition's argument that prison should not be the centrepiece of measures to deal with crime. Perhaps it should not, but it should be an important part of measures to deal with crime.

My contention is that the liberal approach to crime has failed the country dramatically. There are too many criminals who have no fear of being caught. They know that the chances of being caught are slight. They know that if they get caught the chances are that the police will caution them, or refer the case to the CPS which will not follow it through. They know that if, by mischance, they end up in court, they will probably get off with a non-custodial sentence.

All that has had a serious effect on reducing the deterrence of the law in dealing with crime. I regret to say that the liberal approach to crime reached its height—if that is the right word to use—with the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I am pleased that some of the measures on sentencing in that Act are to be revised.

Reformers argue that prison does not work. They quote various reconviction rates, one of their favourite figures coming from a Home Office study in 1986 which showed that 63 per cent. of young male offenders released from prison were reconvicted within two years. However, they do not go on to say that a further study in the July Home Office statistical bulletin, which analysed 11,000 criminals given probation or community service sentences, showed that 65 per cent. of those people had a further conviction within two years. Therefore, it could be argued that no method of punishment is effective. That might well be the case, but we should not forget that, if somebody is in prison, while he is there, he cannot commit any more crime.

Too many of the reformers of the legal system are more interested in the criminal than in the victim and it is the victim of whom we should be thinking. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to resist the pressures that he will undoubtedly be under from the do-gooders both inside and outside the Home Office and to get on with the reforms outlined in the Queen's Speech.

In relation to law and order, people are probably most concerned about the young offenders. Far too much crime is committed by young offenders. We know that they play

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a large part in burglary, much of it opportunistic. The public may not be so aware of the fact that, in the past 10 years, the number of custodial sentences for young people has dropped by 65 per cent.—from 63,000 to 17,000—as a direct result of the liberal approach to law and order. Has it led to a better society, to less crime among young people? Most people would doubt that. There is a great danger that the police have partially given up with young offenders because they know that if they follow the case through, the chances are that the young person will not get a severe sentence.

I welcome the measures to provide secure training orders aimed at 12 to 15-year-olds, but I wonder whether they will go far enough. As I understand it, they will apply only to those who have been convicted of three imprisonable offences. Perhaps we should consider intervening much earlier. If we can intervene early, we can sometimes stop those young offenders reoffending.

Some researchers argue that age is a great leveller in terms of crime and that the only cure for some young offenders is, frankly, that as they get older they commit far less crime. I would not suggest that we send young people inside for a large number of years—that would be totally inappropriate—but it is important to provide an effective criminal justice system. I do not believe that we have one at the moment and the Home Secretary is quite right to bring forward these measures.

There is a danger that the measures will not be effective, because deeper social issues are involved, and I hope that all parties will join together in looking at those deeper and serious social issues. We all have a responsibility to play our part in trying to reduce the levels of crime in society —not just burglary and vandalism, but some of the mindless violence that is endemic. Some people argue that part of such violence is influenced by what people see on television and video—that is another area that we need to tackle.

All those factors have an influence and I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to look at some of the wider and deeper issues so that we can tackle the problem on a broad basis.

7.51 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Minister's speech and much of the debate have focused on questions of crime prevention, bringing down levels of crime, stopping reoffending and protecting the victims. As an agenda, there is a great deal that everyone would agree with, but the issue is not whether it is the right agenda but whether the Government's proposals will actually bring down the levels of crime and whether the criminal justice Bill will make a real difference. I suspect that we will have a Bill that is a mixture of non-contentious, relatively minor changes and window dressing; set alongside that will be the cheap populism of the Home Secretary's speech, which promises far more than the Bill will deliver.

One of the 27 points that the Home Secretary announced, with which I agree, was support to victims of crime and the recommendations of the Royal Commission. I was disappointed that the Home Secretary did not mention that in his speech.

The issue of information by the Crown Prosecution Service, support to victims or witnesses and the way in which people are treated in court all come under the criminal justice system. The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations about that. It recommended that victims should be kept informed of the progress and outcome of cases, including decisions about whether or not to prosecute; that the CPS should take steps to ascertain victims' views before decisions were taken; and that information should be given, if not through the CPS, through the police. When cases come to trial, everything should be done to ensure that facilities for witnesses and victims are adequate and that they are kept completely separate from people on trial. There should be witness support schemes in Crown courts.

Another simple point is that, at the conclusion of cases involving sexual offences, victims' statements should be returned to the instructing solicitors. The royal commission found evidence—and evidence has been quoted in other places—of victims' statements being handed around in prison afterwards.

Outside the criminal justice system, victim support schemes exist in many places, do good work and are widely used by the police. We have not heard from the Minister whether he intends to give those schemes the resources that they need. Another £200,000 is needed this year to enable them to continue and, if we are to implement some of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, at least another £2 million or £3 million will be needed next year.

The gaps that exist in procedures for dealing with the families of murder victims have been brought home to me by what happened to a family in my constituency. I have talked to those people, who feel completely abandoned by the criminal justice system. They were unable to get information about why bail was granted to one of the accused. They could not find out what had happened and, when I asked, I was refused the information by the Recorder of London.

There is a problem for the families of victims in cases like that. They are not direct victims of the crime or material witnesses—they are not directly involved—but certainly in the case of relatives of homicide victims there are great gaps in the support given to them. There are supposed to be "victims of crime" leaflets and the victims charter, but they are not always issued by the police and are often of not much use in such cases. Also, families in that position may feel that the police are not the people who should provide such support. There is a need for organised and easily available bereavement counselling for families who are affected by homicide.

I hope that the Home Office will look at some of those issues and will follow through what the Home Secretary said when he accepted the recommendations of the royal commission. I hope that he will act on those recommendations and find the necessary resources.

If a map was drawn of areas of deprivation in London, and a map was drawn of where crime is committed in London, they would fit nicely together. The conditions that are the breeding ground for crime are the conditions in which the victims of crime have to live. There are streets and council estates in London where drug dealing openly goes on. What are teenagers supposed to think? They are unemployed; they have no prospect of work, no money and no youth services any more, and their parents are struggling to survive.

In the midst of all that, who do they see as the only people with money? The drug dealers and the burglars are

the only people who are examples of success. Is it surprising, in such circumstances, that some people are tempted and drawn into dealing in drugs, and then drawn into burglary and street robbery to pay for their drugs habit? I do not condone the individuals who commit that sort of crime, but we should not be surprised when it happens. When it does happen, the victims in the main are people who are already deprived.

The Government's answer seems to be that we put more people in prison. We heard that view expressed by the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon). Secure places have not been provided for young offenders and some of the secure accommodation which now exists is in danger of being shut down. We are told that, for people who are slightly older, the answer is to put them in prison.

Recently I read a report in a local newspaper of a speech by a magistrates clerk to a Magistrates Association conference. He said:

"There is no surer way of manufacturing criminals than by sending boys in their teens to prison."

He went on to say:

"It used to be said that a magistrate's job was to send people to prison, but they were changing that. In these days it was becoming more and more apparent that their job was to try to effect reform without recourse to prison."

That was in a newspaper that I found recently among some old effects of my mother's dated 9 July 1937. It seems that some people have learnt very little in the past 60 years about the way in which we should deal with crime.

However, unless changes in the criminal justice system are matched by support for projects that try to prevent crime—projects organised by the police, local authorities and voluntary agencies—and by action to tackle some of the causes, such as unemployment, poor housing and the poverty that now exists in many parts of our inner cities, the change in the criminal justice system will be ineffective. We shall be back here in a year or two, with another Minister presenting another Bill and another change of direction; in the meantime, crime levels will have risen yet again.

8 pm

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I am delighted to take part in this important debate. We all agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) said about relevant education. We have seen the introduction of general national vocational qualifications and the placing of a greater bias on vocational education to make education more relevant. That is entirely right, but the fact remains that there is no excuse for criminal behaviour.

One school of thought holds that we should have more understanding of the criminal mentality and that, if a person does something wrong, it does not matter because society will understand. However—as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) pointed out—so many crimes have now been committed that society has had enough.

I, too, have had enough. I am sick and tired of opening my newspaper in the morning and seeing headlines such as

"Sex trap teenagers try to burn a wife to death",

or "Playground rape", which headed a story about a girl of 11 being pounced on by young schoolmates. Another such headline was

"PC and drug dealer shot".

I am sure that we all remember the incident in which PC Patrick Dunne was shot. The story about a young girl of 15 was headed

"Knifed seven times as she fed pet horses".

We have all had enough of reading such stories in the newspapers.

I was delighted when the Home Secretary announced, at the party conference, 27 measures to tackle the increasing trend of lawlessness. We should realise, however, that that trend is taking place in other countries as well; we should also recognise that 95 per cent. of crime in this country is committed against property. I myself have been a victim: my car was broken into twice in one week this year. I am very pleased that the Government are to take stronger action in regard to law and order.

I was delighted to hear the announcement about bail bandits, as that is one of the issues that interest me particularly. I recently held three public meetings in my constituency, all of which were well attended. At two of them I was handed petitions containing a total of 4,500 signatures, saying that people wanted to see the action that my right hon. and learned Friend is now taking. They were especially concerned about the granting of bail.

On Friday night, I talked to a gentleman who works in a bail hostel. He told me that one of the inmates had left the hostel and stolen a car. Having been caught by the police, he was bailed again. Next day he had stolen another vehicle, done a ram raid and crashed it. Someone could have been killed. Only then was that person given a custodial sentence. We need to tackle the problem of criminals who use and abuse the privilege of bail, continuing their career of crime.

At one of my local meetings, police described the career of one criminal over a 12-month period. He was bailed no fewer than eight times and during those 12 months—often when he was on bail—he committed 215 crimes. Such activity must be stopped.

One message came over loud and clear from my town hall meetings. Those who attended backed the Home Secretary's aim to build more prisons and want persistent offenders to be imprisoned. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East said, at least when such people are in prison we know that they are not out on the streets committing crimes. At present, unfortunately, too much crime is being committed by young offenders. Some are only 12 or even younger, but those aged between 12 and 14 will now be treated properly: they can be sent to detention centres. Not only will they be kept off the streets, which is important; they will be given the discipline that was lacking at home and the education that did not interest them at school.

I am disturbed by stories of young criminals who, when they are finally detected and taken to court, are given holidays abroad. One newspaper described a teenager who turned to crime and who—to his mother's horror—was "sentenced" to a holiday abroad. She said:

"It's scandalous. He was doing really well until he got it into his head that he would get motorbikes, skiing trips and foreign holidays if he was bad. He broke into a pub cellar and took alcohol. He also did £2,000 damage at a children's centre. He sees what others in care are getting and he wants the same."

An idea is going around that such people can be sent on holiday abroad and that they will come back converted to the straight and narrow.

The same page of that newspaper told us:

"A teenage car thief who had an 11-week holiday in Portugal is on the run from council care."

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

The holiday has cost £20,000. Such activity is an affront to the victims of crime, who want criminals to be put into detention centres or given custodial sentences. They have little truck with the slogan "Commit a crime and win a holiday", or the slogan "Commit a crime and get motoring lessons". That is the last development that we want.

We could all do much more to help reduce crime. I cannot speak too highly of my own Lancashire constabulary, who are working partnership with industry and schools to great effect. They are also operating a car watch scheme, which is being partly sponsored by Bradford and Bingley building society. More than 120,000 Lancashire car owners are taking part in the scheme: they display a luminous sticker and may well be stopped by police between midnight and 5 am. The arrangement is working extremely well.

We want more people to be involved in the special police force, which is being increased to 30,000. The last thing that we want is for people to become self-styled vigilantes, going around the country to track down crime on their own. They have the opportunity to adopt a role in the special force and to become involved in neighbourhood watch schemes. We now have 115,000 such schemes, covering 5 million homes. They are extremely successful and allow residents to take part in the detection of the crimes described earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East.

As one who represents a rural constituency, I was delighted when my right hon. and learned Friend made his announcement about parish constables. That will enable people in rural areas to help the police to detect the crime that has, unfortunately, been increasing in such areas because of improved infrastructure. It is possible to enter constituencies such as mine from one of the major cities in the north-west, after a 45-minute drive, and to perpetrate a crime; the stolen goods could be offered in a car-boot sale back in the city in a very short time. We need to support the police and we are doing so, in particular, with the announcement of the extended batons.

I am fed up with the rhetoric of Opposition Members. They talk about law and order as though they care. The Labour party manifesto at the general election devoted 155 words to law and order. That is how much they care about cracking down on crime. In debates on the measures that we have passed to crack down on crime, all that we have heard from Opposition Members has been rhetoric and how much they feel for the victims and they have voted time and again against the sort of measures that we need to introduce. I should be interested to see whether Labour Members and especially the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) follow us into the Lobbies when the Home Secretary's proposals are introduced because I suspect that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will think again of all sorts of reasons why he was unable to support the new legislation that we need.

8.10 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): One basic principle of government over the past fourteen and a half years has been the process of centralisation. The Government have consistently put democratically accountable bodies and independent services under Westminster control, either by inserting their own placemen or through more drastic restructuring. It is not surprising that there is more of the same in the 1993-94 programme. The programme is not "back to basics", but more of the same.

I shall briefly consider one quango that would be created under the proposed legislation and one body that is to be quangoised and I shall ask why a third is missing from the plans.

Having spent the largest slice of my professional life in the training of graduate science teachers, I shall raise two serious concerns about the new quango—the teacher training agency. Can it maintain a proper balance between classroom experience and the knowledge and understanding of educational issues—essential to becoming an effective teacher—in the initial training of teachers? Some have suggested that the teacher training agency is primarily a mechanism, through emphasis on school-based enterprise, to provide additional funding for grant-maintained schools.

Emphasis on school practice is important. Anyone who has been in the teacher training business—I was at the university of Leeds for many years—knows that over recent years there has been a consistent increase in the amount of work in schools and an increase in the breadth of experience as a result of students working in different sorts of educational institutions. Partnerships have developed between schools and universities and between schools and colleges, and those partnerships have proved fruitful in developing teacher training. However, a wholly school-based consortium may tip the balance too far and it would need a partner in higher education to maintain balanced training.

Of still greater concern is the control of research. The concept of giving research funding to the teacher training agency is quite disturbing. Research funding given to the agency must deal with issues relevant to initial teacher training. How wide is that remit? Will there be research into the psychology of learning, the motivation of teachers, the supply of teachers and the choices of sixth form students? Those topics are not directly related to initial teacher training and are not its focus, but they impact on it. One has to be careful when one has a research funding body, because inevitably it is liable to impinge on academic freedom. There is great danger in setting up an agency that funds research and is able to specify what areas of research it feels are desirable. One may well get Government-directed research that will conclude what the Government desire.

Having led a council and having been a member of its police authority, I am appalled by the changes proposed for police authorities. I noted the comments made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), the adviser to the Police Federation, who raised the issue of police authorities and correctly stated that chief constables were unhappy about the proposals and about changing the process of democratic accountability. There are a number of examples of events in West Yorkshire that were more easily dealt with as a result of elected members of the police authority having credibility with the public.

Those responsible for drafting the proposed legislation should carefully consider the aftermath of the Yorkshire ripper case. I had not long been in the job of leader of the authority when the case came to its conclusion and Peter Sutcliffe was sentenced. The Home Office must consider the analysis of the failings of the detection work, as it was eventually chance that led to his identification. As an

authority member, I had access to reports which are available to the Home Office but are still not generally available.

New technology was implemented as a result of the analysis of those failings, and changes were made at the top. We were able to talk sensibly with the then Home Secretary, Lord Whitelaw. It was a proper co-operation between central and local government. Because of the public focus on the issue, having a democratically accountable authority was extremely important. West Yorkshire introduced community policing well before it was the norm or was encouraged by the Government.

The Home Office should also consider the policing of the miners' strike and compare events in West Yorkshire with those to the south of us and in the east midlands. People should consider why, in West Yorkshire, there was little violence and few of the problems that hit the national headlines. Sir Colin Sampson was a superb chief constable of West Yorkshire at that time and every week he met democratically elected members of the police authority. Those meetings were also attended by Jack Taylor, then president of the Yorkshire branch of the National Union of Mineworkers, and representatives of the British Coal Board. We talked through likely problems and how to deal with them.

We had a police authority that was credible in the eyes of police and credible in the eyes of the public, because it was operated by democratically elected members. Ken Davison, the Tory spokesperson on police—and a business man and therefore "acceptable"—disapproved of magistrates being on police authorities and said that those authorities were unelected, unrepresentative, unaccountable and and affront to democracy. How much more would that be true of Government appointees? It will be extremely difficult to facilitate effective policing with the consent of the community if an authority is set up along the lines suggested.

Lastly, why is it that the part of the royal commission report that deals with miscarriages of justice is not being dealt with? That would be a devolution of Government decision-making and would be most desirable. People should study recommendations 331 to 337 in the report, together with recommendations 316 and 317.

I have spent a great deal of time during the past year and a half dealing with the problems of a constituent, Alan Dodson, who maintains his innocence—and who has been maintaining his innocence for the seven years he has been in prison. Because of that, he does not qualify for parole. I recognise the seriousness of the problem and I believe that recommendation 317 should be followed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.20 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I want to begin my brief contribution with a revelation. When my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer first arrived at the Treasury, I had the temerity to offer him some advice on his first Budget. I said, "Chancellor, on 30 November why do you not simply get up and say that the recovery is coming along, we have had some encouraging figures recently, we had a very full Budget earlier in the year, steady as she goes, thank you very much—and sit down." The House will have to wait just seven days to discover whether he has taken my advice.

Sadly, I do not have comparable access to Her Majesty, although my advice to her on the Queen's Speech would have been similar. We have a great deal of legislation; perhaps we have too much. Certainly, we need to think carefully before we introduce more. A century ago, we would have had a much slimmer Queen's Speech and passed much less legislation. Were we noticeably less well governed then?

This year, we have a substantial Queen's Speech, and rightly so. However, if next year's Queen's Speech is slimmer, I hope that we will not feel obliged to apologise for that. I am a believer in the old Tory adage that if it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. In government, as well as in other fields of endeavour, there are times when less means more.

This Queen's Speech is very full. It is precisely because nowhere does it propose change for change's sake that I welcome it. Every aspect of it goes with the grain of the aspirations of my constituents——

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): How does the hon. Gentleman know that?

Mr. Brandreth: I talk to my constituents regularly. I have my finger on the pulse of my constituency. That is why I am here now and will be for generations to come.

It is self-evident that we need to sort out the muddle on Sunday trading. It is clear that our education reforms must include improving the quality of teacher training and a much greater emphasis on teacher training in the classroom. We all know that businesses, large and small —but especially small—are crying out for deregulation. As well as repealing unnecessary regulations, we need to tame unnecessarily officious regulators.

Central to today's debate and to the Queen's Speech is the concern with law and order. That is rightly so, because that is central to the concerns of my constituents and, indeed, the constituents of all hon. Members. Judging from my postbag, from meetings and from casual conversations, our constituents are more concerned about the growth in crime and the growth in the fear of crime than they are about anything else.

The proposed criminal justice Bill will do much to correct the balance between victim and defendant. It will end the so-called right to silence. It will allow courts to send persistent offenders between the ages of 12 and 14 to secure centres. It will give the police additional powers to tackle the so-called bail bandits—those who persistently re-offend while on bail and who are responsible for 50,000 crimes a year. In particular, I welcome the proposed measure to take DNA samples from anyone detained or convicted in connection with a recordable offence. That will safeguard the innocent, while helping to secure the conviction of the guilty.

All that makes sense. Indeed, much of it is common sense. However, it is also common sense to recognise that those measures alone will not solve all the problems overnight. They represent an important move in the right direction; they sensibly attack specific problems in specific ways; and they are focused and necessary. They may not stem the rising tide of crime at a stroke, but they will tackle real problems realistically. An essential part of a policy that puts the victim before the criminal is that even the most tolerant society cannot tolerate crime and must be intolerant of the persistent criminal.

[Mr. Brandreth]

Notwithstanding the views of the Labour party, there is no simplistic diagnosis of the cancer of crime in our society —would that there were. Yet there are still Labour Members who claim that it is somehow due to unemployment and deprivation. That is insulting to those from areas of far greater deprivation and unemployment than our own, yet who never turn to crime. It is facile when we consider that much of the growth in crime has coincided with the growth in prosperity. In my constituency, unemployment today is 27 per cent. lower than it was five years ago, yet recorded crime is almost 27 per cent. higher.

Just as there is no easy diagnosis of the problem, so there is no quick-fix remedy. As well as the sensible proposals that will feature in the criminal justice Bill and the other measures announced during recent weeks by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, we need to speed up the process of justice. Many offenders are what is known as present dwellers; the connection between the offence and the punishment, which may come many months later, is too remote. We need to do everything we can to accelerate the operation of the criminal justice system.

We also need to do everything that we can in crime prevention. As a society, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot deplore, as people rightly do, anti-social behaviour among the young, hooliganism, vandalism, theft, under-age drinking and drug abuse, while denying those same young people the opportunities, leadership, sense of direction and sense of discipline that they need to help them to grow in the way in which we want them to grow.

No one becomes a criminal by chance; he becomes a criminal by choice. All of us at home, at school, in the media, through the Churches and with the police can influence that choice. Many positive things can be done and I shall give hon. Members just a taste of what is being achieved in my part of the world.

This summer, on a particularly difficult estate, the Cheshire constabulary introduced a community leaders award course. It trained young members of the community to organise voluntary sports activities for the youth of their own community. The effect was a fall of 22 per cent. in recorded crime on the estate compared with the level in the summer of 1992. Even more important, there has been a sustained reduction in the amount of crime on the estate since then. That is not some do-gooder's daydream; it is cheap and effective and is happening now.

That is what the Central Council of Physical Recreation's community sports leaders award scheme is all about. It is a reminder that we do not need to throw up our hands in despair.

My constituents regularly say to me, "Something must be done." Something is being done. Sadly, we do not know what the Opposition would do because they will not tell us. They had the opportunity to do so today, but they did not take it. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was long on adumbration——

Mr. Patten: What a word.

Mr. Brandreth: Indeed. The word was well chosen by the hon. Member for Sedgefield, who may be aware that the first definition of "adumbration" in the "Oxford English Dictionary" is "to indicate faintly". He chose his words precisely. He was woefully short on detail and offered only faint-hearted waffle—unspecific, uncosted and consequently unconvincing.

Mr. Gunnell: Rubbish.

Mr. Brandreth: The hon. Gentleman has a fine way with words. "Rubbish" is how he sums up his hon. Friend's contribution.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, by contrast—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I merely intervened to say that sedentary interruptions can lead to confusion.

Mr. Brandreth: The one thing about which there can be no confusion is that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is anything but faint-hearted. He knows what needs to be done. He knows that he is the man to do it and that he will have the support of the country as well as Conservative Members in all his endeavours.

8.30 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I declare a potential financial interest in that I am currently discussing matters with a group of police officers and acting as their adviser. Although there has been no finalisation of an agreement yet, I feel that I ought to declare that.

I shall also take this opportunity to congratulate the Warwickshire constabulary on the effectiveness of its Operation Claw. It has begun an operation to deal with burglary in particular and with other types of crime that are escalating in our county. On the first day it arrested 71 people. A number of those people have been charged, and that operation will carry on throughout the year. I very much hope that it will be successful in reducing the escalating crime problem in our area.

It is my belief that, if every one of the Home Secretary's 27 proposals to the Conservative party conference was implemented tomorrow, they would barely dent the increase in crime over which the Conservative party has presided since it come to office in 1979.

In Warwickshire, the annual crime statistics have shown that crime has tripled in our county since the Government came to office. The figures for burglary and car theft have in fact quadrupled since they came to office. It is true that there are considerable crime problems in the inner cities. It is also fair to say that, historically, crime in some of the rural areas has been at a lower level than in some of the inner cities. But crime is now rising in rural areas such as mine at a far greater rate than it is in the inner cities. That must be addressed. I feel that it has not yet been addressed seriously by the Government. I do not believe that we will see any significant and serious fall in crime—certainly not down to 1979 levels—until the long-term causes of crime increase are addressed.

The all-party Home Affairs Select Committee considered the causes of crime in its report on juvenile crime this year. It concluded that there is an unquestionable link between unemployment, hopelessness and crime; indeed there is. There is also a link with deprivation and homelessness., I shall return to that issue in a moment. If we are to address crime seriously, we must address it as a whole. Unless we do that, the crime statistics will continue their inexorable rise.

It is right to say that there is no excuse for crime. Unemployment is not an excuse for committing a crime,

nor is deprivation or homelessness. It should not be said that they are excuses. They are causes. When that has been recognised, the Government must examine both ends of the line. They must look at the short term. They must look at punishment and enforcement and ensure that we have sufficient police officers on the beat to enforce the law. That means looking now at the short term—the criminal —and ensuring that we reduce the number of offences that are now being committed.

We must examine also the other end of the line. We must examine the reasons why those crime statistics are rising in the first place, and the causes of that offending. At the moment, the Government are interested only in looking at one side of the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has described, the Government have a one-club policy. They do not look at the issue in the round or as a whole. We must not deal only with crime that is being committed now. We must look to a long-term reduction in the number of people committing crime.

The Labour party wants to look at both ends of the line. We want to be tough on crime and on the causes of crime. The Government's failure to recognise what that means shows that they will not succeed in reducing crime, even to the level at which they inherited it in 1979.

People are looking not only for punishment but for effective justice and long-term delivery of policies to reduce crime. That is why the Government are losing the argument on law and order. Because of their record, they are seen to be ineffective and short-term. They are going back over policies that failed during the past 14 years. If the Government are ever to succeed, why could they not have implemented those policies before? Why have they failed to deal with crime over the past 14 years?

The Government say that they are supporting the police. We have heard many promises of support for the police over many years. Where is the beef? Where are the policies? Police morale is now at the lowest level ever. Alan Eastwood, the former president of the Police Federation, said at its last conference that police morale was plummeting. That morale was dealt an even more serious blow by the Sheehy report.

Although the Government backed off from confrontation on some of its proposals, the Police Federation well knows that many of the proposals were shelved. Some of them have been put back to the police negotiations board for discussion over the next year. No doubt some of them will be resurrected at various stages while the Government remain in office.

The police, and the Police Federation in particular, have always regarded as far more dangerous to their morale, not the Sheehy report and its consequences, but the White Paper. They regard it as far more dangerous and insidious than they ever did the Sheehy report. They have rightly taken the view that the proposals in the White Paper could result in a sharp reduction in the number of police officers on the beat.

The general secretary of the Police Federation spoke to the all-party police group in the House only a few weeks ago. He argued that the Home Secretary's demand that the core role of the police is identified in the White Paper. The policy of having a fixed budget imposed on a chief constable with a lot of discretion as to how that budget is spent will involve a political appointee—the chairman of the police authority—standing over the chief constable throughout the period of his fixed-term contract to ensure that the policies of the Home Office are carried out.

That chief constable will be under increased financial pressure to reduce expenditure. The core role of the police officer is being identified and the concern, particularly of the Police Federation, is that when those core roles are identified, the non-core roles will be ripe for some kind of privatisation. That is why the general secretary of the Police Federation told the all-party police group that, by the end of the decade, he envisages that, if the proposals in the White Paper are implemented, the number of police constables will be reduced from 128,000 today to about 80,000 by the end of the decade.

The Government propose the political appointment of a chairman in every police authority. The Russian communist party had a way of ensuring that it kept control of its police. It appointed not a chief constable but a commissar who worked with the chief constable. We now have a Conservative Government appointing a Conservative commissar in every police authority in Britain in order to ensure that the cuts in police force expenditure desired by the Government will be carried out. That will result not in any reduction in crime but in a reduction in the number of police officers employed, a reduction in the number of police officers on the beat and an increase in crime in Britain.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but the time is up.

8.40 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The proposals put before the Conservative party conference by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary mark a sea change in attitudes which it would be difficult to over-estimate. That is particularly clear with regard to penal policy. For far too long there has been an unholy, unwritten alliance, one might almost say a liberal agenda, between the Home Office and the Treasury. The Treasury does not like the idea of building prisons because it costs money and the ruling ethos of the Home Office was that it was not the done thing to want to lock people up anyway. For far too long Conservative Home Secretaries were able to take the rhetoric to the Conservative party conference, but when they tried to put that rhetoric into action the answer was, "Oh no, Minister, that couldn't possibly work."

There are many examples of that, but I shall name just one which illustrates not only the point but the difference between the parties on the point. The proposition that it should be possible to challenge in a higher court an over-lenient sentence makes self-evident common sense. Opposition Members now call for that in particular cases. But when the matter was first raised in the Home Office it was smartly squashed and it took considerable time for that policy to come through. It is a tribute to Home Secretaries since 1979 that, faced with such insidious insider opposition, they were able to do as much as they did.

It is all too easy for a liberal agenda to deride prison, saying that it does not cure or reform anyone and costs a great deal of money. It is obvious that when dealing with young offenders there must be an emphasis on reform and, on the basis that hope can sometimes triumph over experience, one can hope that the young people will emerge from whatever custodial sentence they have served in a better position not to reoffend than when they went in.

But in this day and age, if a convicted adult goes to prison he does so because he is a bad person. If such a person manages to reform, if he sees the light, that is fine,

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

but for the time being he goes there as a punishment and to be contained. The public can be sure and certain in the knowledge that while he is contained in prison he is not out on the streets offending again. For far too long such arguments put to us by our constituents were derided. It is a good thing that such beliefs are now informing penal policy.

The idea that sending a person to prison represents a failure for society is complete bunkum. When an individual commits an offence so serious that he has to be sent to prison, the blame and responsibility lie fairly and squarely with the individual, not with society.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made it clear when he announced his 27 propositions that they were only the first instalment. He was straightforward about that. It is important to realise that there are more instalments to come. In the short time available to me I shall suggest two particular areas for consideration.

The first is a natural extension of the abolition of the right of silence. It is remarkable that in this debate we should hear the Opposition deride the principle that the right to silence should be abolished. Any barrister or solicitor such as me, who practised criminal law for the best part of 20 years, knows that that rule was abused time and again. I abused it. I was asked by a defendant to advise him of his rights and, knowing his criminal record and the circumstances in which he had been apprehended, of course I told him to exercise his right to silence.

That was an abuse being perpetrated on society. It was not my fault; I was doing my duty as a solicitor advising that defendant on the laws of the kingdom. But it would be an abuse of society if, ultimately, the House did not abolish such a law. The abolition of the right to silence is long overdue and I welcome it.

There is a natural extension of that which I hope Ministers will consider in due course. It is this. How often have barristers or solicitors appearing in a criminal court seen a defendant acquitted by a jury who, before they are released, hear the judge say, "I understand that there are other matters now to come before me," and then find that, having acquitted someone on the one offence before them, that person has a criminal record as long as one's arm? On more occasions than I can now recall I have heard the gasp of disbelief from a jury when they hear the real background and circumstances of the character appearing in the dock before them.

Traditionally, lawyers told the humble populace that they could not possibly be given information about a criminal's previous convictions because there was no guarantee that the man was guilty on this occasion and they were far too unsophisticated to be able to make the necessary judgment and not jump to conclusions.

Mr. Patten: It is patronising.

Mr. Nicholls: Not only, as my right hon. Friend so rightly says, is that patronising, but it is completely out of date. The mere fact that a person may have 20, 30 or 40 previous convictions for dishonesty does not mean that on another occasion he was dishonest as well, but surely that is information that a jury should have. I do not accept that, in this day and age, a British jury, properly directed by a competent judge, could not give that information the weight that it deserves. Except in the most exceptional circumstances, to deny a jury knowledge of previous convictions should be considered in the second instalment of measures.

My next point concerns minimum sentences. I do not go along with the call for statutory fixed immovable minimum sentences for particular offences. That, for a range of reasons, cannot work. But, and it is an important but, surely it should be the House, comprising elected representatives of the people out there, which establishes the tariff for particular offences.

In particular circumstances, that tariff will have to be adjusted by the judge in charge of the trial, both increased and decreased, but what is so wrong in this day and age with the public, through speeches made by their Members of Parliament in the House, having a direct say in what a minimum sentence might be? Why should not the House say that, for instance, the tariff for a serious assault should be five years' imprisonment?

According to the circumstances of a particular case, the sentence might need to be more or less. It would be a good idea to allow the people who send us here to have a direct, but ultimately not all-deciding, say in the tariffs imposed. The judicial bench would benefit from knowing what our constituents think the minimum sentences should be in particular cases.

All that can be derided on the basis that we should be thinking not about that but about the causes of crime. Of course there are circumstances in which crime will thrive, but the truth about crime is that people are born with free will and some will opt for a wrong, not a right, course of action. However deprived people's social circumstances might be, some will choose a righteous option and others a wicked option. We can talk about the causes of crime until the cows come home, but that proposition will not be affected.

It is bizarre to hear Opposition Members claim to be tough on crime but at the same time talk as though the circumstances which might be a natural breeding ground for crime automatically justify people turning to crime. Perhaps the most pathetic illustration of that this evening was the speech of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). If one were to ask the hon. Gentleman what he thought about any one of the suggestions that have been made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, the hon. Gentleman would have no idea. Either he could not think about the suggestions, or no one had told him about them. The House was none the wiser.

I asked the hon. Gentleman straighforwardly and slowly —I have debated with him before—what he thought was an appropriate way to deal with joyriders. He mumbled about some sort of community project, so that the joyriders could channel their energies into other things. That came from an hon. Member, the leader of whose party, when asked how he felt about the legislation of cannabis said that he was relaxed about it. That is certainly no sort of a lead to give. All that can be said about that speech was that it was consistent with every other one which the hon. Gentleman has made during the past 10 years.

8.53 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) was doing well in the Department of Employment, and I am sorry that he is not still there. He seems to have gone astray in his beliefs.

On the question of law and order, the biggest lawbreakers during the past 10 years have been Tesco and the other large stores which have abused the Shops Act 1950 blatantly by trading illegally on Sundays. If any Home Secretary since 1986 had had any concern about law and order in this country, the first thing that he or she would have done would have been to ensure that the Act was enforced. Many requests have been made in the House, not only to the Home Secretary but to the Prime Minister and many others, in the hope that the Act would be enforced. When we talk about crime, we must remember that a lot of crime is committed in those shops which are illegally open. Since 1986, the Opposition have advocated, either by private Members' Bills or by pressure on the Government, that something be done to change the Act.

I had the luck to be drawn in the ballot immediately after the previous general election to introduce a Bill on Sunday trading on behalf of Keep Sunday Special. Unfortunately, the Bill did not have a response from the House on Report on May 14 and it collapsed. Therefore, I welcome today's statement from the Home Secretary. When the subject is debated on Second Reading, I will support the Bill so that we can examine the three options to replace the Act which will now be available to hon. Members.

It has taken the Government since 1986 to realise that options must be made available to the House. Hon. Members will recall that when the matter was debated previously in 1986, the Government were defeated on a proposal for total deregulation by 14 votes, despite having a majority of over 100. The Government are misguided if they think that hon. Members will have changed their minds since 1986 to the extent that they would agree to total deregulation.

There are no longer four options, as were included initially in the Bill, but three. That has resulted from negotiations involving Keep Sunday Special, the organisation that I support. That organisation is set up by a trust and it expects hon. Members who support it to go around the country advocating policies on their behalf. That is done without champagne breakfasts or lunches and without entertaining hon. Members at their party conferences. The hon. Members do it because of their conviction that there are millions of people who want to keep Sunday, as far as possible, a special day.

Those people have given their opinions to hon. Members. That was reflected by the fact that, on a Friday afternoon, 214 hon. Members came to the House to support my Bill on Sunday trading. I am sure that those hon. Members will be in the House again to support the measures suggested by the Keep Sunday Special campaign and RSAR, a group that is associated with the Marks and Spencer group.

The three options include total deregulation. Although the measure will be decided on a free vote, I am given to understand that the Prime Minister has declared publicly that he is in favour of total deregulation. There can be no doubt that Keep Sunday Special and the RSAR group will succeed with their option, because the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and most of the Cabinet have already declared that they support total deregulation. I assume that, with all that support, the House will vote for the proposal from Keep Sunday Special.

I am concerned when reading the Bill about the offer from the Government of employment protection. I have read and reread the Bill and it is being examined by a number of people regarding the implementation of the Government's proposals for employment protection. The Government must look again at the proposals. I realise that they have had since 1986 to consider what they could have offered on employment protection. The Opposition have asked continually and constantly for employment protection, and did so even in 1985-86 when the House debated the last attempt to provide total deregulation.

It is quite a change of heart for the Government now to be talking about protecting employees, when they have done away with wages councils and with the protection offered by trade unions since 1979. However, when it is a Government Bill about changing the laws on Sunday trading, they concede that they must provide some type of employment protection.

Something should have been done a long time ago about the lawbreakers who are spending millions of pounds to bribe hon. Members to acquiesce to their demands. They are not only bribing hon. Members, but they are blackmailing unions to change their allegiance to the option that they have given to Keep Sunday Special. The lawbreakers are threatening to tear up a properly negotiated agreement for 50,000 trade unionists if those union members were not prepared to acquiesce and agree to support the Shopping Hours Reform Council. That is nothing but blackmail, but, because of the pressure to retain their membership, the trade unions reluctantly conceded.

The Keep Sunday Special campaign and RSAR have agreed jointly that all shops should be able to open for the four Sundays before Christmas. The Keep Sunday Special campaign agreed reluctantly, but in the hope that the House would acknowledge the concessions that it has made since my Bill was presented. The first concession involved DIY stores being allowed to open, the second concerned garden centres being allowed to open with very little restriction and the third involved the extension of the size of shops in question from 1,500 sq ft to 3,000 sq ft. That is the size of the Chamber and should be sufficiently large for a convenience store. We have offered those concessions in the hope that the House will accept that we are trying to ensure that the demand from the public—if there is a demand—is met in what replaces the 1950 Act.

We believe that protection for shopworkers should extend not only to England and Wales but to Scotland and that double time should be paid to anyone who is expected to work on a Sunday.

8.58 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate because it enables me to welcome warmly the priority that the Government have placed on law and order in the Gracious Speech and to welcome the individual proposals that embody that priority. In saying that, I am sure that I endorse and echo the views of my constituents who will also warmly welcome that priority. I look forward to the legislation that will undoubtedly follow and I hope that, when we consider that legislation, we shall do so in a constructive and realistic spirit.

I have been in this place only a short time, but it seems to me that we sometimes fall into two traps. The first is the use of slogans instead of arguments and the second is the creation of unnecessary and artificial divisions where there

[Mr. James Clappison]

should be none. Having listened to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I believe that he fell into both traps. He is fond of the slogan, "Tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime", but having listened to his analysis of those causes I am less than convinced. The longer he spoke about the causes of crime, the more I believed that he was engaging in a diversionary tactic in order to talk about anything but crime.

The hon. Gentleman betrayed the unsoundness of his knowledge of the subject when he said that crime began in the 1970s. He would do well to study the history of crime in this century. Crime was at a stable and low level, with only modest increases, until the middle of the 1950s. Since then, sadly, crime has increased unremittingly under Governments of every complexion. It is very hard to make a connection between the long-term increase in crime and social or economic factors such as unemployment, housing or education, all of which have improved considerably since then.

I also have misgivings about what the hon. Member for Sedgefield said about subcultures creating crime. He is misguided if he is trying to parcel together everyone who lives in inner-city conditions and in the least favoured areas. It needs to be said over and over again that the vast majority of people who live in such circumstances are decent, honest and law-abiding, and that crime is the activity of a minority.

If there is one statistic that is perhaps under-used in the debate on crime, it is that the vast majority of offences are committed by a very small proportion of offenders. Statistics from a recent Home Office study of offenders of a given age group revealed that 7 per cent. of them were responsible for nearly two thirds of crimes. I conclude that living in an inner city or in less advantaged circumstances does not inevitably mean that one turns to crime, but there is a greater likelihood in those conditions of being a victim of crime. Victims of crime are calling for tough action, and I believe that tough action is embodied in the Government's legislative programme.

People are not interested in an artificial debate about whether or not prison works. It is an artificial debate and a diversionary tactic which shows little familiarity with the way in which the sentencing system works. The public want measures to aid the police in detecting crime and in ensuring that criminals are then convicted and properly punished.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield wishes the public to take seriously his claim to be tough on crime. He will be judged on the extent to which he constructively supports the Government's proposals, on whether he supports the wider powers that the Government propose to give to the police and whether he supports DNA testing, all of which will help in the detection of crime. He will be judged on whether or not he supports the Government's proposals for dealing with offenders on bail. The Labour party has called for action. Will Labour Members support the measures or put forward their own constructive ideas? They will be judged on that, but they have said little about it today.

On punishment, I believe that the public will welcome the proposed measures to give the courts greater powers to deal with serious and persistent offenders, particularly young offenders. I warmly welcome the proposal for the secure training order which will improve the existing sentencing powers of the courts. In the case of serious and persistent offenders under 15, the present powers are inadequate to protect the public, being limited to a supervision order with a condition. That is not sufficient for a minority of persistent young offenders.

I also welcome the proposal to increase the maximum sentence to young offender institutions for 15, 16 and 17-year-olds from 12 months to two years. That is a necessary step and will enable the courts to deal properly and satisfactorily with a number of serious offences, particularly those involving youngsters and motor cars.

The Opposition will be judged on the extent to which they support the measures. The measures stand on their own merit and together they constitute a package which shows our determination to tackle crime.

I mentioned that the current approach of the Labour party is limited to a slogan, but even that is more than the Liberal Democrats have produced. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) became agitated earlier in the debate and disputed the suggestion that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) had said that criminal justice was irrelevant.

I do not know what was in the Liberal Democrat press release, but I heard the right hon. Member for Yeovil responding to the Gracious Speech on Thursday, and he devoted far more time and priority to Bosnia then he did to the criminal justice system. Although the situation in Bosnia is serious and tragic, ordinary people in Britain are more concerned about law and order than they are about Bosnia. The right hon. Member for Yeovil said that he had been travelling up and down the country meeting ordinary people. If he is meeting ordinary people who are more concerned about Bosnia than they are about law and order, he has been meeting some pretty strange ordinary people. He is totally out of touch.

I hope that the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party will show a little more humility and constructive understanding of the problems of ordinary people. I challenge both Opposition parties on one particular issue. They have had to eat humble pie on the measure to increase the sentencing powers of the courts by giving the prosecution the right of appeal against over-lenient sentences. When it was first proposed, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) derided it as one of the 64 measures that he said were no good.

When the measure came before the House, the Labour party huffed and puffed. Although his predecessor opposed it tooth and nail, the hon. Member for Sedgefield has had to eat humble pie on that issue, so perhaps he will show a little humility on the Government's proposal to extend the right of the prosecution to appeal against over-lenient sentences for other serious offences. I hope that he does not have to eat humble pie again.

The criminal justice system is important. I endorse entirely the views of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). The public are interested in seeing that crime is detected, that criminals are brought to justice and convicted and that the sentences they receive deter them and others from committing further acts of crime. Ordinary people are crying out for tough action. We can use whatever phrases we like, but people are crying out for leadership and for a sign that those who make laws and decide policy are responding to their concerns.

This package and this priority for law and order respond full measure to that concern. If the hon. Member for

Sedgefield engages in a sterile, unproductive and unconstructive debate on the issue, the Labour party will suffer in the long run because Conservative Members are in tune with what ordinary people want. Ordinary people take the issue seriously, and so do we.

9.9 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): We have had an interesting debate in terms of what has been said inside and outside the House about the Government's policies on education and home affairs.

I was surprised during this evening's debate by the speech of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth). I can remember no hon. Member on either side of the House whose contribution has made the Secretary of State for Education appear to have a modest style, but the Secretary of State was outdone by the hon. Member.

Mr. Patten: Just you wait.

Mrs. Taylor: The Secretary of State says that I must wait. He may not have heard that the hon. Member for City of Chester was promising to be with us for generations. I am not sure what that says about his education.

I welcome the fact that we are achieving a debate on education, although I do not welcome the contributions to education contained in the Queen's Speech. It has been appropriate to debate both home affairs and education, and I am glad that some of my hon. Friends have combined both areas of policy, because much interaction takes place, and much can be learned from the Government's mistakes in each area.

The Government's approach to crime and education shows great failure in their policies. Both issues highlight significant and growing public concern. The interests of individuals and the community should coincide on both issues, although the Government rarely adopt that approach. Hon. Members have shown that the Government's approach is equally inept and incompetent, whether they are trying to fight crime or improve educational standards. Indeed, they are no nearer to tackling the causes of crime than the causes of young people's under-achievement.

The Government still do not realise that the market cannot solve those problems. Nor has anything that I have heard today suggested that Ministers or Conservative Back Benchers consider spending on education as an investment that could reduce crime in the future. They do not seem to have made the basic link between investment in nursery education, in particular, and levels of crime later.

Most worrying is the fact that nothing in the Queen's Speech or the Prime Minister's remarks will improve our children's quality of education or standards of achievement. Last week, when the Queen's Speech should have provided positive proposals to improve education, what did Ministers do? They were too busy to do anything constructive about education, and instead were busy publishing league tables on truancy. Yet again, Ministers were showing that they would rather count a problem than try to tackle it. They proved that they could not even count properly.

Truancy is just one of the many problems to increase in recent years. Ministers sometimes express concern about the problem—quite rightly, because it is a serious issue—but seem to forget that they have been in office for 14 years. Whether we are discussing truancy, under-achievement or discipline in schools, every child in school in Britain today has received all his or her education under a Conservative Government. The fact that the problems are growing and are so severe and so worrying demonstrates the complete failure of 14 years of Conservative government.

I want to consider some of the specific proposals in the Queen's Speech. The proposal on student unions is so irrelevant that the Conservative party could not even manage to mention it in its manifesto at the last election. It may have got the Secretary of State for Education a weak round of applause at the Conservative party conference, but it is irrelevant to any real problems that we face in education.

Student unions are worried that many of their activities—debating, drama and cultural societies, community action, student newspapers and even briefings to hon. Members—could be prohibited, and are definitely under threat from the proposals. Their fears are shared not only by Opposition Members, students and vice-chancellors, but by Conservative Members. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) mentioned, there is widespread agreement among vice-chancellors and students throughout higher education that the proposals will cause difficulties and are irrelevant.

Several Conservative Members are on record as saying that they are worried about the proposals. The hon. Members for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), and for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) who was in the Chamber earlier, have all expressed reservations. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) who has experience as a Minister, told the Secretary of State earlier that it was—I think I remember his words correctly—a small and distracting measure, and he warned of the law of unintended consequences. So I think that we can look forward to difficulties on that score if his predictions come true.

In one of the earlier debates on the Queen's Speech, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) said:

> "I may suggest for a start that the Bill to reform student unions be dropped. I do not think that it would be any great loss. That Bill would be like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Given the recent action taken by the National Union of Students, it is now unnecessary in any event."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 59.]

Those are the views of Conservative Members. I trust that, if the Bill ever reaches this House—I understand that it is to start in another place—they will put their votes where their words are when it comes to a debate or vote. I only wish that the Government and Ministers had spent as much time concentrating on the real issues of student poverty and underfunding in higher education.

Mr. Forman: I believe that I am the only Conservative Member to whom the hon. Lady referred who is present in the Chamber. In case she did not have the benefit of listening closely to my speech, I should like to clarify that I made it clear that I am in favour of the voluntary principle. I have said that from the Dispatch Box and from the Back Benches. However, I want to see proposals that are as simple and workable as possible, because some of the long-term measures that our higher education system has to do in the next five or 10 years are vastly more important than this measure, although I support it.

Mrs. Taylor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman confirms that the measure is irrelevant and should be kicked into touch, and that Ministers should be concentrating on the real problems in education.

Far more important than the proposals for reform of student unions are the Government's half-baked, but thoroughly dangerous, proposals on teacher education. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington also referred to those proposals, with reservations.

An interesting announcement was made by Ministers this afternoon. Perhaps the fact that the Secretary of State did not choose to make that important announcement was even more interesting. The noble Baroness Blatch again stepped in, and determined or announced Government policy. We were told by the noble Baroness that the Department is to issue a new circular about funding courses for classroom assistants. That means, in coded terms, that the Government are dropping the idea of a "mums' army". That is an enormous U-turn, which ought to be welcomed by everyone who has the interests of our children at heart.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I have some difficulty in understanding how one can do a U-turn on what was a consultation document and nothing more. All that my right hon. Friend has done is listen and consult. He is a listening Secretary of State, who has taken on board the representations made to him.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman always had a sense of humour, and we appreciate his attempts, yet again, to rescue the Secretary of State. Time and again, when Ministers have not wanted to appear on television programmes or debate the issues, whom did they send but the valiant hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth? Time and time again, he tries to rescue them. On this occasion, rescuing the Secretary of State is too much even for the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, not least because no one—but no one—supported the barmy idea in the first place.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): The Secretary of State did.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend suggested one person who might have supported the idea, but perhaps the less said about that barmy idea and its supporters the better.

I hope that the Secretary of State will use the debate this evening to confirm that that climb-down is the end—not the postponement—of any such crackpot proposals. I hope that he will learn some lessons from the whole sorry exercise, because it is not just a question of consulting and of being willing to listen: that idea should not have seen the light of day in the first place. I think that the first signs of retreat, which were seen in the summer months when the Secretary of State was away because he was unwell, were made by the noble Baroness. I am glad that she won, but where does it leave the Secretary of State?

I welcome the reconversion of Ministers to the principle that teaching should be a graduate profession. I hold out some hope that perhaps, if the Bill comes before us, we shall be able to explore another idea that the noble Baroness has said she might be willing to consider—the need for a general teaching council. There are, however, still proposals for change before us, and legislation before us about teacher education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) pointed out that the Queen's Speech mentions the Government making new arrangements for teacher training. I agree with him that it is indicative that they are not using the words "teacher education", but I shall point out another problem with the wording in that section of the Queen's Speech, which shows the priorities of Ministers. The speech says:

> "My Government will introduce legislation to establish new arrangements for funding teacher training in England and Wales".

There is no mention of improving quality, but only the word "funding". If we were trying to introduce measures to improve quality, we might all be able to make some progress.

Ministers want more school-based teacher training, and obviously, as several of my hon. Friends, and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, have said, there has to be a balance between elements of higher education and elements of practical experience. However, what worries us especially is the Secretary of State's keenness to talk about a trendy establishment that he seems to think holds such sway in schools throughout the land. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) says, that is drivel, but the Secretary of State continues to repeat those allegations.

The right hon. Gentleman is clearly wrong. He frequently says that he often goes into schools, although I suspect that he cannot do so as often as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West. If the Secretary of State spends so much time in schools, I do not know where he finds all those trendy 1960s people—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield suggests that the Secretary of State looks like a trendy 1960s person, but, although the right hon. Gentleman would like to have been one, he probably never quite made it.

Even if the Secretary of State is right, and our schools are staffed by people educated and trained by the "trendy education establishment", what is the Government's solution to that problem? Ministers want to let the teachers they criticise—those supposed incompetents—to teach not only our children but the next generation of teachers as well. If today's teachers are so bad, why put them in charge of tomorrow's teachers? If there were really a problem, that would only reinforce it.

Last week, I attended a reception at which the Secretary of State spoke. I believe that he surprised everybody there by making the announcement, unusually for him, that change in education could come about only slowly. Coming from a Government who have introduced so many pieces of legislation, and have changed one lot of regulations before the previous lot have been implemented, that was a surprising statement. But the Secretary of State made it, so I do not understand why he is now introducing panic measures.

A pilot scheme was announced in March, then a White Paper was published on 7 September, to which responses had to be submitted by 1 November. Today we are hearing the details of a Bill to be published tomorrow. Presumably that is the Secretary of State's idea of slow, proper preparation. Ministers have still not learned the basic problems caused by such hasty decisions.

There is a great deal wrong with what the Government are trying to do. Several of my hon. Friends have pointed out the difficulties of getting the balance right, not only because trainee teachers need experience of higher

education, but because of the burdens that would be placed on schools if they tried to take on all the training of our teachers.

I welcome the Government's retreat on the "mums' army", but Ministers have a long way to go before they can convince any of us that they have learnt from the blunders of the past year. The Government, and especially the Secretary of State, have a bad record of hasty experiments, and of gambling with our children's future.

One of my main complaints about the Queen's Speech concerns not only what it says but what if fails to say. Some omissions are tragic, because so much needs to be done in education today. Much of that was recently highlighted by the National Commission on Education, whose establishment was welcomed by the Prime Minister.

Therefore, it is surprising that the Secretary of State for Education was so quick to condemn and describe as "rubbish" the commission's recommendations. The commission said that there was a need to move away from confrontation and towards consensus. There is consensus on many education issues, but unfortunately the Secretary of State isolates himself from all the parents, governors and teachers who know which way we should go.

I thought that we were beginning to make some progress, because yesterday we seemed to have scored a famous victory by winning over the Prime Minister to one of our most prized policies. The *Daily Express* headline stated:

"Nursery place for every three and four-year-old."

Mr. Kilfoyle: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Secretary of State was raised by hand by the Jesuits, one of whose maxims is, "Give me a child until the age of seven and I will give you the man." Does my hon. Friend agree that the Jesuits got it right but that their illustrious pupil, the Secretary of State, has got it wrong?

Mrs. Taylor: All the evidence is that the early years are the most critical for any child. I hope that the Secretary of State will announce another U-turn on Government policy by telling us that he accepts this approach and will give a new, direct commitment. However, I am not sure about that, because, while the Prime Minister has stated his position, we also have the views of the Chancellor when he was Secretary of State for Education. He said:

"Enthusiasm for nurseries is very middle class."

I did not realise that Ministers were so against the middle class, but that was how the Chancellor dismissed nurseries. He went on to describe as rubbish the commitment by the previous Prime Minister that was made more than 20 years ago.

Why has the Secretary of State been so quiet on this issue? At Question Time, it is always the junior Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Schools, who answers on his behalf. The junior Minister refused to acknowledge that nursery education for three and four-year-olds was the best start we could give our children. He said that I was obsessed with nursery education. I am happy to plead guilty to that.

The item in the *Daily Express* refers to the Prime Minister's plan, not speculation, for creating 1 million places and calls it the biggest schools revolution this century. It states that the Prime Minister is very keen to provide nursery education for all three-year-olds and above. It says that he is mad keen on it all. I did not realise that my obsession with nursery education was shared by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Don Foster: After that article appeared, I wrote to the Prime Minister. I congratulated him, and said that I entirely supported the views that were expressed in the article. Just half an hour ago, I received a letter from 10 Downing street in which the Prime Minister's private secretary informs me that he has passed the letter to the Secretary of State for him to reply.

Mrs. Taylor: In that case, in a few minutes the Secretary of State will be able to reply to that letter as well as to my questions. I hope that he will give us some clear answers, because there is not just a link between educational achievement and nursery education but a serious and important link between nursery education and crime, which was pointed out by the chief constable of Thames Valley police recently. He said:

"We really have got to start looking at this. It is really important hard evidence of something that works. Pre-school education is very important. It is at that stage that children learn habits. They learn right and wrong and life skills, so that when they get into school they can grasp what the school is teaching them and grow up as mature adults. If they don't, when they get to school, they are lost and just become completely alienated from society and that is where crime starts."

All of us, in the Chamber and in the country, have a vested interest in putting money into nursery education so that we can provide the best for our children and expect the best from them. If we neglect early education, as the Government have done, we shall all pay a significant price for that failure.

9.35 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): We have had an excellent and wide-ranging debate, and I shall do my best to reply to as many points as I can in the 25 minutes that I have.

I begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) on an exceptionally important speech on the future of the Province. My right hon. and learned Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland were on the Bench to listen to his speech, which was important to those of us who were lucky enough to hear it, and will deepen with significance as people read it.

I also thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind personal words in my direction. He knows that, like many others on the Government Benches, I am deeply devoted to the Province and all its people. We wish to do all we can to help that part of the kingdom, which we want to see as peaceful, happy and contented as the rest. Speaking as Secretary of State for Education, I feel that we in England can learn some things from Northern Ireland.

We had a first eleven of speeches from my hon. Friends, kicked off by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman). I shall return to answer two of his questions specifically. He was followed by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale), for Beverley (Mr. Cran)—he made all too short a speech—and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who made a characteristic speech. She was right to highlight the connection between drugs and crime, which I know is high on the agenda of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

I was extremely interested to hear the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby).

[Mr. John Patten]

I shall be glad to relay to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary my hon. Friend's welcome for his important announcement about side-handled batons.

We also had excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), who was in characteristic forthright style. We also had a tip-top performance from that genuinely subfusc character, my hon. Friend the Member for Chester (Mr. Brandreth).

Almost last but not least, we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls). What he had to say about individuals' responsibilities and making, at quite a young age, the choice about growing straight or crooked was worth repeating. Last but not least, we had my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who spoke with vim and verve for 10 minutes without a note. I wish that he could have spoken for longer.

Today's debate has ranged from home affairs to education, and we have touched on Sunday trading, which will be an interesting episode when we have a vote or two on it. First, I will concentrate on education issues, and I will then move on to home affairs—in particular to the points made by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). I had not heard him speak before; I will explain my reaction to his speech a bit nearer 10 pm.

Our Education Bill has been introduced in another place today, and will be published tomorrow. I have written to hon. Members in England about its main provisions and the very important announcement I made today about primary teaching. The Bill is modest in size, much more so than the important monster that was taken through the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools.

The letter from the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has been passed to me. I will pass it on to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools to answer, because he is the expert on these issues.

Although the Bill is modest in size, it tackles areas of great importance, and takes forward the key principles that have informed all our education reforms: quality, diversity, choice and accountability. Those are the four themes that have underlined our education reforms since 1988.

Teacher training is an important issue. If I could wind the clock back 14 years to 1979, I wish we had started with the reform of teacher training. That would have given us a firm foundation for many of the changes that we have made in education. We may have left that for a little while, but we will put it right in the next few months. The Bill will start shortly in another place and then come to the House.

As for teacher training, the new agency will bring together the work of funding all types of courses. It will provide full and up-to-date information about routes into teaching, and accrediting those offering courses. It will be required to put the quality of teacher training at the heart of its funding decisions. In future, we will link the quality of teacher training to the funding of teacher training, and quite rightly so.

The Teacher Training Agency will encourage diversity by supporting courses run by schools as well as by higher education. In a moment, I will turn to the point about higher education that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington.

Those courses will be supported as long as they meet the standards set by the Secretary of State, and will be monitored by the independent education inspectorate Ofsted, which is an entirely independent department of state, free from the direct control of any Secretary of State.

There will be an increasing choice of courses of differing lengths and design, as well as courses provided by different bodies. All those conducting such courses will be held accountable for the quality of what they provide, with the accreditation given by the agency, and will be subject to review in the light of inspection evidence.

I see that the Official Ulster Unionist Benches are now filling up. I am afraid that the hon. Gentlemen are too late to hear the compliments that I have paid to their leader, and they will be able to read them in *Hansard* tomorrow, but they can obtain videos, which are freely available.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: I will not give way. The hon. Lady made a frivolous speech, and I will not give her the opportunity to make a frivolous intervention.

Speaking of frivolous speeches, where is the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who made a totally ludicrous speech? He does not have the courtesy to turn up and represent the Liberal party, which shows the contempt that the Liberal party have for the parliamentary process.

Mr. Don Foster *rose*——

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman should sit down; he had his moment in the sun earlier. He should go and find his hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland.

The reform of teacher training courses is already in hand. The new agency, with its statutory objectives of higher standards of teaching, the promotion of teaching as a career——

Mr. Don Foster: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. I have the feeling that it is a point of frustration, but I must listen to it.

Mr. Foster: Would it not have been more appropriate for the Secretary of State for Education to give way in order to enable me to explain that my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland has left the Chamber in order to go to bed because he is ill?

Mr. Patten: In that case, I wish the hon. Gentleman a return to full health. *[Interruption.]* In any event, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has just observed, the hon. Gentleman is normally allowed out only for the afternoon.

Higher-quality and more efficient training, and school involvement in that training, will give added impetus to the reforms. Let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington that we certainly support high-quality higher education institutions; provided that they meet the quality objectives, such institutions need not fear that they will have no role to play in the future.

The progress of reform was taken a step further today by my announcement of new standards for primary teacher training courses. We now have robust criteria for all primary and secondary courses, requiring more time in schools and allowing schools to play an active part in designing and running courses. I think that that will spread:

our schools contain many excellent teachers who—as can be seen by anyone who visits one of the consortia now carrying out teacher training under the experimental scheme—are full of enthusiasm for the new method of training in the schools themselves, as are their students. Serving teachers will be able to bring a practical and professional perspective to bear on training.

As I announced today, for primary teachers we have greatly increased the amount of time to be spent on the core subjects of the national curriculum. Within that framework, we want teacher training colleges to place special emphasis on the basic skills of reading and arithmetic. After all, it was Ofsted—the independent inspectorate—that found, according to a report that it published recently, that only about 50 per cent. of all new entrants to primary teaching felt that they were adequately prepared to teach reading at all. In many instances, that was after four years in a teacher training college.

We need to put that right, as a matter of urgency. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members cannot even do decent joined-up shouting; the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) cannot even tell a joined-up joke about the Jesuits. I will tell him a few more behind the Chair after 10 pm

If children do not master the basic skills at an early age, they will never reach their full potential. New primary teachers really must have the best possible training, so that they can help to raise standards at this crucial stage of a child's education. The new circular builds on teacher training reforms that have already been introduced. Extensive consultation—to which I am very partial—has revealed strong support for a great emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. It has also revealed a great demand from mature, experienced people to embark on teaching and helping in our schools. I think we should welcome that.

The development of a new specialist teacher assistant certificate, which I have announced today, will ensure that mature people who are already making a valuable contribution as teacher assistants can extend their role by receiving specialist training—and, of course, gaining qualifications that can then be accredited towards the later gaining of qualified teacher status if they want. Such people play a very important role.

I represent quite a few students in Oxford. Over the years, I have become used to them and their doings. I have thought and consulted long and hard about our legislation on student unions, which was introduced today. Choice and acountability are the key aims of our student union reforms. We should remember that about half those entering universities this autumn are aged 24 and over: they are mature people, not people who have just left school.

We should also remember, with some pride, that this autumn about 70,000 extra students can be seen on our university campuses. We have created six or seven brand new universities this autumn. We should remember the Robbins principle, and the idea of open access for all. Over a 10 or 15-year period, a few universities were created, each containing 2,000 or 3,000 people. This autumn—thanks to Conservative Government policy—we have seen a massive expansion in university education. It is important that those entering universities—students of all ages—have the basic right to choose which all of us support.

We recognise that campus unions can provide some valuable services which should be accessible to all, with public funding where necessary. However, we also want activities on a voluntary and opt-in basis. We wish to protect core services, while at the same time treating students—many of whom are adults—as adults, allowing them to choose whether to join a student union.

The proposals will also promote democratic and financial accountability in student unions by requiring universities and colleges to establish codes of practice governing their conduct. An important feature of those codes will be an appeals mechanism for students who feel that they are being unfairly treated by their student union. None of that is a threat to ordinary student activities. Of course, where public money is not available, individual students of all ages can make the choice to pay for the service or activity in which they wish to participate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington raised two important points in relation to the submission by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals—a body that he and I know well and respect—and asked me to tell the House why I am not able and not minded to accept its recommendations. I shall write to him at greater length and place a copy of my reply in the library so that all right hon. and hon. Members can see it.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): How kind.

Mr. Patten: It is a pleasure. It is all part of the service.

The CVCP has proposed building in charity law by developing existing guidelines on what constitutes inappropriate activity for a charitable organisation such as a student union. I am grateful to the CVCP for recognising that there is a need for reform. It is clear that we are at one on reforming student unions, but the CVCP approach would fail to satisfy two important Government policy objectives.

First, its proposals do not include the voluntary principle that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington and I share. Secondly, its approach would relieve universities and colleges of their responsibility for ensuring that student unions are fully accountable and operate according to a clear code of practice. Again, accountability would be lifted. For those two reasons, I have rejected the CVCP proposals, having considered them carefully.

It is moving to my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of Education to find such a high volume of correspondence from students who support our proposals. My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) received a letter on 18 November from the Wales area collegiate forum. It begins:

"Dear Mr. Boswell,

I am writing to congratulate the Government on its commitment to the reforming of student unions as outlined in the Queen's Speech on Thursday. May I also take this opportunity to thank both your staff and yourself for all the hard work that has been done in order for the proposals to be one step closer to the Statute Books."

The chairman of the forum, Mr. Justin Powell-Tuck, from Lampeter, continues:

"I know I speak on behalf of all my members and for the silent majority of students who will welcome more freedom on their campus as well as the choice to join their student union or the NUS. Even some executive members of my student union at Lampeter secretly support the proposed changes which should end the dictatorial power, corruption, lack of competition and political representation within theirs and the parent organisations."

Mrs. Ann Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I am not giving way, Madam Speaker. I have listened carefully to the hon. Member for Dewsbury on many occasions in the past, but this afternoon I was given the chance to listen to the hon. Member for Sedgefield. I had never heard him speak before, and have been kept from him. I thought his mode of delivery rather charming. However, when I began to listen rather carefully, it became quite clear that he was spending all his time trying to reconcile his principles with left-wing policies with which he does not agree.

We listened to a very uncomfortable shadow Home Secretary. He sat demurely on the Bench and was a little camera shy during the opportunities provided by my right hon. and learned Friend to intervene in his speech. Indeed, he maintained his right to silence throughout almost the whole of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech.

There was thorough cross-questioning, and every time that the hon. Gentleman did get to his feet, we searched vainly for the substance of his comments. I could not work out where I had heard his answers before. Then I suddenly realised that we were looking at one of the creations of the hon. Member for Hartlepool when he was simply Mr. Mandelson, the Svengali of the Labour party. He was extremely fond of creating for the Labour party a number of public relations persons rather than a number of politicians.

When looking at and listening to the hon. Member for Sedgefield, I was also reminded of Senator Gary Hart. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members must remember the question about Senator Hart—"Where's the beef?" It is quite clear—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I have heard enough sedentary interruptions.

Mr. Patten: It was quite clear—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) must desist.

Mr. Patten: There was no substance to the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield. There was no description of any Labour party policy on crime. It is clear that Sedgefield is a policy-free zone; it is a beef-free zone. I was puzzled why he should behave like that, when he is clearly not a stupid person—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East must stop.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We are questioning the Secretary of State on the important policy issue of nursery education.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is not questioning the Secretary of State on anything. The right hon. Gentleman is replying to the debate.

Mr. Turner: Why does not the Secretary of State answer instead of waffling on——

Madam Speaker: Order. I am not responsible for the Secretary of State's answers.

Mr. Patten: Indeed, Madam Speaker, you are not responsible for my answers.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield clearly is not a stupid person. Because he does not believe in anything he says, he does not say anything of substance about Labour's policy on law and order. Indeed, I do not think that he actually believes in Labour party policy any more. This afternoon we have seen the beginnings of an early middle-age political crisis—someone who has realised that he is in the wrong party. I have the authority of the Government Whip, the hon. Member for Stevenage (Mr. Wood), to say that we would happily consider an application from the hon. Member for Sedgefield to join us on this side of the House.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is really a Tory—and by the look on the face of the Labour party Chief Whip, the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), he thinks so too. The hon. Member for Sedgefield should have seen the faces of those behind him when he was speaking this afternoon. They could see the words "Tory, Tory" coming out in bubbles around his head.

The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind. Either he throws himself behind left-wing policies and votes against my right hon. and learned Friend's important Bill, or he will have to do what he did on the 1991 Act, when he voted against longer prison sentences for violent and sex offenders, against an increase in the minimum time to be served by all prisoners, against tougher and extended supervision on release for violent and sex offenders and against parents being made more responsible for their children. The hon. Member for Sedgefield was against all those things. After his performance this afternoon, come back the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), all is forgiven.

We have had no serious response to the Gracious Speech from the Labour party this afternoon. We have had nothing of any substance at all. We have heard this afternoon the authentic voice of Britain's permanent party of opposition, able only to shout and squawk, unable at all to make any serious policy pronouncements. What a difference from the run-up to the first Attlee Government, when there was something on which to bite. What a difference from the noble Lord Wilson when he was leading the Labour party. At least they stood for something. At least they had some ideas.

We have seen both in the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield and certainly in the speech——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Air Cadets

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew MacKay.]*

10 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces who is on duty to reply to my debate. I understand that he is unwell and suffering from ear problems. As someone who from time to time has had similar problems I sympathise and am grateful that he is on duty tonight.

When I joined the Air Training Corps in 1943 I never imagined that 50 years later I would still be directly involved in the corps or that tonight I would be introducing a debate on the future of the air cadets.

Tonight I shall look into the way in which I and other young people were motivated into joining the air cadets. I shall also touch on the history of the air cadets and examine the benefits for the individuals who join and also the massive benefit to the nation that comes from members of the corps. I shall look also at the recruitment situation for the Royal Air Force, which it directly enjoys from its control and funding of the air cadets.

First, I shall say a few words about the air cadets and their history. The air cadet organisation is a term used for the combined Air Training Corps and the CCF, or combined air force, RAF sections. The ATC had its origins in the air defence cadet corps and the first of the squadrons paraded in 1938, before the second world war. When those squadrons became part of the ATC in 1941 they had an "F" put after their number to denote that they were founder squadrons.

The aim of the ATC in 1941 was to provide pre-service, part-time training for young men destined to join the Royal Air Force or Fleet Air Arm. The corps reached its peak of 210,000 cadets during the second world war. In 1983, the rules of the corps were changed to allow girls to become members.

The corps was established by royal warrant in 1941 and the most recent royal warrant was in February 1990. His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh is the Air Commodore-in-Chief of the corps. The aims of the air cadets are, first, to promote and encourage among young people a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force; secondly, to provide training that will be useful both in service and civilian life; and, thirdly, to foster the spirit of adventure and develop qualities of leadership and good citizenship.

Later, I shall examine the benefits of those objectives, particularly as they will affect social values such as self-discipline and the wider preparation for life as mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently at the Lord Mayor's banquet. But before doing so I shall remind the House that the command and control of air cadets is via headquarters air cadets and that functional control is via the AOC and commandant at RAF college, Cranwell. That, in turn, is under the full command of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Support Command. All that will be changed next year when the new command for training and personnel is set up.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the cost of running the air cadets in global terms is £30 million, of which, in 1993-94, the cash budget is £20·06 million. Consequently, it is wise to consider how the budget is spent, what, if any, are the areas where substantial reductions can be made and, if those reductions were to be made, what impact that would be likely to have on the air cadets and in the community.

First, we must recognise that the air cadets today is a large organisation. There are more than 49,000 cadets, more than 10,000 adult volunteer staff and about 5,000 civilian committee members. Therefore, the air cadets makes a substantial contribution towards involving adults and cadets in an organised, disciplined and controlled environment. That is done through the 928 squadrons and 83 detached flights which are part of 40 wings and seven regions. In addition, there are 186 combined cadet force RAF sections in schools, most of which are public schools.

Many of the 928 squadrons and 40 wings are located in the large urban areas and a considerable number are located in and service inner-city and deprived areas. If those squadrons did not exist, other Government Departments and local authorities would be faced with the extra cost of providing additional youth facilities for the youngsters who are at present members of the air cadets.

Ministers urged the cadet forces to become involved with the Department of the Environment's inner-city initiative and, as I said earlier, without the air cadets the Department of the Environment in England and the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices would be faced with the extra costs of providing additional youth facilities in place of the squadrons. I doubt whether they could provide, or would be capable of providing, an air interest as well. Therefore, many thousands of young, air-minded youngsters would be deprived of the vehicle through which their interests could be explored and nurtured. In addition, the RAF would be deprived of a source of good, highly motivated, disciplined recruits.

What is it that makes the air cadets a healthy, viable and vibrant organisation today, 52 years after the Air Training Corps was established? First, it is the flying and the gliding that attracts young people. That is what attracted me in 1943 and it is still a magnet that draws in young people today and probably, more importantly, keeps them in once they join. Secondly, it is the disciplined and organised environment which a uniformed body projects. Thirdly, it is the character building and self-discipline that the challenge of flying and gliding provides. I make it clear to the House that, without flying and gliding, the air cadets would be just another uniformed youth organisation.

The aim of the air cadets is to give each cadet one air experience flight per year and to give each new cadet an air experience gliding trip in his or her first year of service and then to provide suitable cadets with progressive gliding training. That is achieved at 13 geographically suitable locations—geographically suitable in as much as the squadrons can travel to the locations without having to spend hours reaching them.

Thirteen air experience Chipmunk flights are found at those locations. Those flights are staffed by a small cadre of full-time pilots and groundcrew, and there is an establishment of volunteer reserve pilots who, on a part-time and unpaid basis, fly the cadets. They have 48 Chipmunk aircraft, plus 12 more which are in use as reserve aircraft. The pilots and aircraft log up 24,500 flying hours per year.

The 27 volunteer gliding schools are similarly spread geographically. Those are manned by volunteer reserve officers and volunteer civilian instructors who fly cadets at weekends on a part-time and unpaid basis. There is also the air cadets central gliding school at RAF Syerston, which is

[Mr. Bill Walker]

manned by full-time officers and groundcrew. The unit trains and tests the volunteer reserve and the civilian gliding instructors and also provides courses for cadets. The unit is an essential part of the training organisation and without it one could not maintain the volunteer schools.

The air cadets have a fleet of 150 modern gliders, of which 52 are motor gliders. I am pleased to tell the House that I am in current flying practice on the Vigilant motor glider. I am the vice-president of the British Gliding Association and I can say that the quality of the instruction and the professionalism of the air cadets gliding organisation is respected, admired, and envied throughout aviation and gliding both within the United Kingdom and abroad.

A 16-year-old who has undergone training with the air cadet gliding organisation and who has flown an air cadet motor or conventional glider solo is unlikely ever to seek a challenge or thrill by stealing cars or by joyriding. He or she will already have had his or her thrill. There is a real risk and a danger in aviation and only by mastering the risks and controlling the danger can the youngsters see their own self-development.

In my time, I have sent hundreds of cadets off on their first solo flights. It is a wonder to watch the increasing personal stature and confidence which stem from that flight. It is also wonderful to see the pride with which they receive their gliding wings and wear them on their uniforms. It is from such cadets that future squadron officers and volunteer gliding school staff will come. That is why the air cadet central gliding school and the RAF volunteer reserve training centre are important. Air cadets grow and train their own future officers and instructors.

There are also two adventure training centres, and 100 part-time non-publicly funded centres which are run by the wings. It is there that the Duke of Edinburgh award and other personal development practices are carried out. The policy for air cadets is directed by the RAF Board, and is advised by the Air Cadet Council through the Air Member of Personnel. The president of the Air Cadet Council is my hon. Friend the Minister. The council consists of seven civilian regional chairmen, a representative from Northern Ireland, the Air Officer Commanding Air Cadets and a representative of S10.

The Air Cadet Council's role is to recommend changes to the RAF Board to improve the corps' efficiency and image. It is responsible to the RAF Board for the overall running of the Air Training Corps and to formulate general policy. As well as the military input, there is an important civilian input into the policy and running of the corps. It all sounds very good. Why, then, am I raising a question about the future?

Surely any organisation that provided 3,275 gold, silver and brozen Duke of Edinburgh awards in 1992, that provides citizenship training, sports, adventure training, shooting and community projects and which sends cadets abroad on international air cadet exchange schemes and to Easter and summer camps, which were attended by 19,700 cadets in 1993 and where 17,400 places are proposed for 1994 must have a rosy future. That must be so when the same organisation has, in the past five years, provided the Royal Air Force with 60 per cent. of all officer recruits, 66 per cent. of all direct entry officers and 28 per cent. of all airmen and when it has also been actively involved in many inner-city initiatives. However, I am worried about the future, as is every volunteer member of the corps. Why is that? Let me explain.

When I hear that, under the alternative options or the alternative assumptions, or any other form of "alternative", it is proposed to make cuts—or savings, as they are called —of 10 per cent. or, worse still, of 20 per cent., in the budget, I become desperately worried. I said that I joined the Air Training Corps in 1943. Since then, I have had the good fortune to have served full time in the Royal Air Force and given more than 12 years of my adult life to running an ATC squadron. I have also commanded a volunteer gliding school and served full time at the central gliding school. I have held a volunteer reserve commission and an A1 instructor category for almost 40 years.

Let us say that granddad has been around the air cadets for a long time. He has lived through many changes, but what has not changed is the fact that it is the gliding and flying which attract young people to and then keep them in the corps. I get the same thrill today when I get into an aircraft or glider as I did as a cadet in 1943. I can remember my first solo flight in a Tiger Moth and my first solo in a glider as if they were yesterday. I still get an enormous thrill in sending young people on their first solo flight and yet, if savings of the magnitude proposed are to be achieved, I believe that gliding or flying has to suffer. A significant number of youngsters would be deprived of the opportunity to fly if, for example, a substantial number of air experience flights were to be stopped. That is what will happen if there are reductions of 10 per cent. or 20 per cent.

I strongly urge the Minister to examine all the RAF's assets before any hasty decisions are taken. I suggest that we examine not only air experience flights but the university air squadrons. There may be opportunities to make savings via the merging of the units and the tasks, the air experience flights and the university air squadrons.

Way back in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the volunteer reserve schools did all the flying for the air cadets. They provided all the air experience flying and it was very happy flying because it was largely in Tiger Moths, which the cadets loved. I also remember what happened in the mid-1950s when the volunteer reserve schools were closed. We set up the air experience flights because that was the most cost-effective way of providing cadets with air experience.

Perhaps the time has come for a much closer look at the university air squadrons, which I believe that we must keep —let me make that clear—because they, too, play an essential part in making young people air minded and in giving them the right attitude to the Royal Air Force. We should take a closer look at the university air squadrons and air experience flights—their sights, tasks and activities —and consider a cost-effective replacement for the Chipmunk for air experience flights and the Bulldog for the university air squadrons.

I seek from my hon. Friend the Minister an assurance that the importance of flying and gliding will be maintained at their current levels; otherwise I fear for the well-being of the Air Cadets. Once volunteers lose faith, it is difficult, if not impossible, to restore it.

Birth is easier than resuscitation, so I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the proposal to cut the pay of the volunteer reserve officers who get paid when they attend full-time camps and courses. That is the only time they get paid. I suggest that camp is essential and that courses are a must because they are the only way in which we can train

our people to take command of units, to fly gliders and take air experience flights and possibly to command future air experience flights.

I also remind my hon. Friend that all evenings and weekends are unpaid and that volunteer reserve officers give their time for nothing. The volunteers give more than six days free for every day for which they get paid. I suggest that is a good deal for the Treasury, which may wish to consider expanding it elsewhere.

If we want to get officers into training and camp, there is not much scope for a reduction in pay. I mentioned birth and resuscitation. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Prime Minister's comments at the Lord Mayor's banquet. He said:

"Basic social values like self-discipline. Respect for the law. Concern for others. A great acceptance of personal responsibility and obligations . . . It is a wider preparation for life and it involves parents as well as teachers".

He was talking about education, but his words also fit the Air Cadets. He spoke about learning the values of our society as well as the rules. Some people will say that those values are obvious; I suggest that some people have forgotten them.

I am not overlooking the time, as I have an arrangement with the Front Bench. Let us not forget the Prime Minister's comments. Air Cadets provide an environment for the values that he mentioned. If we reduce the flying and gliding, the motivation for joining and remaining in the corps will be adversely affected. Tomorrow's officers and instructors will go elsewhere and the air cadet units will wither and die.

In inner-city areas and elsewhere there will be fewer opportunities for young people to learn to be good citizens. RAF recruiting will be adversely affected and other Government Departments will be faced with funding alternative projects. Savings of 10 or 20 per cent. are not realistic. I seek an assurance that no hasty action will be taken to achieve such reductions and that the future of the Air Cadets will be secure under the Government.

10.23 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I congratulate my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on securing the debate. I also draw attention to the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who is a qualified pilot; for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), from the armed forces parliamentary scheme; for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay), whose knowledge of defence is second almost to none; and for Stevenage (Mr. Wood), who has also served with my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East in the Ministry of Defence and the Northern Ireland Office. Their interest is worthy of note just as is the fact that no interest whatsoever has been shown by the Opposition.

We are talking not just about air cadet organisations; we are talking about an inspiring group of young people who have the ability not only to bring themselves together during their spare time to become part of our forces but to learn discipline and dedication both to the country and to the Air Training Corps.

To some degree, all the comments that I shall make about the air cadets will apply broadly to the other cadet forces, which also do an excellent job. There are just over 40,000 cadets in the Air Training Corps and some 8,[illegible] in the RAF sections of the combined cadet force, giving a total of nearly 50,000 cadets. There are more than 900 squadrons divided into 40 wings throughout the United Kingdom. The country is divided into seven regions, each with a regional commandant, and the permanent staff throughout the country numbers just over 250. However, that is clearly insufficient to run a successful air cadet organisation and I must therefore pay tribute to the many volunteers—as my hon. Friend said, the majority of whom are unpaid—who give their time to the running of the corps.

One of the objectives of the Air Training Corps is to foster a spirit of adventure and develop qualities of leadership and good citizenship. Of equal importance, the corps also promotes and encourages a practical interest in aviation and provides training that will be useful in the services and civilian life.

My hon. Friend described how the corps meets those objectives. He mentioned flying, gliding, camps at RAF stations at home and abroad, sport, adventure training, shooting and, equally important, through the community projects, citizenship training. He mentioned the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and he may take comfort from the fact—I hope that the House will be impressed—that in 1992 some 3,275 gold, silver and bronze awards were made to air cadets.

Cadet forces do not exist as recruiting agencies for the armed forces, although it is clear that membership of them encourages an interest in the services among young people considering a life in one of them as a career. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence is president of the Air Cadet Council and takes a keen interest in the cadet forces. He is especially keen to strengthen the links between the cadets and the community at large and, to that end, officials from the MOD have been tasked with finding ways to involve the cadets to an even greater extent in the local community. Initiatives such as the Department of the Environment's action for cities programme and city challenge aim to bring together and give new focus to a range of programmes to promote regeneration in inner-city areas.

Some 80 Air Training Corps squadrons currently exist in the areas identified for those initiatives. Most urban units are already thriving but could still benefit on similar lines to those involved in the schemes, as nearly all serve a community need.

The cadets have a high awareness of the need to consider the communities from which they come and those less fortunate than most. Many individuals and organisations have benefited from the kindness, generosity and unstinting help given by the cadets' volunteer staff and parents. That is because the essential column of the corps' philosophy is to promote good citizenship. Discipline is a much maligned work these days and there is more to good citizenship than just that. But the cadets foster values that would do much to engender a proper sense of social responsibility and altruism if applied more widely. My hon. Friend's description of that was graphic.

The Ministry of Defence must ensure that we achieve value for the funds allocated to various activities. The air cadet organisation is no different in having to prove its cost-effectiveness and efficiency in these difficult times. A balance must be made between the aims of the air cadets and the value for money which they represent to the MOD. The air officer commanding the air cadets has recently undertaken a review of the organisation and implemented

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several measures to bring the organisation into line with the changes taking place within the Ministry of Defence as a whole.

Wide-ranging changes face the armed services and cadet organisations cannot escape some of the effects of those changes. The air cadets must consider ways to increase efficiency still further and ensure that value for money is obtained in all its activities. Each year, we must consider carefully its funding arrangements in competition with other demands on the defence budget. But I confirm that we have no intention of changing the spirit or traditions of the ATC.

A recent internal report made a number of recommendations for improvement in the management and financial procedures of the corps and all the recommendations on the financial procedures have been, or are being, put into action.

On voluntary support for the corps, it is heartening that more than 10,000 adult volunteer staff are assisting the Air Training Corps and Royal Air Force sections of the combined cadet force. There are also 5,000 civilian members. Of those volunteers, many people have served in the Royal Air Force volunteer reserve training corps. The many adult warrant officers, civilian instructors and chaplains all play a vital role in meeting the corps' objectives.

We can be proud of the air cadet organisation. At the same time, we must recognise that it is not immune from changes taking place within the Ministry or from the severe budgetary pressures facing us. None the less, the cadets are given and will continue to be given exciting and demanding challenges and excellent training. Those are solid bricks for them to build on for a career in the armed services or civilian life. Moreover, in some of the most deprived urban areas they provide a focus towards becoming good citizens.

The air cadets represent the only RAF presence in many parts of the United Kingdom and provide a focus for many young people in inner-city areas and remote rural communities. In return, the RAF achieves a high profile in society as a whole and, as an adjunct, a high proportion of well-motivated recruits stay in the service longer and give a better return on our training investment.

The House is therefore grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for raising this important subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 24 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(1) the total number of Questions to Ministers or other Members which stood on the Order Paper, distinguishing those set down for oral, written priority and written answer respectively, the number of days upon which replies to Questions for oral answers were given in the House; and the total number of Questions for oral answer to which such answers were given in the House;

(2) the total number of Notices of Motions given for an early day;

(3) the number of Members ordered to withdraw from the House under Standing Order No. 42 (Disorderly conduct), showing separately the orders given in the House and those given in Committee; and the Members suspended from the service of the House under Standing Order No. 43 (Order in debate) or otherwise, distinguishing whether the offence was committed in the House or in Committee, the period of such suspension, the number of occasions on which more than one Member was so suspended having jointly disregarded the authority of the Chair, and the number of occasions on which the attention of the House was called to the need for recourse to force to compel obedience to the Speaker's direction; and

(4) the number of public petitions presented to the House distinguishing separately those brought to the Table at the times specified by Standing Order No. 133 (Time and manner of presenting petitions).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

CLOSURE OF DEBATE AND ALLOCATION OF TIME

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(A) applications of Standing Order No. 35 (Closure of debate)—

(1) in the House and in Committee of the whole House, under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before House or Committee when claimed	Whether in House or Committee	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(2) in the Standing Committees under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before Committee when claimed	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

(B) applications of Standing Order No. 28 (Powers of Chair to propose question)—

(1) in the House and in Committee of the whole House, under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Whether in House or Committee	Whether claimed in respect of Motion or Amendment	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(2) in the Standing Committees under the following heads:

1	2	3	4
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Whether claimed in respect of Motion or Amendment	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(C) the number of Bills in respect of which allocation of time orders (distinguishing where appropriate orders supplementary to a previous order) were made under Standing Order No. 81 (Allocation of time to Bills), showing in respect of each Bill—

(i) the number of sittings allotted to the consideration of the Bill in Standing Committee by any report of a Business Sub-Committee under Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) agreed to by the Standing Committee, and the number of sittings of the Standing Committee pursuant thereto; and

(ii) the number of days or portions of days allotted by the allocation of time order and any supplementary order to the consideration of the Bill at any stage in the House or in committee, together with the number of days upon which proceedings were so taken in the House or in committee.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION: Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(A) the numbers of Instruments subject to the different forms of parliamentary procedure and those for which no parliamentary procedure is prescribed by statute (1) laid before the House; and (2) considered by the Joint Committee and Select Committee on Statutory Instruments respectively pursuant to their orders of reference, setting out the grounds on which Instruments may be drawn to the special attention of the House under Standing Order No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) and specifying the number of Instruments so reported under each of these grounds; and

(B) the numbers of Instruments considered by a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c., and by the House respectively, showing the number where the Question on the proceedings relating thereto was put forthwith under paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(A) the numbers of Instruments subject to the different forms of parliamentary procedure and those for which no parliamentary procedure is prescribed by statute (1) laid before the House; and (2) considered by the Joint Committee and Select Committee on Statutory Instruments respectively pursuant to their orders of reference, setting out the grounds on which Instruments may be drawn to the special attention of the House under Standing Order No. 124 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee) and specifying the number of Instruments so reported under each of these grounds; and

(B) the numbers of Instruments considered by a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c., and by the House respectively, showing the number where the Question on the proceedings relating thereto was put forthwith under paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

PRIVATE BILLS AND PRIVATE BUSINESS

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(1) The number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills, Bills for the confirmation of Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders introduced into this House, and brought from the House of Lords, and of Acts passed, specifying also the dates of the House's consideration of the several stages of such Bills;

(2) All Private Bills, Hybrid Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which were reported on by Committees on Opposed Bills or by Committees nominated by the House or partly by the House and partly by the Committee of Selection, together with the names of the selected Members who served on each Committee; the first and also the last day of the sitting of each Committee; the number of days on which each Committee sat; the number of days on which each selected Member served; the number of days occupied by each Bill in Committee; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been proved; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been not proved; and in the case of Bills for confirming Provisional Orders, whether the Provisional Order ought or ought not to be confirmed;

(3) All Private Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which were referred by the Committee of Selection to the Committee on Unopposed Bills, together with the names of the Members who served on the Committee; the number of days on which the Committee sat; and the number of days on which each Member attended;

(4) The number of Bills to confirm Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, distinguishing those proceeded with under section 7 and under section 9 respectively; specifying, in the case of Bills proceeded with under section 9 against which petitions were deposited, whether a motion was made to refer the Bill to a joint committee, and if so whether such motion was made to refer the Bill to a joint committee, and if so whether such motion was agreed to, withdrawn, negatived or otherwise disposed of; and stating for each joint committee to which a Bill was referred the names of the Members of this House nominated thereto, the first and last day of the committee's sitting, the number of days on which each joint committee sat for the consideration of the Bill referred to it, the number of days on which each Member of the committee served, and whether the committee reported that the order ought or ought not be confirmed;

(5) The number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills, Bills for the confirmation of Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders withdrawn or not proceeded with by the parties, those Bills being specified which were referred to Committees and dropped during the sittings of the committee; and

(6) The membership, work, costs and staff of the Court of Referees and the Standing Orders Committee.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

PUBLIC BILLS

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return to Session 1992-93 of the number of Public Bills (other than Bills to confirm Provisional Orders and Bills to confirm Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936) distinguishing Government from other Bills, introduced into this House, or brought from the House of Lords, showing—

(1) the number which received the Royal Assent, and

(2) the number which did not receive the Royal Assent, indicating those which were introduced into but not passed by this House, those passed by this House but not by the House of Lords, those passed by the House of Lords but not by this House, those passed by both Houses but Amendments not agreed to; and distinguishing the stages at which such Bills were dropped, postponed or rejected in either House of Parliament, or the stages which such Bills had reached by the time of Prorogation.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of the days on which the House sat; stating for each day the day of the month and day of the week, the hour of the meeting, and the hour of the adjournment; the total numbers of hours occupied in the sittings of the House; and the average time; showing the number of hours on which the House sat each day and the number of hours after the time appointed for the interruption of business; and specifying, for each principal type of business before the House, how much time was spent thereon, distinguishing from the total the time spent after the hour appointed for the interruption of business.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SPECIAL PROCEDURE ORDERS

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(1) The number of Special Procedure Orders presented; the number withdrawn; the number annulled; the number against which Petitions or copies of Petitions were deposited; the number of Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively considered by the Chairmen; the number of such petitions certified by the Chairmen as proper to be received and the number certified by them as being Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively; the number referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses; the number reported with Amendments by a Joint Committee, and the number in relation to which a Joint Committee reported that the Order be not approved and be amended respectively; and the number of Bills introduced for the confirmation of Special Procedure Orders; and

(2) Special Procedure Orders which were referred to a Joint Committee, together with the names of the Commons Members who served on each Committee; the number of days on which each committee sat; and the number of days on which each such Member attended.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of—

(1) the total number and the names of all Members (including and distinguishing Chairmen) who have been appointed to serve on one or more Standing Committees showing, with regard to each of such Members, the number of sittings to which he was summoned and at which he was present;

(2) the number of Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items referred to Standing Committees pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.), or Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees) considered by all and by each of the Standing Committees, the number of sittings of each Committee and the titles of all Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items as above considered by a Committee, distinguishing where a Bill was a Government Bill or was brought from the House of Lords, and showing in the case of each Bill, Estimate, Matter and other item, the particular Committee by which it was considered, the number of sittings at which it was considered (including, in the case of the Scottish Grand Committee, the number of Meetings held in Edinburgh, pursuant to a motion made under paragraph 3 of Standing Order No. 94 (Scottish Grand Committee)) and the number of Members present at each of those sittings; and

(3) the membership, work, costs and staff of the Chairmen's Panel.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

SELECT COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House a Return for Session 1992-93 of information and statistics relating to the membership, work, costs and staff of Select Committees (other than the Standing Orders Committee).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Deregulation

1. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of deregulation proposals.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): As announced in the Gracious Speech, we will introduce a major Bill to deregulate and to remove obstacles to contracting out by central and local government.

Mr. Bates: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Is he prepared to consider giving priority to deregulation in the small business sector because while many large corporations and institutions believe that they may have the structures to support unnecessary bureaucracy, to the small business man and the entrepreneur that bureaucracy can often be the difference between success and failure?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend clearly understands the problem. In all the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) on the deregulation initiative, we have ensured that small business representatives have been included in the consultative process.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: May I follow the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) and ask whether the President of the Board of Trade accepts that many small businesses feel that the imposition of statutory sick benefit, the draconian penalties in relation to VAT collection and the collection of statistics for exports, which deter small companies from seeking export business, should be considered as part of the deregulation programme and not just aspects that affect consumer protection or health and safety?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is out of date because we have made significant exemptions in respect of the VAT system for small businesses.

Mr. Spring: Is my right hon. Friend aware of how much unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy emanates at local level? Will he assure the House that, as he seeks to encourage deregulation, local government plays a part in that important process?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises an important point and the answer is yes.

Mr. Robin Cook: Is the President of the Board of Trade aware that of the regulations that he is reviewing as a burden on business, 71 per cent. have been introduced since the Conservatives took office and 21 per cent. since the Prime Minister took office? Has anybody told him that the second largest number of regulations are in the DTI, of which 84 per cent. have been introduced since the Conservatives took office, 27 per cent. since the Prime Minister took office and 13 per cent. since he became President of the Board of Trade? As the overwhelming majority of the burdens on business have been introduced by the Conservatives, is there no one in the Conservative

Government willing to defend their record of 14 years of regulating that includes the record of the President of the Board of Trade?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That is excellent news and shows how determined we are to continue improving our performance.

Small Businesses, London

2. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy for encouraging the expansion of small businesses in the Greater London area.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): The Department provides a range of services in London and elsewhere designed to allow small businesses to operate with the maximum freedom and efficiency. In particular, the Business Link network that my Department is helping to develop will greatly strengthen the delivery of those services together with other business support organisations at local level.

Mr. Shersby: Does my hon. Friend agree that most small firms are well managed and if they were not, they would probably not be in business? Will he take every opportunity to relieve them of the burdens of paperwork that afflicts them as part of the deregulation initiative and give the House an example of the kind of burdens that are to be removed?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. As for the examples for which he asked, he will have to wait for the publication of the deregulation Bill to which my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has just referred.

Mr. Gapes: Does the Minister agree that the biggest problem for small businesses in Greater London is the impact of the recession? In my constituency, where one adult male in six is currently unemployed, there is certainly no glimmer of hope: unemployment has doubled in the past five years, and is twice as high now as it was when the Prime Minister came to office.

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman overlooks the important point that small businesses contribute to employment opportunities. Given the whingeing that we hear from Opposition Members, it is no surprise that such businesses have no confidence in the Labour party.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest boost for small firms in Greater London will come from a more prosperous economy? Will not those firms welcome the fact that interest rates are at their lowest for 25 years, and the fact that inflation is at its lowest for a generation?

Mr. McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is, of course, correct. Those underlying factors are giving great confidence to businesses—including small businesses—not just in London, but throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I welcome all measuress to help small businesses, but why have the Government done so little to crack down on the banks that are persecuting so many small businesses? Is he aware of the survey carried out by the Forum of Private Business? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members sneer at its 21,000 membership, but the survey showed that, in the past six months, 50 per cent. of respondents had found that banks were to introduce tougher charging policies. When will the Minister crack down on those banks, and eliminate practices that are doing so much harm to so many small businesses and individuals?

Mr. McLoughlin: What the hon. Gentleman never tells us is what his party would do. The simple fact is that, since we have been in government, some 400,000 new businesses have started up each year. That is a far greater success than was ever achieved during the socialist years of Labour government.

Deregulation

3. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of his deregulation initiative.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): We have made reasonable progress on the deregulation initiative so far, but we cannot be satisfied with the progress that we have made. What we are trying to achieve is a culture change on the part of Ministers and Departments—and, I like to think, possibly a culture change on the part of the Opposition as well. There will be a deregulation Bill, which will shortly be introduced in the House. The proof of the pudding will be whether the Opposition are prepared to support us.

Mr. Hendry: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I assure him that the business community in my constituency considers that the Government have no more vital task than tackling over-regulation.

Will my hon. Friend assure the House that, as well as tackling over-regulation—which he is determined to do—he will tackle over-zealous inspectors, who all too often appear keen to put out of business small, successful firms for the sake of some unnecessary and expensive regulation dreamt up by some inspector who knows nothing about the businesses that are affected?

Mr. Hamilton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Regulations that might otherwise be thought reasonable can be made unreasonable if they are interpreted and enforced excessively. Through our local authority, business partnership initiative schemes, we are seeking to bring business and local authority enforcers together, so that authorities can understand their obligation to keep regulation within reason, and so that regulation does not become a burden on business.

Mr. Burden: It is easy to parrot cliches about deregulation, but is it not disgraceful that the Government should even consider weakening health and safety standards, when last year no fewer than 28,000 people suffered serious injury at work?

Mr. Hamilton: There is one regulation—uniquely—that I would like to introduce: a regulation to compel Opposition Members to know what they are talking about before they stand up. I realise that it would deny us a good deal of innocent entertainment, especially from the Opposition Front Bench, but I am prepared to forgo that enjoyment.

The hon. Gentleman is, of course, completely wrong. We do not intend to interfere with sensible health and

safety regulations. The scales may fall from his eyes if I read him a press release from my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), the Minister of State, Department of Employment, who is responsible for the Health and Safety Commission. The press release states:

"The purpose of the review being undertaken by the Health and Safety Commission is to simplify, clarify and to update health and safety legislation. There is certainly no plan to sacrifice the high standards already in place—in fact, the aim is to improve them by judicious pruning."

Sir Michael Grylls: Does my hon. Friend accept that his initiative in introducing the Bill and really get the deregulation programme moving is welcome throughout the country? It is of prime importance, particularly to smaller firms, as my hon. Friend has said. When he comes to consider an announcement on the abolition of the statutory audit, will my hon. Friend resist pressure from other parts of Government to make it a mouse rather than a major announcement—in other words, to include all unquoted companies? There is no necessity for a statutory audit of any privately owned company. It would be disappointing if he were to abolish that audit for just certain companies.

Mr. Hamilton: I regard resistance as a negative attitude. My job is to be more pro-active than that and to attack Government Departments that are not playing a prominent enough part in the deregulation initiative. I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend says about small company audits, and I hope a decision on that will be announced very quickly.

Technology Transfer

4. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to assist with technology transfer from defence-related activities; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): A number of schemes in my Department assist technology transfer, including transfer from defence-related activities.

Mr. Maxton: When the United States Government are planning to spend $19·5 billion over the next five years on retraining programmes, investment programmes and incentive schemes to deal with the problem of technology transfer from defence industries, is not the Government's attitude to this problem irresponsible and dangerously complacent? Is the Minister prepared to see the skills of thousands of highly qualified and trained workers lost to our economy for ever? When will the Government come up with the same sort of package as that of the Clinton Administration?

Mr. Sainsbury: The most important factor in encouraging technology transfer from the defence industries is to have the right climate to encourage innovation. That is what the Government are determined to support and the Opposition persistently oppose. Let me remind the hon. Gentleman of some of the schemes we have. Apart from the budget for industrial revolution *[Interruption.]* sorry, innovation—innovation often needs satisfactory revolution—we have the pathfinder programme, the dual use technology centres, the defence research information centre and the changing tack seminars, all of which have been strongly welcomed by industry.

Mr. Mans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best way to develop defence technology for commercial use is for direct links to be established between the companies involved and the Ministry of Defence? That would produce a partnership and bring research and development forward, and the commercial and military use of such research could be equally exploited.

Mr. Sainsbury: I strongly agree with what my hon. Friend says from his specialist knowledge. My Department is working closely with the Ministry of Defence. The identification of civilian applications for defence research technology is steadily improving to the benefit of industry.

Mr. Caborn: I am not asking the Minister for a revolution, but does he acknowledge that there is great concern, particularly in the aerospace industry, about the question of technology transfer? What steps will his Department take to rearrange and reorganise that, as requested in the recent Select Committee report on the aerospace industry? The industry and the Select Committee are concerned about the lack of action from the Minister's Department and the Ministry of Defence. We are not getting the best out of our industry, and we are not assisting firms to stay at the competitive edge of leading technologies.

Mr. Sainsbury: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we work closely with the aircraft industry in our civil aircraft research and development programme, known as CARAD. The directions in which we spend the money in that programme have been identified by the industry as being the most important. That is the most effective way that we can continue to benefit the industry from our research and development programmes.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most effective and efficient ways of transferring technology is to ensure that the present companies involved in the supply of defence equipment continue to receive the orders already committed, such as those committed to Babcock Thorn at Rosyth, which has demonstrated very clearly how technology transfer can be operated in practice?

Mr. Sainsbury: The matter to which my hon. Friend refers is primarily one for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, but one way in which to strengthen defence companies and thus enable them to have the resources to look for methods to transfer their technology to civilian uses is by the successful sale of defence equipment overseas. I take this opportunity to congratulate defence industries on their success in that respect.

Trade (Japan)

7. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current trade balance with Japan.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): Despite the difficult economic conditions in Japan, United Kingdom exports rose 19 per cent. in the first 10 months of 1993 compared with the corresponding period in 1992. The United Kingdom has a visible trade deficit with Japan which, for the same period, stands at £4,894 million.

Mr. Viggers: Does my hon. Friend agree that raw statistics are rather misleading because of the variation in value between the yen and the pound? The true position is that our exporters have performed strongly in the Japanese market in recent years. Is my hon. Friend in a position to make an announcement now about the successor to the extremely successful Priority Japan programme?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is right. If we look at the balance between exports and imports to Japan, we see that it has hardly changed in the past five years and is better than it was in the early 1980s. Our exports to Japan have increased by 20 per cent. this year against a difficult background. We continue to attract enormous investment from Japan. I will announce the successor to the Priority Japan programme in the next few weeks and I am sure that it will command the support and backing of the House and British industry.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is the Minister aware that the Japanese have now identified the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries as the ones in which special effort and special investment will be made in the next few years? Currently, we do quite well against Japan in those industries. What does the Minister think that those British industries will be like by the year 2000 in comparison with the Japanese industries?

Mr. Needham: We have among the most competitive and successful pharmaceutical and aerospace industries in the world. The only way in which that position could alter is if the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends ever sat on the Government Benches and imposed the ridiculous rules that they want to introduce, which would undermine the competitiveness of our country and make our competitive position more difficult than it would otherwise be.

Mr. Butcher: My hon. Friend will be aware that the United States is looking increasingly eastwards towards Japan and the Pacific basin as the areas of more dynamic growth and trade than that offered by Europe. As a counter to that trend, is my hon. Friend prepared to encourage negotiations to establish a north Atlantic free trade area, which would dynamise the economies of the western European ports, such as our own and the American eastern seaboard? Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we could achieve that, it would be an important subset at the GATT negotiations?

Mr. Needham: I am for dynamising wherever I can go. Western European/Asia-Pacific trade is now greater than north American/European trade and that trend is likely to continue. The most important aspect of that for the British economy is whether Britain is taking maximum advantage of our opportunities in the east. The answer is yes. For example, our own exports to China are up more than 100 per cent. this year and those to Hong Kong have increased by 48 per cent. Throughout the far east, British industry, British commerce and British services, with the help of the British Government, are doing remarkably well and we will continue to concentrate on that part of the world.

Manufacturing

8. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give figures for the percentage change of manufacturing as a proportion of gross domestic product since 1978-79.

Mr. Heseltine: The share of manufacturing gross domestic product has fallen by around six percentage points since 1979. All the main industrialised countries are seeing a decline in the share of GDP accounted for by manufacturing.

Mr. Hain: At this rate, Britain is in danger of becoming a manufacturing-free zone with more people on the dole doing nothing than in factories producing British goods. Instead of blaming everybody else, why will the President of the Board of Trade not start to invest in skills, infrastructure and industry and provide industry with the long-term, low-cost finance which it needs. That is the way to recovery. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not have an industrial strategy to build that recovery?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Member will be pleased to know that manufacturing output rose by 1·6 per cent. during the past 12 months. Manufacturing productivity rose by 5 per cent. during the same period, while manufacturing exports to non-EC countries were 16 per cent. higher. I am sure that the hon. Member and his right hon. and hon. Friends will welcome that good news.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend remind the Opposition that recent figures issued by the university of Cambridge show that manufacturing output in this country has risen by 30 per cent. since 1979, while under the previous Labour Government it fell? Is not it perverse in the extreme to wish small firms well and at the same time to support the social chapter, to support compulsory recognition of trade unions, and to support increased taxation? Is not that exactly what the Opposition have tried to do?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is anticipating the speech that I hope to make to the House later this afternoon.

Mr. Barry Jones: May I tell the right hon. Gentleman about a manufacturing success in my constituency—the construction of the executive jet which can fly the Atlantic and which can carry 12 people? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House why he permitted the sale of that magnificent aeroplane by British Aerospace to the American firm, Raytheon? Will he guarantee that production of the aeroplane will remain in Britain after three years?

The right hon. Gentleman should know that my constituents who build the plane are concerned about the future of their jobs in the long term. The right hon. Gentleman boasts about manufacturing. Why did he allow that great machine to be sold to an American company?

Mr. Heseltine: Is the hon. Member suggesting that we should have controls in every constituency and in every industry over whether British companies should be sold to American companies? The hon. Gentleman should realise that the effect of that would be to choke off the inward investment from which this country has had such success.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend accept that one way to help enhance manufacturing capability in areas that have suffered from defence-related redundancies is through the support of the Konver fund which his Department backs? Given that results on bids for Konver are being made available next week, may I, as a last-minute

request, put in a plug for the bid by Essex and Chelmsford to help those areas that have been badly affected by defence-related redundancies?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right to take every possible opportunity to put in bids that will help his constituency. I only hope that all of my hon. Friends will not take immediate advantage of that precedent.

Mr. Fatchett: In his responses, the President of the Board of Trade seems to have failed to understand the problems that affect British industry or to accept the Government's record during the past 14 years. Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that 2·6 million jobs have been lost in British manufacturing industry? Will the right hon. Gentleman also acknowledge that this country comes near the bottom—if not at the bottom—of league tables on research, development, and training by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

The Prime Minister talks about returning to basics. Will the Government, as part of that policy, go for an investment policy in manufacturing industry, and also for an industrial strategy so that manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom can be restored to the strength and capacity that it enjoyed when the Labour party left office in 1979? If that is not done, will not there be more years of decline and job losses under this Government?

Mr. Heseltine: The basic fact that Opposition Members are quite incapable of understanding is that, throughout the advanced economic world, there has been a shift away from manufacturing. If one looks at this country's record, it can be seen broadly that we have marched in line with other similar economies. *[Interruption.]* It is no use Opposition Members shouting down the facts. Those facts may not suit their arguments, but Opposition Members will not silence me. They will have to get used to that.

There has been a reduction of 6 per cent. in our GDP percentage since 1979. The House will want to know that until 1987, the equivalent figure for America and for Germany was 4 per cent., for France it was 5 per cent., and for Italy it was 7 per cent. Our output is now rising while the output of other nations is falling.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. Friend cast his mind back to those heady days of manufacturing might in the 1970s when the Labour Government were implementing their industrial strategy? At that time, British Steel was the world's largest loss-maker, British Leyland was the butt of international jokes, multinational car firms were falling over themselves to transfer production overseas, manufacturing output fell——

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to make a speech, he should try to catch my eye in the debate that will follow, and I shall try to call him to speak in it, but I ask him to put a question now.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is my right hon. Friend also aware that, in the 1980s, we were top of the manufacturing, productivity and growth leagues and second only to Japan in manufacturing output——

Madam Speaker: Order. I have given the hon. Gentleman a warning. I might call him if he tries to catch my eye in the debate afterwards, but I need a question now.

Mr. Oppenheim: What is my right hon. Friend going to do about it?

Mr. Heseltine: I hope, Madam Speaker, that if you do call my hon. Friend, it will be after me because otherwise I shall have nothing left to say. What I shall do about it is to listen carefully to what he has to say in the debate.

Defence-related Manufacturing

9. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his latest estimate of the number of people employed in defence-related manufacturing employment.

Mr. Sainsbury: The latest estimate published by the Ministry of Defence is that in 1991-92 United Kingdom defence-related manufacturing employment was around 410,000.

Mr. Chisholm: Does the Minister agree that that is a large and highly skilled group of workers, who must be kept in manufacturing employment? Will the Government therefore abandon their hands-off approach to defence diversification and start by accepting the recommendation of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on that subject in its recent aerospace report? When considering the EC Konver bids, will the Government give sympathetic consideration to the submission from the Lothian region, where almost 20 per cent. of manufacturing jobs are dependent on defence orders?

Mr. Sainsbury: On the latter point, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all the Konver bids being considered today will be given careful scrutiny by the committee. On his first point, I agree that defence employees form a skilled group of employees with many and varied skills which we want to see used to the best advantage. The one sure way to ensure that that did not happen would be for the Government to decide what should happen to them, rather than for their employers, the companies, to make their own commercial decisions. We are not in the business of telling management how to run their companies. We are in the business of encouraging management by providing the right environment for them to succeed.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the saddest casualties of the reduction in defence orders was the receivership of Swan Hunter shipbuilders at Wallsend? Can he give the House an assurance that his talks with Commissioner Karel Van Miert about the absurd Community regulations that prohibit that company from obtaining intervention funding for commercial shipbuilding will lead to the lifting of that regulation, so that other shareholders will have a chance to invest in Swan Hunter, and there will be a future for that company and for jobs on the Tyne?

Mr. Sainsbury: First, I agree with my hon. Friend about what a sad day it was when Swan Hunter went into the hands of the administrators. We continue to hope that those administrators will be successful in finding a buyer for the company so that shipbuilding can continue on the Tyne. My hon. Friend made an important point about the shipbuilding intervention fund, a matter on which the Commission has to agree because it is a state aid. I had useful discussions with Commissioner Van Miert last week. Our negotiations are continuing and I hope that we

shall be able to bring the matter to a conclusion relatively shortly. I believe that we have a strong case in respect of Swan Hunter.

Ms Eagle: Can the Minister confirm whether a similar approach has been made on behalf of Cammell Laird shipyard? Both the current owners and the potential buyers, who have so far failed to secure more than 1,000 jobs on Merseyside—already a high unemployment area—have all agreed that with access to the intervention fund Cammell Laird could have remained open. If such an approach has not been made, why has it not, as the survival of shipbuilding is as important on the Mersey as it is on the Tyne?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure the hon. Lady that the original approaches to the Commission in July were in respect of all the warship building yards covered by the original agreement about subsidies. Because the circumstances of each yard differ, it has been necessary to focus particularly on discussions in respect of Swan Hunter. My latest meeting with Commissioner Van Miert was solely in respect of Swan Hunter.

Domestic Telephones

10. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of homes now possess a telephone; and what was the proportion in 1979.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1979, 67 per cent. of households were connected to a telephone. The latest figures show that 89 per cent. of households are now connected, which represents a 33 per cent. increase.

Mr. Bruce: I wonder whether in his busy day my hon. Friend might have a chance to read the Second and Third Reading debates and the speeches made by Opposition Members when we were discussing the Telecommunications Bill. He may well find that the predictions that were made by the Opposition about privatisation have all been proved to be totally untrue. I should like to encourage my hon. Friend to continue the Government's policy of extending the number of people getting into the telecommunications market so that we can not only continue to have a successful industry but also provide the services that consumers clearly want.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am not sure that it would do much good if I re-read those speeches, but I recommend that Opposition Members do so because they ought to see the way in which their forecasts have so miserably failed to come to fruition. The facts are that to have a telephone installed in 1979, at today's prices, cost £188. Today, that connection cost is £99.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Many of my constituents have telephones and they keep calling me and telling me about the rotten Government and what they are doing. When will the Minister take a hand to British Telecom and ask it to cut the price for the installation of telephones for pensioners? The cost is enormous—it costs almost £200 for pensioners to have a telephone installed. Is not it about time that the Minister did something about that?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman does not seem to have been able to pick up the telephone to BT. The figure that he has just given—and which I gave in my last answer—shows how much he is out of touch. As I have said, to install a telephone in 1979 would have cost £188 at today's prices. BT has just reduced the connection charge to £99. I hope that you, Madam Speaker, will now give the hon. Gentleman a chance to get up and welcome that and the privatisation of British Telecom.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: Will my hon. Friend confirm that there has also been a substantial increase in the number of payphones in the past 10 years? Does he agree that the telecommunications industry provides a classic example of exactly what deregulation can achieve?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That was another scare being touted by the Opposition at the time of privatisation—that somehow all rural phones and mobile phones would cease to exist. The fact is that public phone boxes are working.

Mr. Cousins: Does the Minister not know that there are fewer telephone lines in British homes than in most European countries? The Minister talked about installation charges. Is he not aware of the extortionate installation deposits which are levied in addition to installation charges, particularly in some of the tough inner-city areas? What is he doing about the antique pricing structures and the rank overcharging which mean that British telephone lines are used a third less than telephone lines in the United States? What is he doing to create a mass market in telephones which link the screen to the telephone rather than confining it to yuppies?

Mr. McLoughlin: I honestly do not know where to start in answering the hon. Gentleman's question. When we were privatising BT, the Opposition predicted that prices would go up. In fact, they have fallen by 27 per cent. so far as BT is concerned. There has been a greater increase in competition, with cable companies investing massive amounts of money in this country because they see that as an opportunity to develop their industry. They are providing telephone services, too. It is amazing that the Opposition spokesman can find nothing on which to attack the Government but the leading companies in this country.

Manufacturing, Leicester

11. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will take steps to assist manufacturing industry in the city of Leicester.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department already has in place a number of schemes that are helping manufacturing industries and other companies in Leicester and elsewhere.

Mr. Janner: I am sure that the Minister is aware of the awful troubles afflicting Leicester's traditional industries—hosiery, textiles and, in particular, footwear—and the massive job losses which have resulted, but is he aware that, despite reductions in interest rates, those companies that are trying to rebuild are having enormous problems raising capital, whether from the banks, venture capital or otherwise? Will the Minister undertake to look into that problem, which affects not only Leicester and the east midlands, but manufacturers throughout the country?

Mr. Sainsbury: I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on being the first Opposition Member to say anything during this Question Time which has even slightly implied that something good has happened, such as a reduction in interest rates. As he knows, that reduction

is a benefit to businesses in his constituency and elsewhere. With regard to small businesses, I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman would also welcome the fact that 400,000 new businesses have started up this year. We wish to continue to provide an environment which will encourage the creation of businesses and enable them to succeed and grow.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, like the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), I have constituents who work in manufacturing, textile and hosiery businesses? Is he further aware that many textile, hosiery and engineering businesses in my constituency are thriving and that in my constituency we have the lowest unemployment figure in the county? Does he agree that we have such a happy picture to paint because of the increasing deregulation, which is being welcomed by business men, because of lower interest rates and because the Government have been fighting hard to keep the social chapter off the backs of British business men?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am delighted to hear from my hon. Friend about the success of some of his businesses. He confirms the point that, in the right conditions, well-run businesses will flourish, expand and create more employment. I congratulate the textile industry on the success that it is achieving in exports, particularly in the wool and best quality textile markets.

Retail Sector

12. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the change in the performance of the retail sector since 1992.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): Retail sales figures issued last week for October showed a year-on-year increase of 3·2 per cent. in volume and 5·5 per cent. in value.

Mr. Booth: Putting the vexed issue of Sunday trading on one side for another occasion, what proposals will the Government bring forward to help small shopkeepers by deregulating?

Mr. Eggar: As I am sure my hon. Friend will understand, I cannot prejudge the contents of the deregulation Bill or anything that might be in the Budget statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, we are acutely conscious of the need to ensure that the retail sector is truly competitive and we know that there must be a particular emphasis on reducing red tape for smaller businesses, whether in the retail sector or elsewhere.

Exports

13. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the percentage change to the volume of exports of manufacturers to *(a)* other EC countries and *(b)* the rest of the world since August 1992.

Mr. Needham: The volume of United Kingdom exports of manufactures to other EC countries was 0·3 per cent. higher in the three months ended August 1993, compared with the same period a year earlier. The volume of manufacturing exports to the rest of the world increased by 13·8 per cent. over the same period, resulting in an overall increase of 6·2 per cent.

Mr. Mitchell: On those figures, the Minister accepts that our trade in manufactures with the rest of the world is doing much better, thanks to the fact that our devaluation in relation to the rest of the world was much greater than it was against the EEC. On the other hand, we are doing less well against the EEC because of the surreptitious policy of shadowing the deutschmark, which in real terms has brought the real exchange rate back to the figure before wonderful Wednesday in 1992. Does that not mean that almost half our trade in manufactures in volume terms is now outside the EEC and we need a much bigger fall in interest rates to get the pound down to a competitive level in Europe?

Mr. Needham: The recovery in this country happened in the second quarter of 1992, before we came out of the exchange rate mechanism. It may not have occurred to the hon. Gentleman that the major reasons why our exports to Europe are not doing so well as they are to the rest of the world is because——

Mr. Mitchell: Of the pound.

Mr. Needham: It has nothing to do with that. It is because Europe is in deep recession. Our volumes have increased in Europe. As for the rest of the world, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We have done remarkably well. The Government are working with British industry to ensure that we are making export credit available and that we have a long-term strategy with industry to maximise opportunities outside the EC as well as in it. The hon. Gentleman has accepted that those figures prove that. On that basis, he will congratulate us.

Mr. Paice: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is amazing that there is relative silence about the exceptional export figures, particularly to the rest of the world? Would my hon. Friend like to take this opportunity to note a very traditional manufacturing company in my constituency, Standens of Ely? That company has been fabricating materials for export to the far east and the Pacific rim, with considerable help from my hon. Friend's Department. Should not such achievement be sung about from the highest mountains?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend has given one example. I am sure that an endless series of my right hon. and hon. Friends could give similar examples, as could Opposition Members if they searched their telephone books and listened to their industrial constituents. British capital goods companies have set themselves a target to double their exports to non-OECD countries in the next few years from £10 billion a year to £20 billion a year. That is the answer to Opposition Members on the resurgence of manufacturing in this country.

Mr. Bell: The Minister has referred to export credit. What would he tell exporters who increase their competitiveness and productivity, yet when it comes to export credit guarantees look askance at Europe and see what they think are more competitive rates? The President of the Board of Trade said at the Confederation of British Industry conference that our rates were broadly in line. Is the Minister aware of the anxiety of exporters who fear that the European Commission is looking at a new directive designed to create a level playing field for export credit guarantees which they believe is tilted towards the French? Will he give the House an assurance that in relation to that

directive and the negotiations, the Department of Trade and Industry will play an active part, with a strategy for trade and for industry, and not leave it to the Treasury with a strategy for money?

Mr. Needham: When it comes to export guarantees, as the hon. Gentleman knows, we have increased the cover by £2·5 billion, we have reduced the premium rates by 25 per cent., we have several markets back on cover and we have increased short-term insurance cover by £1·4 billion. British industry and commerce are much better placed than they were before. However, I accept that it is vital that we are not the only ones playing on the level playing field. Any directives from the Community or any proposals that come forward will be considered by the Department of Trade and Industry and by the Government to see whether they are of benefit to our industry. We are of course determined to make sure that British industry receives the maximum support possible. That is what we have been doing and we shall continue to do it.

Deregulation

14. **Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what have been the findings of each of the deregulation task forces set up last March.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: More than 600 proposals for removing unecessary burdens are being put forward by the seven business task forces. The eighth task force, on the voluntary sector and charities, will report shortly. I expect to be able to publish the contents of the deregulation task forces' investigation documents as soon as possible.

Mr. French: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to read the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union publication entitled "Freedom to Kill? The case against deregulation", in which it is argued that the Government are endeavouring to weaken the laws that protect employees against death, injury and disease and give unscrupulous employers the right to kill? Will my hon. Friend join me in condemning the hysterical and emotional language in that publication and confirm that the Government's proposals are reasonable and should not be allowed totally unnecessarily to cause anxiety?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct, but he must remember that where the Opposition and their trade union allies are concerned criticism is never inhibited by ignorance. This is a good example because the Government do not have any firm proposals in the area. The deregulation task forces have made their suggestions for deregulation. We are not obliged to accept them, but it would be sensible to debate the proposals in an adult way; then we can take a balanced view of their desirability. To condemn things out of hand, on the basis of emotion, hysteria, shroud waving and headline grabbing is not exactly an adult approach for an Opposition.

Mr. Illsley: Will the Minister tell the House why local authorities were excluded from the deregulation task forces? Would it not have been sensible to allow local authority trading standards officers to be part of them, as they are the people best placed to determine which regulations are redundant and which are still necessary?

Mr. Hamilton: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that I spent the whole of yesterday afternoon in Bristol, at a conference to which we had invited all the local authorities and trading standards departments in the south-west. It was the fourth such conference to be held in England during the past few months—the others were in Manchester, Newcastle and London. No one from local government has been excluded from the deregulation exercise. Local government has an important role to play in making constructive proposals of its own and we are inviting it to do so. Unlike that from Opposition Members, we have had a very constructive response.

Small Businesses

16. **Mr. Thomason:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Institute of Directors to discuss small businesses.

Mr. Heseltine: I met representatives of the Institute of Directors last night when I spoke at their annual dinner on a number of issues, including small businesses.

Mr. Thomason: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many small businesses continue to require assistance in management and marketing? Will his Department continue to ensure that support is provided to them in various ways? Does he agree that that should be seen as part of the extension of an enterprise culture, which is so derided by the Opposition?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I very much accept the thrust of his questions. I am considering the basis of the services that we provide, especially the more intense back-up for small and medium-sized firms that the Business Link organisation will provide. I hope to be able to say something about that shortly.

Mr. Turner: Has the President of the Board of Trade received representations from companies in the west midlands regarding the inordinate delays in receiving appraisals through the regional selective assistance policy? That is causing some concern in the west midlands. It is taking more than four weeks for the initial appraisal to be made, which is causing consternation to companies, and I believe that the delay is being caused by staffing problems. We need more staff in that department. Also, market testing is creating great problems in that area.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Member is asking two questions. About £700 million of Government expenditure was market tested last year, as a result of which we have achieved an ongoing annual saving of £100 million. As to his first question, I do not believe that the service that we provide in dealing with those grants is the subject of widespread criticism. If it were, I or my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry would have heard about it many times. However, if the hon. Member knows of a case that may not have received prompt attention I hope that he will bring it to my attention.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many small businesses in the tourist sector are concerned about over-regulation, especially the package holiday directive? Can he give us any hint as to whether that might be one of the regulations that could be considered for review?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will know that the essence of the exercise that we are carrying out is to study

all aspects of laws, regulations and practices, whether from Whitehall, European directives, or the practices of local authorities. In essence, my hon. Friend will find that we have looked at, and will continue to look at, the area that he has drawn to our attention.

Mr. Robin Cook: If the President of the Board of Trade is serious about helping small businesses, will he acknowledge that, in survey after survey, they cite late payment as their biggest problem? Is he aware that small businesses have to pay their bills, on average, 10 days before they get paid by big businesses? So why does the Conservative party, alone among the major parties, refuse to accept the case for a statutory right to interest on late payments? If interest on late payment works for the Inland Revenue, why not for small businesses? Or does the Conservative party's interest in small businesses stop short of offending its friends in big business?

Mr. Heseltine: No, that is not our position. This is a matter on which we have made many statements and conducted a great deal of consultation. We realise that it is a matter of concern to small businesses, and we are actively considering it.

Manufacturing Industry

18. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the growth of manufacturing industry for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will publish new forecasts of manufacturing output when he presents his Budget to the House on 30 November. However, it is very encouraging that manufacturing output, manufacturing productivity and manufacturing investment all rose in the last 12 months.

Mr. Hughes: Surely the Minister is aware that, according to the last published figures, manufacturing industry grew by only 1 per cent. in the previous 12 months. Does not his answer mask the massive decline in manufacturing industry that took place during a period when the Government continually denied that we were going into recession, even though we were already deep in one? Will the Minister now stop complacently pretending that the recovery has taken hold and introduce a proper strategy for investment-led growth in manufacturing, which is the only way the country can get out of its balance of payments problems?

Mr. Sainsbury: Manufacturing output rose by 1·6 per cent. over the past 12 months. I would have hoped that that would be welcome to the hon. Gentleman, in the light of the decline in many of our major export markets in continental Europe. The sort of policies proposed by the party that he supports—saddling manufacturing industry with the burdens and restrictions that would follow from the social chapter—would be likely to stifle any further growth in output more quickly than anything else.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Although I welcome the growth of manufacturing output last year and predictions of more growth next year, may I ask my right hon. Friend to point out to his colleagues in the Council of Ministers how much labour on-costs, such as those from the social chapter, will hamper manufacturing industry? Will he point out to them that it is essential that those labour on-costs be kept to a minimum so that both this country and the rest of Europe can remain competitive with the rest of the world?

Mr. Sainsbury: It was my impression at a meeting of Council of Industry Ministers last week that a number of colleagues in other Community countries are now conscious of the points that my hon. Friend makes and are perhaps beginning to have second thoughts about the wisdom of some of the things to which they have signed up.

Dr. Berry: Is the Minister genuinely surprised that manufacturing output is higher this year than last, given the appalling state of the economy last year? Is it not more relevant to recognise that the trade deficit in manufactured goods at this point in the trade cycle has never been worse in recent economic history? How does he explain that?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to welcome the changes since 1981. Manufacturing output is up by nearly a quarter, and productivity and exports are up by nearly three quarters. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has already pointed out—perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening or was not in his place at the time—that it is normal for advanced economies to experience a decline in the proportion of manufacturing in their total gross domestic product. This country is no exception.

Skeletal Implants Testing

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the total estimated cost of the development of life-time predicative test methods for the skeletal implants project.

Mr. Sainsbury: The total estimated cost is £750,000. The Department of Trade and Industry will provide up to £472,000, 63 per cent., and industry £278,000, 37 per cent.

Mr. Flynn: Is the Minister aware that this project is of enormous importance and will bring relief to many millions of people in this country if successful? Will he investigate the tendering procedure as it is claimed that many organisations with great expertise in this area were excluded?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am not aware of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. I have received no formal complaints about the tendering process. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific point that he would like to bring to my attention, I will certainly follow it up if he writes to me.

Konver Initiative

22. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what grants have been made in the current year under the Konver initiative.

Mr. Sainsbury: None so far. The Konver programme for the United Kingdom was approved by the Commission only on 19 November. An announcement of grants allocated will be made early in December.

Mr. Coombs: While waiting in eager anticipation for that undoubtedly much-valued programme, will my right hon. Friend support, when it comes along, the application from Royal Ordnance in my constituency for a bomb-proof

waste paper container, which will be valuable in view of the current activities of the IRA? Can he confirm that there is no feeling against small and medium-sized companies in relation to the criteria for the Konver programme? That is certainly something about which the office of the Department of Trade and Industry in the west midlands has hinted.

Mr. Sainsbury: I congratulate my hon. Friend on finding a perhaps slightly unexpected opportunity to commend that project in his constituency. As I said earlier, the Konver national programme committee is meeting today. I can assure my hon. Friend that it will be looking carefully at all the schemes, including the one to which he has referred. There is no prejudice against schemes from small companies. We are looking for quality schemes, and I believe that we shall find a large number of such schemes to support.

Paediatric Intensive Care

3.30 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside) *(by private notice):* To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the report of the multi-disciplinary working party on paediatric intensive care convened by the British Paediatric Association.

The Minister for Health (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I welcome the report from the British Paediatric Association on the care of critically ill children, and would like to thank Dr. Peter Fleming and his colleagues for their work.

The report is based on a study of critically ill children and their care in hospital. My Department funded this study, the most comprehensive ever undertaken anywhere, because of the priority which we attach to the care of those children. Today's report needs to be seen against the background of significant improvements in children's health achieved in recent years.

In the past 14 years, infant mortality has halved. Over the same period, the number of children dying at birth or in the first week of life has dropped by about 40 per cent. Rates of immunisation against major childhood infections are at an all-time high. Since the introduction of the HIB vaccine a little over a year ago, the incidence of HIB meningitis has declined by 74 per cent.

The House will also want to know that the total number of designated paediatric intensive care beds has increased from 127 in 1987 to 209 this year. Two out of three children who need paediatric intensive care are admitted to specialist units. There are many such units in the national health service providing first-class care, and I wish to record my appreciation to the doctors, nurses and other staff who work in them.

Today's report rightly expresses concern that some children are still not able to receive the care that they need in specialist units. While those children receive skilled care, nevertheless, as the report identifies, they should be cared for by nurses and doctors trained and experienced in paediatric intensive care. We therefore need to extend our existing facilities and training programmes.

District health authorities have the responsibility for assessing local health care needs and determining how they should be met. They do so within the priorities set by Government. Child health is a priority. Consequently, I have already asked the national health service management executive to ensure that health authorities are aware of today's report and the importance we attach to its main findings, and to ensure that health authorities make a co-ordinated and effective response.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for granting this question. Can the Minister tell the House how we can claim to have a national health service when we cannot guarantee equal treatment and access for the most severely ill children across the country? Will he acknowledge that the fact that we have an internal market has severely damaged the chance of co-ordinating the planned and invested care that we need for severely ill children?

Will the Minister accept the recommendations in the report that such specialist facilities cannot be subjected to the internal market and to the mechanisms of local purchasing care? Will he tell the House why, with a 34 per cent. shortfall in specialist children's intensive care, the Government are prepared only to refer the report to local district health authorities and to ask the NHS Management Executive to supervise their reaction?

What would any parent feel if they took their child to an intensive care unit only to be turned away? That happened at every single specialist unit during the period of the report's survey. It happened to 77 children this year at the Royal Manchester children's hospital—a situation which the Prime Minister is reported in today's *Manchester Evening News* as describing as "heartbreaking".

What will the Minister do about this? Why are the Government simply referring the report to local level when 76 per cent. of adult units have no trained child nurse available, when there is a shortfall of 34 per cent. in the places available, and when we know from the report that there is scandalous under-investment in these absolutely crucial specialist facilities?

Will the Minister this afternoon agree with the recommendations of the report that paediatric intensive care should be organised not on a district basis, but on a regional or multi-regional basis to co-ordinate the necessary investment and a sufficient availability of these units?

Will the Minister, instead of merely passing the buck and passing responsibility down to the internal market and the district health authorities, guarantee today that he accepts the clear recommendation of the specialist report that we should have

"a co-ordinated national programme . . . instituted by the Department of Health"

and not by someone else, for the care of the most sick and needy children? Will he accept the Government's responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and investing in intensive care facilities for children in every part of Britain?

Dr. Mawhinney: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman did not listen to my answer. We are in no sense passing the buck, as he so inelegantly phrases it.

We agree with the report's conclusion that the overwhelming number of children who are very sick should be treated in paediatric intensive care units. I suspect that that is common ground between us all because the concern for very sick children is not a partisan matter. Indeed, I was able to tell the House of the strides that have been made over the past six years in providing extra facilities. I recognise that further facilities must be provided.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the report makes it clear that these matters should be dealt with in the context of the reformed NHS. He will see in the recommendations that reference is made to purchasers and providers. He is right to point out that the report recommends that it may be necessary for these facilities to be provided on a wider basis—perhaps a regional basis—than simply by each individual district health authority. I am happy to accept that recommendation. I have made it clear in the instructions that I have already given to the NHS Management Executive that, as it works with the district health authorities to ensure that these priorities are addressed and met, it should have that recommendation very much in mind.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): Does my hon. Friend agree that the increase in beds between 1987 and now is substantial, but that the report suggests that there is scope for more? They are certainly needed. Does he also agree

[Mr. Roger Sims]

that the rate at which knowledge is increasing and technology developing in this area is outpacing the rate at which we can train doctors and nurses in those new techniques?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is right on both counts. Since 1987, the number of paediatric intensive care beds available has increased by some 70 per cent. Indeed, the increase of about 70 beds recommended by the report is less than the increase that has taken place since the last report in 1987, so I have no doubt that we can address the report with the same success as the previous one.

My hon. Friend is right on the second point also. Part of the pressure has arisen because of the skill of the medical profession, which can now offer treatment, care and hope to very sick children who, some years ago, would have been beyond the scope of medical help. We recognise that that is itself creates an upward pressure on the need for provision.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): The Minister just said that this is the second report in seven years. Although I am glad that he has agreed to act on the report, why are we in such a sorry state if the previous report was fully implemented? Will he assure the House that this report and the intensive care beds needed for children will be properly funded, and that trained staff will be available? Does he now accept that this is just another example of how the NHS reforms have not worked?

Dr. Mawhinney: It is a pity that the hon. Lady put in the last point, because, until then, she was on reasonably solid ground. Her last point was nonsense, as we both know.

We responded to the 1987 report with a 70 per cent. increase in the number of paediatric intensive care beds. On the basis of research, which we funded because we recognised that a problem was developing again, we now learn that more beds need to be provided. Our response will be as strong and directed as our response to the 1987 report. We shall continue to treat this as a priority and shall make it clear to district health authorities that they, too, must treat it as a priority.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is good news to tell about children's health? Will he confirm that, whereas the World Health Organisation has set a target of 90 per cent. for the immunisation of children, the record in this country is not 70, 80 or 90 per cent. but exceeds 90 per cent. and for some diseases has even reached 95 per cent?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why I put in the answer to my question the significant information about the halving of infant mortality and the 40 per cent. reduction in perinatal mortality in the past 14 years. The report raises serious issues, to which we shall respond with commitment and priority, but it is against a background of improvement in child health which I should have thought hon. Members on both sides of the House would welcome.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is it not high time that we had centrally available information on where children receive intensive care? Is the Minister aware that many children in need of intensive care have had to go to adult intensive care units, while, at the same time, adult patients have had to go from Greater Manchester to as far afield as Blackpool at times of critical need—indeed, in life-or-death situations—and that some of them died en route?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am certainly aware, as the right hon. Gentleman is, that most of the very sick children in need of paediatric intensive care were treated in paediatric intensive care beds. Some were treated in intensive care general beds, and some in children's wards. He and I both recognise that it is preferable for very sick children to be treated in paediatric intensive care beds. No Government can guarantee that no child will ever have to move out of a paediatric intensive care unit because, as he knows, there are peaks and troughs in demand, for which it is impossible to plan. It ought to be the case that, where possible, very sick children should be treated in paediatric intensive care unit beds. That is what we are seeking to achieve.

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): It was useful that my hon. Friend was able to remind hon. Members of the excellent improvement in child health care in this country, but there is no room for complacency, as the report makes clear. Will he assure the House that he will put maximum pressure on district health authorities in the reformed health service to ensure that they update their purchasing plans so that we do acquire the improved facilities that we need?

Dr. Mawhinney: We have already told the NHS Management Executive to take the proposal forward as a priority. I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that as the best answer to his question.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Minister has already said that this is a heartbreaking report which tugs at the emotions. Therefore, will he give a guarantee extra resources will be provided for more intensive care beds for children rather than pass the buck to district health authorities? As the subject is emotional, to avoid the heat those authorities might move money from other departments in serious need. Will he fund the service properly by provided extra resources?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady knows that the priorities of the health service are set by Ministers and reflected down to district health authorities, which have the responsibility for ensuring that the priorities are met, taking account of their assessment of local health needs and how best to meet them. I have told the hon. Lady and the House that we give the subject priority. Each year in the health service, we deliver new services to patients because they constitute a priority. Within that framework, we will, as a priority, deliver the new services to patients.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I greatly welcome the frankness with which my hon. Friend has talked about the report. Is not the simple truth that Ministers with responsibility for health will continue to be victims of the success of the NHS? In many sectors, such as neonatal paediatrics, medicine will always be able to deliver more than we can practise. Is not the way that the Opposition use even the health service as a political football testimony to their sickening cynicism?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend speaks with great authority as, unlike most of us in the House, he has had responsibility for such matters. I am grateful to him for

underlining the point that I made a few minutes ago. In the sector medical skill under discussion, rapid developments are being made. Doctors can offer patients care and treatment that would have been literally inconceivable a few years ago. We must accommodate that in the health service because it is a priority for the Government, the health service and the House.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister's statement is to be generally welcomed. However, does he agree that there is still room for improvement, not only in intensive paediatric care, but in paediatric orthopaedics? Does he accept that, even in Britain, there is a need for development in that sector? The process of rationalisation brings added pressures—as happened at the Royal children's hospital in Belfast in my constituency. Will he admit that some of the leading work has been done through charitable work, as in the Gait unit at the Musgrave Park hospital, of which the Minister has personal experience?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for my statement. I accept that, in various parts of the country, pressures involving the delivery of paediatric care must be addressed. The hon. Gentleman will understand that I am not familiar with the details of his constituency, but I shall ensure that they are brought to the attention of my noble Friend who has responsibility for such matters in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I welcome the Minister's new-found recognition of the fact that the shortage of specialised trained nurses and doctors in the sector is contributing to the crisis. Will he investigate why, in Alder Hey children's hospital in my constituency, of the 15 nurses who qualified last year, only four found work at the hospital after three years' training in precisely those specialised skills of which he now recognises there is a shortage? Is it not only a shocking waste of resources to train people, but an indictment of the way in which the health service is being run that, after all that investment, those nurses could not find work?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Lady wishes to widen the debate, and that is perfectly acceptable. The proportion of nurses moving into jobs is high, and many are remaining in posts much longer than before. If the hon. Lady was alluding to the fact that there is some evidence that nurses who are trained in paediatric intensive care specialties are not remaining in those specialties, she is right, and we are looking at that special issue. I have asked the chief medical officer and the chief nursing officer to enter into urgent discussions with the professions to address the question of the necessary extra training.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): The Minister will recall events at Birmingham children's hospital a few years ago, when many children needing heart surgery were turned away because of the lack of paediatric intensive care beds. I was the parent of one of those children waiting for such surgery, and my child later died. We were all assured that that situation would never recur. Several years later, and after and two further reports, we are being told the same story. Is that not cause for enormous shame and great anger?

Dr. Mawhinney: I was not aware of the hon. Gentleman's personal circumstances, and I shall bear them in mind in my response, when I say that significant change has taken place since 1987. There has been a 70 per cent. increase in the number of paediatric intensive care beds since the events occurred to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. It is widely accepted among the professions that it is a developing specialty. We funded the report precisely because we wish to have an authoritative assessment of where we are now, so that we can plan to build on the decisions that have already been implemented.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We are now going to move on to the next item of business, which is the Welsh Grand Committee.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 98(5) (Matter relating exclusively to Wales).

BUDGET (WALES)

That the Matter of the implications of the Budget for Wales, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Points of Order

3.51 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you could assist the House on a point of real confusion and difficulty. I refer to printed papers of the House that were sent yesterday to hon. Members on both sides of the House who are members of the Select Committee on Transport, I do not wish to detain the House, but to make the point of order, it is necessary to quote briefly from the paper, as I understand it is in order to do.

The supplementary estimate for 1993-94 states:

"This supplementary estimate is sought to increase provision for current expenditure on royal travel to cover revised expenditure forecasts with a corresponding decrease in the provision for Government support of British Rail pension funds."

In other words, the authors of that official document of the House made the clear link between taking £730,000 away from the British Rail pension fund to supply it

"to royal travel and grant audit".

Another document covering the same subject was placed in the Library. I have no other way of putting it but to say that that doctored version of the same document sought to obfuscate the link between the money taken from the British Rail pension fund and given, extraordinarily, to the royal train. The two points were broken.

One half of the earlier statement became point 1, which is:

"Increased provision for current expenditure on royal travel to cover revised expenditure forecasts";

and the other half became point 5:

"Provision for Government support of British Rail pension funds".

The fact that £730,000 was being transferred from one heading to another was being deliberately and cynically disguised.

My point of order is this, Madam Speaker. There is a widespread belief, both inside and outside this place, that at least one of the major objectives of the whole unwanted rail privatisation procedure is for the Government to get their hands on the British Rail pension fund surplus in order to use it for other purposes. This document—this deception—will feed those fears.

I have two requests, Madam Speaker. First, I ask you to seek clarification of why the two documents were, respectively, sent to Members of Parliament and placed in the Library; secondly, I ask you to protect the interests of the House, railway pensioners and everyone in the country who wants to see the end of the Railways Bill by asking the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the House and answer for the deception that he attempted, which has been ameliorated only by the incompetence of his Department.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that I can deal with the point of order, unless hon. Members can put a fresh complexion on it.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. May I seek your guidance? The charge made last night by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), and repeated today by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), is extremely grave and affects many of my constituents. It seems to be based on a genuine misunderstanding of the document.

However, as the British Rail pension fund has today made it clear that not a penny has been filched, as has been alleged—it is perfectly clear that there has been a mistake—and as the Secretary of State has made it clear that this is nonsense, may we have an early discussion of the matter to give Opposition Members a chance to apologise for the unnecessary concern that they have caused to pensioners?

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have had a discussion with the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan), who is rather better informed now than he was before and whose remarks are rather more considered than they were earlier.

We are in an extraordinary position. The Select Committee on Transport is in session at this very moment; I left it to make this point of order. We have two documents. One, which we received yesterday, told us that there was a correlation between the increase in the money given to the royal train and the decrease in the money given to the pension fund. The other document, which we received from the Library a few weeks ago, does not make that point at all. It seems to me that in this case the House, rather than the Select Committee, has been misled.

The accompanying documents make it crystal clear that three quarters of a million pounds has been taken from the British Rail pension fund allocation and added to the royal travel fund. Many of us would say that, if spare money is floating about, we can think of many causes—in transport and elsewhere—that need it more than the royal train. At a time when the Government are threatening to take money from the unemployed and the sick, it is an outrage that three quarters of a million pounds should be given to the royal train, which will cost £2·5 million in a single year.

Madam Speaker: Let me respond to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who first raised the point of order, and to other hon. Members who clearly have an interest in the matter.

As the hon. Gentleman will understand, I have not seen the papers to which he referred, or the supporting documents that he mentioned; they are not in front of me. I know, however, that the authentic version of the supplementary estimates is the one that has been deposited in the Votes and Proceedings office. I will, of course, look into the suggestion that some versions of the estimates may not be consistent with the original. I must satisfy myself on that point, and I will come back to the hon. Gentleman when I have done so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would it not be helpful, and clear the matter up completely, if any one of those 10 Ministers sitting on the Front Bench came to the Dispatch Box now to clarify the position? Then we could have the issue out, and establish that in no circumstances will £730,000, or any other sum, be taken out of the British Rail pension fund to subsidise the royal train—and, what is more, the Queen should have to subsidise the train herself instead of calling on the British people. She has plenty of money.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the House will appreciate that the point of order was originally made to me. I will deal with it in a serious and sensible manner.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That—

(1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word 'thirteen' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 44; in paragraph (5) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 46; in paragraph (6) the word 'Thursday' shall be substituted for the word 'Wednesday' in line 61; in paragraph (8) the word 'two' shall be substituted for the word 'four' in line 67; in paragraph (9) the words 'and Thursdays' shall be inserted after the word 'Wednesdays' in line 74; and in paragraph (10) the word 'Thursday' shall be substituted for the word 'Wednesday' in line 84;

(2) Standing Order No. 90 (Second reading committees) shall have effect for this Session with the following modification, namely:

In paragraph (2) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 23;

(3) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 28th January, 4th, 11th, 18th and 25th February, 4th and 11th March, 15th and 22nd April, 6th, 13th and 20th May and 15th July;

(4) Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 10th December, 14th and 21st January, 18th March, 29th April, 10th, 17th and 24th June and 1st and 8th July, and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on 25th November, 8th and 15th December, 2nd March, 13th April, 18th and 25th May and 8th, 15th and 22nd June;

(5) On Monday 7th February and Monday 25th April, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business until Seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 20th January and Thursday 24th March; and

(6) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this Order in anticipation of the ballot for that day.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FIFTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.]*

Question again proposed.

Trade, Industry and Deregulation

Madam Speaker: I must announce that I shall have to impose a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 pm.

3.59 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech contains not a single measure to raise investment in industry, to improve the level of skills of the workforce, to modernise public infrastructure, or to expand private research and development expenditure, and no recognition of the burden on the economy and the cost to individual citizens of mass unemployment, and no commitment to make its sustained reduction the priority of macro-economic management today; support the repeal of outdated regulations but reject proposals that will reduce the protection of the public as consumers and as employees by means of legislation that will increase the powers of Whitehall at the expense of its accountability to this House; and further regret that the Gracious Speech contains no proposals to tackle the rigged market created on the privatisation of the electricity industry or to provide a more open opportunity for coal to compete for a fairer market share, but proposes the privatisation of the coal industry which will accelerate closures of mines and threaten the safety of miners.

At Question Time, those on the Opposition Front Bench were teased for not adequately recognising those industries that have shown advance over the past year. I am always willing to accept the instructions of the House, so let me refer to an industry whose achievements in the past year have been outstanding.

It is an industry in which productivity is up by one third in 12 months, and in which most of the production units have managed a reduction in price of a quarter in the same 12 months. Curiously, it is an industry about which no planted questions were asked by the Government Whips in order that answers could come forward from Ministers congratulating the industry on its achievements. The simple and sole reason for that is that it is the coal mining industry—an industry which, despite those achievements and advances, is in crisis. The Queen's Speech outlined the Government's preferred solution to that crisis, which is to privatise the coal industry so that they can walk away from the crisis that they have created.

The President of the Board of Trade is with us today, and I welcome the fact that he has returned to speak from the Dispatch Box on this occasion. He was present to listen to the debate that we had on the coal industry four weeks

[Mr. Robin Cook]

ago, and he will recall that the Opposition repeatedly asked how many pits would survive until privatisation; how many pits would be left by the time we had finished our debates; and how many pits would be closed to pave the way for privatisation.

We already know some of the pits that will not make it to privatisation. In the four weeks since we had that debate, seven pits have been fingered for closure. Last week, the President of the Board of Trade passed a watershed of his period in office. I do not know whether he is aware of it, but it would be unfortunate if it went unremarked. When he took office and became responsible for the Government's energy policy, there were 50 pits operating. As from last week, the majority of those 50 pits have been closed or announced for closure.

No one has pretended that any of the seven pits that have been fingered for closure in the near future are near exhaustion. Hatfield pit has over 30 years of coal reserves at its present rate of production. It has a lifespan which would enable it to remain in production when most of our gas and all our oil will be gone. What strategic sense does it make to fill up the mineshaft that gives access to such a rich energy source? What other Government in Europe would dream of agreeing to do that?

The Littleton pit has been named for closure. That pit produces coal of such good quality that two fifths of its output goes to industrial and house coal markets. British Coal is importing coal because it cannot meet its industrial contracts from the domestic market. What are we doing importing coal when we have under our feet domestic coal of a standard to meet those markets?

There has been the most feeble pretence that these pits are not financially viable. Silverdale pit made a profit of £100,000 in the week that its closure was announced. All the coal from Silverdale goes to the Fiddler's Ferry power station, and Fiddler's Ferry is the nearest power station to the ICI chlorine plant at Runcorn. It is an interesting industrial chain. Silverdale is one of Europe's most efficient pits, supplying one of its most efficient power stations, which in turn supplies energy to one of our most efficient industries.

The power services manager at Runcorn is driven to frustration by the knowledge that Fiddlers' Ferry could supply his plant with electricity at between £10 and £15 per megawatt hour. Instead of squeezing every drop of cheap electricity out of that power station, what is happening? Fiddlers' Ferry is operating at half-capacity, the pit that supplies it is closing, and ICI is paying between £25 and £30 per megawatt hour for power supplied from new and more expensive gas-fired power stations. How does that make economic sense? What kind of industrial strategy is that?

A year ago, the President of the Board of Trade announced the pit closure programme, and justified it on the grounds that he could not ask British industry to lose competitiveness by paying more for its electricity from coal. Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman what has happened since then. The price of coal has continued to come down and, while it has become cheaper, the price of electricity from the generators has continued to go up. The study by Caminus Energy last month discovered that the pool price went up by 23 per cent. in the first six months of the year.

What sort of energy strategy is it that closes down productive coal mines when the price of coal is falling and boosts the production of gas when the price of it is going up? Yet the Queen's Speech does not include any measure to remedy the rigged market that makes that possible.

There is no proposal to tackle the sweetheart contracts that exist between the gas-fired power stations and the electricity companies. The Gracious Speech provides no measure to ring-fence the nuclear levy to the nuclear power industry. No proposal is made even to stop paying the nuclear subsidy paid to France, even though the electricity it sends us does not have to be produced at nuclear power stations. None of those measures, which would keep the pits open, are contained in the Queen's Speech: instead, we have the grotesque irrelevance of coal privatisation.

We will oppose that wretched Bill, whenever the President of the Board of Trade manages to produce it, because our coal reserves are a national asset which should not be managed in the interests only of private profit. We will oppose it because we have not forgotten that pits were brought into public ownership to stop the carnage that occurred under private ownership.

Since 1947, there have been 3,000 deaths in the public coal industry—far too many, but many fewer than under the private industry that it replaced. In the 46 years before nationalisation, there were 50,000 deaths in private coal mines. That equation between public ownership and safer mines is not just a historical fact. The same is true now. The private pits of Britain employ a smaller work force and produce a smaller output than that produced by British Coal, but they had the same number of deaths underground as those in the whole of British Coal in the past year.

British Coal has the best safety record of any deep mining corporation around the world, and that alone provides compelling reason for keeping it in public ownership. We will also oppose the privatisation Bill because it is utterly and abjectly irrelevant to the real crisis in the coal industry. The privatisation of coal will not save a single pit, but will accelerate the closure of those pits that cannot produce a profit within the time scale set by parliamentary procedures.

It is the stark irrelevance that bonds the privatisation of coal with the other main contribution of the President of the Board of Trade to the Queen's Speech. Let us first consider the background to our debate. On the very day that we heard the Queen's Speech, the employees of Rolls-Royce heard that another 1,000 of them were to be made redundant. They are skilled craftsmen whose output is vital to the aerospace sector, which is this nation's largest single exporter.

Today as we debate, Parliament is being lobbied by manufacturing workers from the north-west. In the document that they have produced, they point out that, in the year to March this year, 88,000 more jobs in manufacturing in the north-west have gone. That has happened, mark you, in the year which we have been told is the year of the upswing. In that year of recovery, the north-west has lost the last pit in Lancashire, the last shipyard in Merseyside and almost the entire United Kingdom capacity to produce bulk denim.

The President of the Board of Trade, or at any rate his Department, is aware of the extent of the crisis in manufacturing. We know that they know it, because they have produced the most damning report on innovation. I do

not know how that report slipped through the net. Perhaps no political commissar was allowed to see it in time to detect that it was so politically incorrect.

The document contains a graph which shows a real lapse in the security of the Department. The graph shows that, between 1975 and 1979 under the previous Labour Government, Britain's share of world exports rose by one fifth. Since 1980, Britain's share of world exports has fallen under the Conservatives by exactly as much as it rose under Labour during the 1970s.

On the same page, it is pointed out that there are now only three UK companies in the international top 50 of companies ranked by spending on research and development. Over the page, we find that there are now no UK companies in the top 25 companies ranked by the number of new patents registered.

However, I want to be fair. I shall certainly give the full and balanced picture as it is provided by the report. There is one sector in which Britain leads the world. There is a graph that shows that, in that one sector, British companies are head and shoulders above any competitor. That is the percentage of profits that is paid out in dividends.

That is something for which the Conservatives can take some credit, as it has happened during their period of office. In 1979 the percentage of profits paid out in dividends was below 50 per cent. In 1991, it was almost 70 per cent. That is double the figure for Japan and for Germany. I cannot comment better on those figures than the report itself, which says:

"this may be a reflection of an attitude of jam today rather than investment for the future."

The problem is spelled out in the Government's own document. Perhaps the President of the Board of Trade did not see the document before publication. Perhaps no one has dared to show it to him since it was discovered that the document has been published.

If the President saw the document, one could not tell it from the Queen's Speech. There is not a single measure to turn that bleak picture around. There are no measures to increase manufacturing investment, which is now one tenth of the level it was in the 1970s under the Labour Government. There are no measures to increase the level of skills in Britain, in which we are among the poorest in Europe, with only Portugal and Greece beneath us.

There are no measures to increase spending on research and development, although we are one of the few industrialised nations where spending on research and development is less than the pay-out in dividends. There are no measures to discourage companies from treating profits as a bottomless jam jar from which dividends can be paid out.

Having glimpsed the magnitude of the challenge to the manufacturing base, what did the President have a tilt at in the Queen's Speech? What was uniquely identified in the Queen's Speech as holding back British industry? It was Whitehall red tape, and the burden on business.

First, how dare the Government talk about lifting the burden on business when every press briefing about the Budget warns us that statutory sick pay is to be handed over to business? That is an imposition of £1·5 billion-worth of burden on to business. To be fair to the President, we must recognise that he did not think up that nonsense.

During the Queen's Speech debate in 1988, the President made a speech which was quite different from the one that I suspect he is about to make. He said about regulation:

"There will always be somebody in an unfettered marketplace who pressures the standards at the lower end and thus destroys environmental standards that it is the Government's responsibility to uphold. The only way in which that can be prevented is by . . . regulation by the Government."—[*Official Report*, 28 November, 1988; Vol. 142, c. 460.]

I say with humility that I could not make a better case for regulation. Regulation is needed to give a set of decent standards which will provide a common floor so that cowboys cannot drive down standards to get a competitive edge. Today, sadly, the President finds himself on the side of the cowboys, and is extending to them the freedom to get a competitive edge by lowering standards.

Why has the President been forced to lower his own standards? The reason is that the pace on this is being forced by mightier minds than his. It is being forced by the mind of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton).

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): Oh!

Mr. Cook: The intellect of the hon. Gentleman is such that I would wish to have his full attention.

During Question Time, the hon. Gentleman lectured us three times on our ignorance. My respect for that rebuke would have been greater were it not for his decision, in his speech to the Conservative party conference, to cite the EC directive on the import of caramel as one of the cases proving that we need deregulation. The hon. Gentleman will recall that he pointed out to the conference that the Lord's Prayer needs 59 words, but the directive requires 26,911 words.

The only problem with that parable is that, when we asked the EC Commission for the directive on the import of caramel, it told us that there was no such thing, although someone remembered Sir John Banham, when in Brussels two years ago, making an after-diner speech in which he used that as a joke. That joke is now the foundation of the policy of the Department of Trade and Industry.

The hon. Member for Tatton is on the right wing. He is one of those people who believe that Government do not work, and who get into Government to prove it. Earlier this year, he made a speech to the Conservative Way Forward group. That must surely become the Conservative way back, but that is its problem. He is reported as saying:

"Measures controlling everything from health and safety at work and food, to fire prevention and the sale of dangerous goods, should be entrusted to business instead."

That, God help us all, is the man entrusted with running the deregulation initiative.

As I understand the reasoning behind the hon. Gentleman's ideology, it is that all regulations are an interference with the market. Left to itself, the market will compete for consumers, that competition will oblige the market to ensure ever higher standards in the competition for customers and if, through the absence of food regulations, a person contracts a fatal dose of salmonella, the market will automatically punish the producer because he will not get that person's custom again. I think that that is the reasoning in the loopy world inhabited by the hon. Member for Tatton, where reality does not intrude and environmental health officers do not call to inspect.

The hon. Member for Tatton gave the Conservative conference a most telling example of the red tape that holds

[Mr. Cook]

back British industry. At extended length, he explained that people who bake cakes for Conservative fund raising have to register their premises if they do it for five days every month. I am not clear as to how common is that practice among industrialists, upon whom it is a burden. I have my doubts whether that is how Asil Nadir raised the £400,000 that he gave to the Tory party.

However, I can pinpoint the offending regulations. I have looked them up. They are called the Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991, and the order was signed by four Tory Ministers, including two Cabinet Ministers. The hon. Gentleman has done us a service. He has exposed the humbug in the rhetoric about deregulation, which arises from the fact that the Tories themselves brought in most of the regulations about which they now complain.

I have here "Butterworth's Company Law Handbook 1979", which sets out British company law in under 500 pages. In 1979, Sir John Nott, the first of many Tory Secretaries of State for Trade, announced the first of many deregulation drives. I also have here "Butterworth's Company Law Handbook 1992". After 14 years of drives to deregulate, the book is now over 5,000 pages—10 times longer—and the pages have had to be made thinner so that everything can go into one volume.

If those 4,500 extra pages contain matter that is only tying up enterprise in red tape and regulations that serve no purpose, fine—the President will have our full co-operation in cutting that out. As that is always desirable, why does he need a special Bill to proceed? That is the point at which the alarm bells begin to ring. We have read that the Bill will not be a list of the 4,500 pages of regulations which should be repealed. Instead, the Bill will give the Government the power to repeal regulations. Specifically, it will give the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs the power to repeal those regulations.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): With his expert knowledge of the workings of the EC and EC directives, can the hon. Gentleman explain how many pages would have to be added to the tome that he has just produced if the charter on European socialism, signed by his colleague in Brussels two weeks ago, became European law?

Mr. Cook: I do not have the slightest difficulty in saying that, if we want to compete with other countries in Europe, we must compete with them in work practices. That is why no successful industry in Britain would face any serious problem in meeting the terms of the social charter. The people on whom it would bite are the cowboys whom the Government have encouraged to come into business over the past few years and who provide work practices and conditions for their employees of which the Government should be ashamed.

As I understand it, we are to be invited to provide the Government with the power to deregulate without reference to Parliament, which passed the regulations in the first place. On the day of the Queen's Speech, the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs went on record as saying that "nothing is ruled out". If the President of the Board of Trade wants the Bill to go through without controversy, he had better start ruling out some of the regulations. In particular, he will need to rule out any deregulation that will reduce the safety of the public. That does not appear to have been a working principle of the review of the regulations.

I have a copy of a letter about furniture regulations which the deregulation initiative sent to many companies. It informs those companies that part of the review of deregulation is to consider the furniture and fire safety regulations. Those regulations were introduced only six years ago, after a week during which 10 people, mainly children, died as a result of toxic gas produced from foam-filled upholstery. What are we doing even contemplating the deregulation of those controls?

The Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs went on the record at the Conservative party conference as saying:

"We must always remember that the silent majority of consumers are backing us all the way."

This month, the National Consumer Council put that assertion to the test and held an opinion poll. The poll discovered that 91 per cent. of consumers want consumer protection to be regulated by the Government, particularly in respect of fire regulations on furniture. The arithmetic of the Under-Secretary of State appears to be as suspect on this occasion as it was in respect of the caramel directive. His silent majority in favour of deregulation has dwindled to 3 per cent. of that sample.

I understand why the Under-Secretary formed the view that consumers were silent. He formed seven task forces to carry out the review. Those task forces comprise 55 members, not one of whom is on a task force as a consumer. They are all there as business men. To be precise, 52 are there as business men and, for the sake of what passes for balance, three are there as business women. They are all members of the task forces as producers. Consumers are kept silent while vested interests gather around the table and consider how to cut the costs and standards of regulation, without reckoning the risk or cost to the consumer.

In fairness to those estimable people, some of them have been admirably frank about how they see their role. Mr. Christopher Spackman is chairman of the construction task force. He comes from Bovis, whose parent company has given the Tory party £600,000 over the past five years. Mr. Spackman and his colleagues have obviously been baking a very large number of cakes.

This is how Mr. Spackman described his objective:

"There is no use playing around. We have to be drastic—for example, kill off the Building Regulations."

There was none of that language that we heard during Question Time, of upgrading and improving the regulations. Mr. Spackman said that we should

"kill off the Building Regulations."

We were rebuked for using such words when we used them in respect of what the Government are proposing for health and safety. There cannot be much hope of protection for the home buyer after the building regulations are killed off.

There is a word to describe the arrangements by which the party in government takes large sums from a company and then takes direction from that company on which regulations it would find it convenient to have scrapped. That word is "corruption". It is the corruption of a party that has been in power for so long that it has forgotten that it holds office in the public interest, not the vested interests of its friends.

Mr. Spackman, of course, does not confine himself to the building regulations. Mr. Spackman also says that he

will express his views on the safety regulations for the construction industry, an industry that already has the worst safety record in Britain. It is not just the safety to the consumer that is at risk, but the safety of the employee.

We know that, among the 3,600 regulations that have been looked at, there are dozens relating to health and safety—for example, the regulation on lifting loads manually, the regulations intended to contain repetitive strain injury while using a visual display unit, even the regulation obliging employers to supply toilet rolls and a lavatory, which was signed by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. Mcloughlin), the present Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in 1992 when he was at the Department of the Employment.

That is back to basics with a vengeance. Is that how we will increase competitiveness—by making our workplaces the most dangerous? Is that how we will attract inward investment—by letting companies take greater risks with British workers? Only the myopic would describe the cost of proper safety measures as a burden on business. The business executive who has got beyond counting candle ends and joined the modern world knows that the real burden is the cost of accidents, that better safety is not a burden on business, and that better safety means reductions in lost production, less absence through injuries, fewer compensation claims, and lower insurance premiums.

Earlier this year, the Health and Safety Executive produced a study of the cost of accidents in five workplaces. It found that the cost of accidents in one company was the equivalent of 37 per cent. of profit. In another company, it was the equivalent of 8 per cent. of turnover.

As Conservative Members are contemplating deregulating the new regulation on manual lifting, I invite them to remember that 3·5 million working days are lost in Britain through back injury. That is five times the number of days lost through strikes, which Conservative Members are quick to denounce as damaging to the economy. I am not so naive as to hope that Conservative Members might back off because there are 3·5 million days of pain for members of the public suffering from back strain, but I ask them to think again and pause to reflect that 3·5 million lost working days add up to several hundred million pounds of lost output.

We could make a similar financial case in respect of the environmental regulations. Among the 3,600 regulations which the President of the Board of Trade has put into the review are regulations on air quality, water and waste management, nuisance from noise and litter, and insulation in lofts. We do not do our industry any favours by permitting it to operate to lower environmental standards than in the rest of the world. The rest of the world is our market.

The OECD estimates that, by the end of the century, the market for green technological products will be £300 billion—bigger than the global aerospace market. The rest of the world will want products that meet their standards, not our standards. They will buy from countries that will provide the best environmental technology. Our industry will not invest in developing that technology if we run our country on the worst environmental standards.

Such consideration should inform the thinking of any Minister who is interested in a serious industrial strategy. Instead, deregulation is offered to this Session of Parliament as a grotesque parody of industrial strategy.

The hon. Member for Tatton defended it by saying that the fastest growing economies are the unregulated tigers of the Pacific rim. The hon. Gentleman deludes himself if he thinks that their impressive technological advance was achieved by doing without toilet paper in the lavatory or insulation in the loft. They advanced by a formidable rate of savings and investment, and by a first-class education service, which is putting through double the proportion that Britain puts into higher education. They got there with a massive programme to build modern transport and communication systems. Most of all, they got there with active partnership between Government and industry to identify, and they to occupy, markets in new technology.

Britain needs a Government who are ready to face up to the challenge that those countries pose to us. What the Queen's Speech proves is that this Government are incapable even of understanding that challenge. Instead of measures that will provide for more investment, skills and technology, we are presented with a measure which will bring lower safety and environmental standards and a lower level of consumer protection. That this pathetic, mean-spirited Bill should be held up as one of the two big Bills of this Session is a revelation.

We have a Government who have been in office so long that they are bereft of any sense of purpose, or any idea of what good they can do for the public. It would flatter them to compare them to a row "of exhausted volcanoes", which was Disraeli's phrase. Most of them—I exempt the President of the Board of Trade—have never produced a single notable eruption in their entire careers. They bear more resemblance to a line of abandoned molehills, and it is long past the time that they were turned over and ploughed back into the earth.

That is what we shall start to get down to tonight, with the first official vote of the parliamentary Session. We will express our contempt of a Government who present deregulation as a parody of an industrial strategy, and we shall signal our determination to fight any attempt by them to abandon their duty as a Government to protect the safety of the public.

4.31 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): When I returned to the House not many weeks ago—I thank the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) for his kind remarks—someone asked me, "How's life?" I replied, "A great deal better than the alternative." As I listened to the hon. Member for Livingston today, I wondered whether I had been a little rash in my judgment.

The Gracious Speech made clear the importance that the Government attach to a successful outcome to the present general agreement on tariffs and trade round. It was fascinating that not a word was said about that, although it is perhaps the single biggest opportunity facing the entire world, to improve living standards and trading opportunities—not a word about that from the hon. Member for Livingston. However, Conservative Members will welcome the boost which the passage of the north American free trade agreement has already given to the Uruguay round. There must be no doubt that no country will work harder than we will for a successful conclusion to that round.

The calculations show the excitement of the possibilities. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation

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and Development claims that a successful outcome could raise annual world income by about $270 billion during a decade. That estimate could well prove to be on the cautious side, once the effects of trade in services and the dynamic benefits of trade liberalisation are taken into account.

We all realise that the timetable is perilously tight and, frankly, all the Governments of the world must face the understandable criticism that it has taken seven years of negotiation, yet we now face trying to conclude the deals on so many issues with just three weeks to go.

It is also important to remember that a successful outcome to the GATT round would not only be welcomed on trade grounds, important though they are; the less-developed and poorer countries in particular stand to gain far more in extra trade and investment than they could ever expect in extra aid from the more prosperous countries.

Within a more open trading environment, our policy is to enable and assist British-based companies to gain the largest possible share of world trade.

On any detached analysis, there are growing signs today of success. We heard virtually not a word from the Opposition about the direction in which the economy is moving or about the news, which is more encouraging by the day. Inflation is at its lowest level for 30 years. Headline inflation has been below 2 per cent. for 10 months—the best performance since the 1960s. With the base rate now cut to 5·5 per cent., since October 1990 interest rate reductions have added about £12 billion a year of benefit to business. Investment is rising; manufacturing investment in the third quarter of this year was up by 2 per cent. on a year earlier, a point which also seems to have passed the hon. Member for Livingston by—it certainly passed his colleagues by when they drafted the amendment on the Order Paper.

Our GDP has been rising for 18 months. It was 1·9 per cent. higher in the third quarter of this year than a year earlier. Perhaps most excitingly of all, exports are at record levels. The volume of manufactured exports going outside the EC was up by 16 per cent. on a year earlier. Characteristically, the hon. Member for Livingston sought to diminish the world trade that this country has achieved by claiming that our share of it had risen under the Labour Government. The only way he can do that is by talking about cash and ignoring exchange rate calculations. In fact, persistently and under all Governments, since the war we have lost our volume share of world trade. Our share has now stabilised, however. The task is to ensure that we build up our export success, to make sure that it increases in the right direction.

It is particularly encouraging to realise that this is now beginning to happen, given the depth of the recession affecting our principal markets in the European Community. Within the single market, it is this country's economy that is leading the recovery. There are clear background signs now that we can look forward to persistent growth. Our prime task, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spelt out with great clarity, is to enhance the competitiveness of our economy.

Opening the debate on the Gracious Speech, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister covered many of the essential ingredients of this enhanced competitiveness when he set out our central strategies for education, training, research and development, infrastructure and macro-economic management—to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor will return tomorrow.

In the Gracious Speech, my Department, as the hon. Member for Livingston rightly said, has three Bills: the deregulation Bill, the trade marks Bill and the Bill to privatise the coal industry, and the House would expect me to comment on each of them. I wish to make it clear that the deregulation Bill will not be about destroying the environment, imperilling safety or exposing the unsuspecting to fraud and cheating.

"We believe it is vital to keep red tape to a minimum."

I expected that phrase to provoke a response from the Labour party—I thought that its members might have welcomed it. Why? Because those were the words of the Leader of the Opposition to a small firms conference that he held the other day.

It is all very well for the right hon. and learned Gentleman to come out with these wonderfully ringing words—with which I agree—when he is away from the House and away from the parliamentary Labour party—and when he is not being listened to by his supporters. But when he comes here, he dismisses deregulation, as he did in his remarks on the Queen's Speech, as almost irrelevant to our national recovery.

The truth is that the only thing that is marginal, in the context of a party that has lost four elections in a row, is the policy of that party on deregulation. We want to make sure when we regulate that we protect the vulnerable, protect the public, protect our heritage and protect the countryside, but in such a way as to deal best with the real risks and to put the fewest obstacles in the way of wealth creation. We must keep paperwork to a minimum and keep the intrusive nature of bureaucracy under the tightest possible control.

There are three thrusts to the policy that we intend to introduce. The first is the new regulations; we will ensure that regulators count the cost of their proposals before they publish them. Secondly, there is no point in taming domestic regulators in Whitehall if European directives keep piling on the burden. Last year, we persuaded our European colleagues to put the cost of business into account and to publish it when new European measures are proposed.

Thirdly, there is the subject matter of the Bill. We are reviewing existing regulations. Under the guidance of Lord Sainsbury, eight task forces from business and the voluntary sector have been examining regulations on the statute book to see whether they can be scrapped, modified or improved.

Even then, primary legislation can stand in the way of reform. That is why we are introducing a deregulation Bill to cut the red tape and open up the opportunities for business. The Bill will include specific deregulation measures, as well as a means to deregulate in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] The hon. Member for Livingston was deeply immersed in creating fear, at which he is a past master. A parliamentary process will be involved in our proposals.

In the same Bill, we will be removing statutory obstacles to market-testing and contracting-out programmes of both Government and local authorities because we want to see better value for money for the taxpayer in all our policies.

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I am pleased to welcome back the President of the Board of Trade after his illness. He seems to fail completely to comprehend that some Labour Members do not correlate cutting red tape and minimising death and injury in the industry. Why does he fail to comprehend that?

Mr. Heseltine: I do so for precisely the same reason that the Leader of the Opposition made it absolutely clear that he wanted to cut red tape to a minimum as well. The hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) and other Labour Members cannot understand that in a competitive world we have no choice but to make absolutely sure that every avoidable cost is avoided in our legislative programme.

It must be recognised that deregulation is not simply about the letter of the law. The law gives rise to a plethora of guidance notes, circulars, inspectors and forms—all the familiar trappings of bureaucracy. Our review covers the impedimenta of legislation, as well as the legislation itself.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Conservative Members are finding this speech extremely invigorating, and I hope that we will hear a little more of this wonderful stuff. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will bear in mind that it is not simply about deregulation—it is about the over-zealous interpretation by officials not only in Whitehall but at local level. It is an attitude problem which we must address from the top.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why I referred to the impedimenta of legislation and all the practices that flow from it. We are well aware that many of the changes that we hope to see will not require legislation; they will require changing practices in a new changed culture. The House will have an opportunity to examine our detailed proposals when we introduce the Bill.

The speech of the hon. Member for Livingston was anticipated, but he is not the only one. Labour Members are already in full cry and, if I may say so, in characteristic vein. This is not the first time that the hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to indulge in what might be called slightly exaggerated versions of the truth. Indeed, he has a technique. He is a sort of chill factor in the body politic. We are well aware of how he does it because the record is there. He was shadow spokesman for the health service.

Mr. Robin Cook: I was very good.

Mr. Heseltine: Let me remind the hon. Gentleman, if he needs any reminding, of what he said before the election about Conservatives seeking a health service where organisations were put on the second floor of buildings to discourage people who were disabled and therefore expensive to treat from enrolling, or where casualty patients died because no one could pay for them. The hon. Gentleman knew that that was not true; it was a great distortion of anything that we had in mind, but if he could find people to frighten, frighten them he would, regardless of the facts.

The Leader of the Opposition had an even more brazen charge. He said that it is all the Government's fault—we heard that again from the hon. Member for Livingston—because we are simply reviewing our own regulations. Nothing so reveals the fossilised inherent approach of the socialist in practice as that allegation.

A communications revolution can sweep the world. The globalisation of markets can overwhelm national boundaries. The Asian-Pacific rim can transform the competitive threat. Industry and commerce must change. The one thing that must never change is the good old British regulation. Like the pint and the good old British banger—once a regulation, always a regulation. What a battle cry for the modernised Labour party.

But who can be surprised? The Labour party is the regulator's natural ally. About the only things left of the trade union movement are the white collar affiliates of the Trades Union Congress who dream up the regulations, inspect the regulated, regulate the regulators and drown the rest of us under the weight of the burden. That is typical of those socialists in their approach, with their ideas frozen in time and practices set solid in concrete. That is the image that one would think they wanted to portray—no change; and when it is done, leave it there.

Hon. Members will want to consider carefully whether that argument is applied as consistently by Labour Members as they would have us believe. They may not be prepared to change one dot or comma of the most outdated regulation. Not a hair on the head of the most lowly inspector must be subjected to the wind of change, but when it comes to their fundamental socialist beliefs, which have cost them four consecutive elections, they want us to believe that the whole lot have been flung out the window. They fought against Europe for 30 years. Now they take every nugget of Euro-speak before the red ink is dry on the paper. Nationalisation was once the essence of their industrial strategy. Now it has become the word that dare not speak its name.

I shall give one example of what can be achieved when the yoke on nationalisation is removed. In 1983, we privatised the ports. In 1989, we abolished the dock labour scheme. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) doubtless reacted with a characteristically moderate and balanced judgment. The modesty of his language was exceeded only by the energy with which he rushed around the docks spreading the news of impending disaster.

I took the liberty of doing a little research. In 1980, less than 4,000 tonnes of cargo went through Hull. In 1992, it was nearly 9,000 tonnes. The figure had more than doubled. The only other difference that I have detected over the years of Hull's growing success is the absence of the hon. Gentleman, who, I am told, has not visited the thriving new dock company since its inception. Like the scarlet pimpernel, they seek him here, they seek him there. But the first sign of real success in his constituency brings forth in the hon. Gentleman a unique contribution to the political debate—absolute silence.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: There is someone who has never known what absolute silence is.

I can only say that when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East describes my deregulation proposals as a return to the killing fields, nothing persuades me more that I have got them more or less right.

Mr. Skinner: Give way.

Mr. Heseltine: Yes, why not?

Mr. Skinner: I have a little tablet here that the President can put under his tongue. Is he aware that when he talks about imports into Hull, he is talking about the massive increase in coal imports which have enabled him

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and his fellow Ministers to encourage pit closures? As a result, the 31 pits that he said he would save now look as if they will be closed. He should be ashamed of himself for putting all those workers on the dole.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman gives the game away. In the real world, employment in the docks is the preoccupation. He cannot understand that there has been a container revolution and that the efficiency of the ports today makes them competitive. What he would really like to see are the days of old when thousands of men carried the loads in sacks on their backs. Then he could have a national union of sack carriers. Doubtless we would have Members of Parliament sponsored by the national union of sack carriers, paying their funds into the Labour party and shackling the competitive instinct of this country, at which the hon. Gentleman is one of the greatest experts.

I should be the last person to wish to do the Labour party any sort of injustice. I have said that it would regulate everything. I am prepared to believe that every rule has an exception. I have missed out one area where no doubt the deregulating zeal of the Labour party would be at the forefront of its political agenda: the trade unions would be deregulated. Here we would find a veritable bonfire of controls: strikes, go-slows, no-gos, Labour in power, socialism in practice—all back to an agenda that we drove from the country 14 years ago. The painful sacrifices accumulated over 20 years that have given the country the best industrial relations for a century would be thrown away in a single Act of Parliament.

On this issue at least let me accuse the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East of no silence. He has made it absolutely clear that Labour would repeal all our trade union legislation. There is nothing to keep. It all has to go. The House will want to contrast that with the charge made by the hon. Member for Livingston that, because we talk to leaders in the construction industry, with a view modestly to changing the regulations to lighten the load on our system, we are indulging in corruption. Yet the Labour party is prepared to sweep from the statute book all our trade union legislation to satisfy its paymasters. What are we supposed to call that? So we shall press on with our deregulation programme as part of our determination to help British industry compete.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The President of the Board of Trade is making an entertaining speech. Will he tell the House specifically how the regulations will be introduced? Will the House be presented with a detailed Bill that includes the specific regulations, which can be debated, amended and voted on; or will we be presented with an enabling Bill in which each individual regulation will be determined by statutory instrument? If the latter is the case, that is not the way to deal with deregulation.

Mr. Heseltine: The good old Liberals are at it again. They want it all ways. Whatever we do, it will be wrong. The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. We will have a Second Reading of the Bill, when he can examine it in great detail. Doubtless he will table some amendments, the scrutiny of which we shall be forced to subject ourselves to. Nevertheless, in the proper, democratic exercise of our duty, the Liberals must have their turn, however small it may turn out to be.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): It is good to see the President of the Board of Trade back on form. His speech is entertaining, if in no way factual. I remind him that a great deal of research was done by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry for its report on Europe. Does he recall that the report pointed out clearly to Ministers that the burden of many European Community regulations had been increased by his own civil servants? That was a strong criticism.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has referred to the increase in regulation. That has arisen directly from the inability of Ministers, particularly those in the Department of Trade and Industry, to control their civil servants, who are adding extensively to EC regulations. Ministers rode on the back of EC regulations that would not have passed through the House had the turnkey of the European Community not been used.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members present that interventions are supposed to be brief. They are not supposed to be mini-speeches.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and I thank him for his generous words to me personally. If he wants to help me to a full recovery, he will avoid inviting me to appear before his Select Committee again.

I now want to say something about the privatisation of the coal industry. The hon. Member for Livingston treated us to a general denunciation of the issues of privatisation, so it may be helpful if first we spend a moment or two looking at the record of privatisation over this decade. We have absolutely no doubt that privatisation drives up standards of efficiency and management, ensures that investment decisions are taken by customers, not Government, leads to increased efficiency and lower costs and encourages innovation, all of which help the privatised companies to get out and become world class players on the international stage.

Just one sobering statistic—a single sentence—will show why we believe that we have brought about a fundamental and important shift. In 1979, taxpayers paid £50 million a week to subsidise the losses of the nationalised industries. The privatised industries are now paying £60 million a week in taxes to the Exchequer on the profits that they are making. There is no clearer vindication than that of the privatisation policies of the past decade.

British Steel is now one of the most efficient in the whole world. PowerGen, National Power and the National Grid are international companies. We have a major extension and modernisation of our water and sewerage infrastructure, with a £30 billion investment programme. British Telecom's prices are down by more than 27 per cent. in real terms since 1984. Domestic and small business prices for gas have fallen by 20 per cent. in real terms since privatisation. British Gas now operates in more than 45 overseas markets.

The hon. Member for Livingston describes that as the grotesque irrelevance of privatisation. There has been a dramatic transformation of the commanding heights of our economy precisely because they have been privatised. This is the remarkable transformation of great parts of the previously nationalised industries. It is against that background that we believe that the best future for coal is in the private sector.

I have no need to repeat the concern shared by everyone in the House for the difficulties experienced by those in the industry.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Bloody hypocrisy.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman talks of hypocrisy. The Opposition have presided over the run-down of the coal industry every time they have been in office. The figures are startling. In 1948, when the industry was brought into public ownership, there were 958 collieries and 700,000 workers; by 1970, it was down to 300 collieries and 375,000 workers. Everybody knows that the market for coal has been declining persistently for the past half century.

Another matter has been proved beyond peradventure. Energy markets are too volatile for any kind of central planning system to make sensible decisions for the future. A salient feature of Government forecasts on energy is that they have always turned out to be wrong. It was forecast that oil and gas would become rare and expensive towards the new millennium. In practice, new discoveries are taking place all the time. Production is at a high level and reserves are mounting. As a result, prices are low and look set to remain that way.

We plan to bring before the House as soon as possible this Session a Bill to privatise British Coal. That would free the industry from the dead hand of state control and allow it to compete within the wider energy market. The Opposition do not see it that way. They have not seen it that way whenever we have privatised an industry and they have always been wrong.

The hon. Member for Livingston is up to his old tricks and trying to suggest that privatisation will threaten the safety of miners. It is despicable how the hon. Gentleman always finds the most vulnerable sectors of society and cynically exploits their legitimate fears for narrow party purposes. When I became President of the Board of Trade, at my first meeting on the subject, I said that I would do nothing to prejudice safety in the mines. I have never been asked to do anything that would do that and, if I were asked, I would not do it. We have fully accepted the advice of the Health and Safety Commission which was contained in its recent report, which has been placed in the Library.

I look forward to the day when British coal companies are free to seek—and invest in—world opportunities and to export their skills and experience in the huge international market. Furthermore, looking back over the decades, I have no doubt that, had we privatised the industry earlier, British Coal would have saved more jobs and we would have had a larger and more viable industry than the market can now sustain.

Mr. Robin Cook: The President must have missed out a page of his speech. Before he leaves the issue of privatisation of the coal industry, will he answer the question put to him? If privatisation is to work such a wonderful transformation of the coal industry, how many pits will survive to be privatised?

Mr. Heseltine: It is an illusion of the Opposition. When they were in power, the pits closed month after month. They never knew, and no Minister will make such forecasts in a market condition where the customer will determine the market.

My third Bill covers trademarks, which play a critical part for business. The forthcoming trademarks Bill will deregulate procedures. It will open the door to the use of international trade mark registration systems under the Madrid protocol, thereby allowing businesses to protect trade marks overseas in all contracting states by a single application. That will achieve substantial savings for other businesses.

The Gracious Speech debate and the Opposition's amendment go wider than the specific legislation that I propose to introduce. I should like to update the House on the position of Leyland Daf because nothing so illustrates the difference in policy as the differing approaches of the Government and the hon. Member for Livingston on that issue.

The House will remember that the company went into receivership in February this year. The hon. Member for Livingston was on his feet demanding instant intervention. "Bail the company out" was the instant policy. I refused, not least because, having put £3·5 billion into Leyland, we did not seem to have succeeded in doing the trick by bailing the company out with taxpayers' money. Instead, we backed the entrepreneurial skills of the management, receivers, banks and financial houses to let them find a commercial market solution. The van and truck businesses were able to set themselves up as two independently run companies. Half the jobs were saved, as was the supply and distribution chain. The cost to the British taxpayer was £5 million in regional assistance.

While my Department was encouraging and helping all that intricate, detailed work to save half the jobs at minimum cost to the taxpayer, the hon. Member for Livingston was not idle. He was leaping about, flying to the continent, and climbing on any old soap box urging me to do what the Belgian and Dutch Governments were doing. It all made good headlines at the time, and nudged the hon. Member up the shadow Cabinet pecking order a bit. But, as always, when the facts come out, they do not fit the scare stories in which the hon. Gentleman trades.

The Dutch and Belgian work forces were reduced by virtually the same proportions as ours, but the poor old European taxpayers were £100 million worse off as a result of their Governments' hasty involvement. That is what the hon. Gentleman really believes in—spend money first and then try to find solutions. That is what the last Labour Government tried, but it costs money and it does not work.

The news for us is even better. Both Leyland DAF Vans and Leyland Trucks have recovered well. The vans business is maintaining its production volume and has recently announced an £8 million development programme. Leyland Trucks has been able to increase civilian volumes by 30 per cent. and win export markets, and is discussing joint development of a new medium weight truck.

However, to the hon. Member for Livingston, all that was grist to the mill. Some of my hon. Friends, who do not need to concern themselves with the details of those matters, may have missed a little press release that he put out at the time. It was in characteristic language and was headed:

"Labour reveals the threatened 'dossier of disaster' if Leyland Daf closes".

The hon. Gentleman had identified 6,000 firms that would be pushed into closure by the loss of business. He produced a "dossier of disaster". All my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Government in whose constituencies a Leyland van had ever been seen were listed for that hideous impending

[Mr. Heseltine]

disaster—6,000 fingers stretched out in blame, reaching to tear the throat from the hapless President of the Board of Trade.

My poor old right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was up to his eyes in it simply because the Rover car company in his constituency had supplied parts to Leyland Daf. Rover would be hit, we were warned. What happened? Rover is selling cars like there was no tomorrow, recruiting extra employees and setting world quality standards.

It was not just the big fish. Even the junior Ministers were not to be spared the ruthless scourge of the hon. Gentleman's searing foresight. He said that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, was about to see Land Rover knocked off its perch. What happened? Land Rover has taken on 300 extra staff, and sales of the Discovery have doubled in Japan and Australia.

What has happened to those 6,000 fingers? They are stuck in the dykes of Labour's crumbling allegations, as every day the recovery reveals the bankruptcy of its statements. If the hon. Member for Livingston is searching around for another press release, why does he not put out one containing good news stories from the constituencies of his colleagues in the shadow Cabinet? I do not want to impose any unnecessary burden or strain on him. Let us have just a press release of good news stories from his constituency—£20 million investment in NEC semi-conductors by 1994; 300 new jobs at VRG International in the next four years; 200 new jobs at Mitsubishi in the next two years; 300 new jobs at Marshall Food Group in the next three years; 400 new jobs at David Hall in the next four years; 400 new jobs at IMTEC. I could continue with the list in his constituency alone.

So why are there no press releases about all that? Where are all those menacing fingers? They are itching to get to work in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, with the new technologies, new factories and new British opportunities. What else? *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Livingston said that it was a gross misrepresentation.

Mr. Robin Cook: The President of the Board of Trade must not run away with a mishearing. What I said was that it was an excellent representation of Livingston.

Mr. Heseltine: That is interesting. It brings me conveniently to the next argument. Why are all those companies in the hon. Gentleman's constituency? What is it that brings them there? They are all seeking a base in Europe and they are choosing Britain because we are competitive and attractive and they are welcome here. Under this Government, Britain will stay that way, but not under a Labour Government.

I am sorry that the Leader of the Opposition is not here; he is probably looking after some of his new friends in the boardrooms of England. He is famed for his flirtation and carrying-on with the leaders of our great companies—last week, he was at the Confederation of British Industry conference and, week by week, he is among the thick pile and hushed atmosphere of the City dining rooms. I must make it clear to the leaders of our great companies that it is not their smoked salmon that he is after. He has a different agenda. He has a manifesto of Euro-socialism. Of course, he says that it does not mean all that it says, but it has got his name on it, he is a lawyer and it is printed in English.

The manifesto may not mean much to the Leader of the Opposition or his hon. Friends, but if one asks the directors in the boardrooms of the international companies deciding whether to invest in our country or not, they have no doubt about what it all means. What is the agenda that we have from the Euro-socialists? The manifesto supports

"a substantial cut in working time"

including the prospect of a 35-hour or four-day week.

"to breathe life into the European social Chapter."

It supports

"European works councils, consultations of workings in multi-national businesses and European sectoral collective agreements . . . a guaranteed minimum wage"

and

"Community measures . . . to avoid a tax-cutting competition between member states".

We shall not even be allowed to cut the taxes to bring the investment to create the jobs in the constituency of the hon. Member for Livingston.

There is one other little nugget tucked away in the manifesto for Euro-socialism. It supports

"a European policy on waste".

Let us start by ripping up the manifesto itself. To what does it actually add up? Every competitive advantage that this country possesses will be thrown away. To pursue the international brotherhood of man is one thing, but to sell the dear old country down the river to get it is another.

The Leader of the Opposition made much play—*[Interruption.]* There were a great many more people at the Tory party conference than there are Labour Members present today. The Leader of the Opposition made much play of the need for evidence. He asked, "What is it about the Tories? They make all the decisions and announcements—the only thing that is ever missing is evidence." He accused us of designing policies, against the facts, without regard for evidence, and as a mere reaction to events. I reject that charge absolutely. We are determined to steer the country to a new competitiveness and a sustained recovery.

If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) wants evidence, I shall give it to him. We have the highest proportion of our population at work among the major Community countries. Unemployment has fallen by 137,000 this year. Inflation is persistently lower than at any time since 1960. Exports are at record levels. Interest rates are among the Community's lowest. Industrial relations are excellent. That is the evidence upon which a sustained recovery can be based and on which I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for the motion.

5.16 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The late Earl of Stockton, when he was Prime Minister, was talked of in the House as an actor manager. I hope that the President of the Board of Trade will forgive me for saying that today he has shone more as an actor than a manager. Let no one ever say that he has no alternative career.

Europe's fastest growing airport, which is also the north-west's most prolific job creator in the private and public sectors alike, has been much in the news recently. I refer, of course, to Manchester airport in my constituency. The airport is owned by Greater Manchester's 10 local authorities and we have been told by the press, on the basis

of recent Whitehall briefings of parliamentary journalists, that the Government intend to enforce the sale of the airport to the private sector. We have been told by *The Sunday Times:*

"The Government would not benefit directly from the cash raised [an estimated £560 million] but could cut Whitehall grants to the local councils which raised funds from the sell-off."

Another and perhaps better way of describing what the Government were said to be proposing is that Greater Manchester's 10 local authorities would, at the end of the day, retain not a single penny from the sale price because the Government would cut Whitehall grants to them by the same amount. In other words, the 10 local councils lose their airport, while the Government save £560 million in Whitehall grants. If that is what the Prime Minister means by "going back to basics", I advise him not to take his soap box anywhere near Manchester airport or to any of the 10 town halls.

If accurately reported by *The Sunday Times,* the Government plan will involve theft of public property on a massive scale and will make the "great train robbers" look like petty pickpockets.

Many responsible newspapers were expecting the Government's intentions in regard to Manchester, Birmingham, Luton and other airports to be announced in the Gracious Speech, most probably in the context of the debate on the Bill to facilitate deregulation which, of course, we have yet to see in print. Now, we are told that Whitehall has discovered that it might not be as easy as it thought to grab Britain's still publicly owned airports for the private sector.

For example, on 19 November, after a briefing at the Department of Transport, *The Guardian* reported that forcing local councils to sell their airports could be "fraught with difficulties". But despite all the briefing given to Parliamentary journalists, the House has still to receive any kind of statement on the Government's intentions.

I speak in the debate first to seek full clarification of the Government's position. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that it is just not good enough for Ministers and their officials to give a welter of briefing to the press while Parliament is being left in the dark. My second purpose in speaking today is to warn the Government that there will be the most fierce and utterly unyielding opposition to any attempt to dispossess the people of Greater Manchester of their proudest asset, not least, much to their honour, from a great many Conservative members of the 10 local councils.

If Ministers are in any doubt about the scale of Conservative opposition to what the Government are said to want, let them spend a day or two with their party's local public representatives in, for example, Bury and Bolton. They will find scant, if any, dissent in any party in Greater Manchester, from the message in a recent leading article in the *Manchester Evening News,* which said of our airport:

"It is the shining jewel in Greater Manchester's crown, and should be allowed to remain the property of 2·5 million people in Greater Manchester who benefit from the profits the Airport makes".

Ms Estelle Morris (Birmingham, Yardley): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising the important point on the future of airports. Will he accept that any campaign or effort to oppose the privatisation of Manchester airport and other airports will be joined by hon. Members who represent Birmingham constituencies? Is he aware that, under the control of local authorities in Birmingham, our airport is a success story because it has expanded its standard and level of service to make it equal with not only any other airport in the country, but throughout the world?

Mr. Morris: I hope that I may be excused for referring to that welcome intervention as one not from an hon. Friend, but from a close relative, my niece, whose work for and total commitment to her constituents in Birmingham I greatly admire. I understand that we are the first niece and uncle ever to serve together in the House and, of course, I am grateful for what she said.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Would the righ hon. Gentleman give way although I am not a relative? Is he assured to learn that at least one Conservative Member shares many of his concerns? Will he accept that Manchester airport is a fine example of a successful partnership that makes a substantial profit? Indeed, some months ago, a number of us attended the opening of terminal 2, which was not only constructed below its estimated cost, but was finished ahead of time. If that is not an example of efficiency in the public local government sector, I do not know what is.

Mr. Morris: In a way I am related to the hon. Gentleman, at least geographically in terms of our constituencies. Mine adjoins his at the airport and he is a regular user. I entirely agree that the airport's achievements are a superb example of partnership at its best, as I shall explain in more detail.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): It is also superb for people in Wales.

Mr. Morris: As my hon. Friend says, it is also much appreciated in Wales. I know that he often drives from Wales to Manchester because of a quality of service that gives great pride to those who work there, based, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) says, on close partnership between the public and private sectors.

I must now complete the quotation I was giving the House from the leading article of the *Manchester Evening News.* It concludes:

"The Government must be made to understand that Manchester International Airport has nothing to gain from being sold off."

Let me briefly document the justification for that last sentence. Manchester airport is highly efficient and very profitable. By every test—growth, profitability, performance, consumer satisfaction—the airport is Britain's best. In fact, only two months ago, the airport won the "Best of Britain" accolade, and its ability to pick up other prizes and awards has made it the envy not only of other British airports, but of airports across the world. Of the 12,200 people who work at Manchester airport, some 80 per cent. are in the private sector. Tens of thousands of other people in the north-west, all in the private sector, owe their jobs to Manchester airport's huge success.

The airport's profit in the past year was £42·8 million, compared with £7·4 million nine years ago, and it is now out-performing Gatwick. In 1988-89, when Gatwick, as a British Airports Authority airport, was publicly owned, it had 21,056,000 passengers a year and Manchester 9,700,000. Now that Gatwick is in the private sector, it has 19,843,000 passengers a year, compared with publicly owned Manchester's 13,200,000. So much for the totally

[Mr. Morris]

bogus argument that transfer from public to private ownership means automatic growth. Stanstead, which is heavily subsidised, is another instructive case that Ministers may wish to examine for the purpose of comparing private and public sector airports.

Manchester airport's success did not happen overnight. It was achieved by courage, foresight, imaginative planning, patience, intensely hard work and shrewd business sense. That combination made Manchester airport as important to the regional economy of the north-west today as the ship canal was earlier in the century. Who were the shrewd business men who brought this about? They were successive generations of Manchester city councillors, public men and women of all parties and of none. Expertly advised, and acting together with the full support of Manchester's ratepayers, they took the investment decisions that are paying off so handsomely today.

There were many years when Manchester airport did not make a profit. The people of Manchester have had a return on their investment as ratepayers only since the early 1980s. Moreover, that return has been ploughed back into the regional economy. In what the Government are said to be proposing, there can be no guarantee that the airport's profit will stay in the north-west. It comes as no surprise in Greater Manchester, now that the major risks have been taken and an increasingly successful future is assured, that people want to poach our most valuable asset for private profit. That is why there is so much resentment in the conurbation about the Government's reported intention and why there is such strong, all-party determination to resist any attempt at dispossession.

If anyone questions our airport's efficiency, let him name the private companies in the north-west that showed anything like a profit of £42·8 million in the past year, or let him point to any other airport that has won, by independent adjudication, so many prizes and awards. By common consent, Greater Manchester has many daunting problems that merit the attention of the House. Its longest and most distressing queue is that for jobs. We have one of the gravest problems of youth unemployment in Britain and the Government's reported plan for an enforced sale of Manchester airport is widely seen as a threat to make the job crisis even worse.

The best message that we can send to those who own, control and work at Manchester airport is one of congratulations on what they have achieved and the best wishes of the House for still further success. In the interests of the economic revival of the north-west as a whole, Greater Manchester's fixed commitment is to an expanding international airport that will create more and more growth, and more jobs in a region with unacceptably high unemployment. I ask the Government now to drop their manic obsession with privatisation for privatisation's sake, to learn from Manchester airport's undoubted success and to help it to attain the important new goals which it has the high management skills and sense of purpose to achieve.

After the Newbury and Christchurch by-elections, the Government promised to repent, to change their ways and to start listening to people. Let them now, at long last, have the common sense to start listening to the voice of the people of Greater Manchester on an issue of crucial importance to them and the north-west of England as a whole.

5.30 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) is a long-standing and compelling exponent of the virtues of aviation in the north-west, but I am sure that he will understand if I choose to follow the main course of the debate as set out by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

As the first Conservative Member to speak following my right hon. Friend's appearance at the Dispatch Box, I should say how warmly we welcome him back, and how delightful it was to embark on a vigorous debate and an argument which set out the developing areas of dispute between the two sides of the House. It is a dispute that we shall take to the nation in two or three years' time, at the conclusion of this Parliament, and it is our responsibility to ensure that our differences are put in the most compelling fashion. Only in that way can we secure a popular and meaningful mandate.

In following the theme set by my right hon. Friend, I intend to detain the House for only a short time, and to speak mainly about issues of deregulation. My first three points concern the proposed Bill. I welcome the introduction of such a Bill. There seems to be almost a culture of controls and regulations which build up incrementally over the years, and it is perfectly legitimate to look again at whether they are fulfilling the role for which they were intended—a proper and protective social role. I welcome the legislation in that context, and I shall not be offended if its basis is the use of statutory instruments. Indeed, I find it difficult to conceive how it could be done otherwise, although I take the point made by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce).

As a consequence of the decision to deregulate, the public will be relied on to do their own regulating, as it were, and to make their own judgments. "Caveat emptor" is a cheerful and casual expression, but in truth it is more applicable to an alert middle class than to the public at large. I hope that the Government will underline their commitment to the legitimate role of protection by making further contributions to the consumer advice bureaux. It is not a particularly expensive or onerous undertaking, but it would be appreciated and would legitimise the responsibility that will be placed on the public.

My second point was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. Inevitably, the whole operation will have a Community context. I do not believe that the House yet appreciates the consequences of the Single European Act. The Act requires tremendous authority for the European Commission, and seeks a level of compliance that I do not think the Government appreciated when the Act went through Parliament. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) agrees with me. This is not really a party point, but one of the areas in which the House has a learning curve. The development of bureaucracy under the Single European Act is now proving onerous in this country, and I consider it a matter of direct political challenge.

In a recent article in *The Economist*, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke of "the tangle of regulations". Some years ago, when he was at the Board of

Trade at the close of the post-war Labour Government, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx talked of the "bonfire of controls"—a phrase that was not particularly original, and has now passed into political usage. I think that we should now envisage the prospect of a Euro-inferno, given the consequences of the treaty of Rome and, more particularly, the operation within that framework of the Single European Act.

I hope that the subsidiarity provisions can be used aggressively to seek the end outlined by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and that he will have some system whereby he can report back to the House not merely on aspiration to reduce controls, but the achievement of that aspiration.

My third point involves the so-called even playing field, which is prayed in aid repeatedly in circumstances such as these. I must say that, until the last few years, everything in my life—in terms of economics—denied the existence of an even playing field. It was recognised that there were always differences; life was a tapestry of judgments made against that background.

None the less, I think it important to establish something in our arguments about the social chapter. I do not suggest that Conservative Members are disposed to downgrade the significance of social obligations; it should be asserted, however, that these judgments properly belong to national Governments and Parliaments rather than to Community institutions. That is the position that we now have—although it exists in a rather blurred fashion, as many of my fellow Euro-sceptics would be the first to stress.

That is a profoundly important judgment, if we are trying to minimise the impact of bureaucracy—not because we seek to hold back its exercise for legitimate objectives, but because the additional level of bureaucracy intended to bring about pseudo-uniformity is found increasingly distasteful.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade—clearly relishing the prospective fight—has given a sharp tap to the kaleidoscope of European debate. He has identified Labour as the party of size—of general bigness—within the Community, and he has clearly done valuable research to that end. I am glad to say that I can wholly endorse his analysis and I should like to take it a little further.

A fascinating recent development is the cult of size. Of course, bigness has a certain appeal to the faction of the Labour party now in the ascendancy, represented by the leader of the Opposition, but it also has a great appeal to certain elements of the manufacturing community. I was particularly interested by a speech made recently in Harrogate by Mr. Iain Vallance, chairman of British Telecom. Mr. Vallance is a man of bigness in every sense—starting with his salary, which according to my calculations is equal to the entire parliamentary salary bill of the parliamentary Liberal party, give or take a touch. *[Interruption.]* I am invited by an anonymous voice on the Front Bench, in typically ungenerous fashion, to say how I would judge value for money. I have always had the deepest regard for the party of Gladstone, but I realise that judgments are constantly subject to revision. I will perhaps allow myself that reflection and no more.

Mr. Vallance made a very powerful address—not so much a speech, more a string of sound bites—and asserted:

> "Britain must not allow itself to be marginalised; to become so introspective that it is effectively excluded from the inner core of EC decision making. The key areas of monetary policy, employment issues, social costs"—

I hope that all his fellow industrialists took that point—"innovation and regional aid are too important for that."

Those are all legitimate areas for Community discussion, but the approach that comes from big business, exemplified by Mr. Vallance and elements of the Labour party, is that those are matters which are to be determined under the basic philosophy of the judgment of size and the alleged virtues of centralisation. That is totally contrary to the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and myself, but our response will get further encouragement from the Government Front Bench and the President of the Board of Trade, as has been the case this afternoon. We are in for exciting times as the European debate is taken forward towards the next general election.

Given those judgments, the question of regulation is not a technical matter at all, but begins to run to the very heart of how we see the relationships between the nations of Europe and the institutions of the Community. Through the Commission, we are currently seeing the development of a most powerful regulation-making body; we are seeing ambition to bring about a degree of uniformity that inspires the most tremendous commitment to regulation.

I have an idealism about Europe which is based on free nation states in open co-operation. Others may take a more centralist view, but there is no idealism in a Europe of bureaucracy, and that is the Europe that is emerging.

5.41 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen). I am not going to make a European speech, but I have considerable agreement with the hon. Gentleman's point. Whatever our views about Europe and our own domestic arrangements, we have to beware of excessive regulation. The thrust of that debate should strike a chord on all sides of the House and outside; it is the detail about which we may have substantial reasons to differ.

The President of the Board of Trade was in good form. It was suggested that he made the speech that he was unable to make at the Conservative party conference; it was certainly of that style.

It was interesting that he ended his speech by saying that the measures he outlined are what we need to put Britain back on the road to recovery. I take that to be an admission by the Government that we have had not 14 years of consistent economic success but a rollercoaster ride; that the Government's policies have not always worked in the best interests of the British economy.

The core problem for the Government is the scale of the budget deficit of £50 billion. It should be put on record that a substantial part of that deficit is a direct creation of the Government's own incompetence and irresponsibility. It is arguable, but something like £15 billion of that deficit is a hangover from the cost of sorting out the poll tax. The same amount is the cost of Lord Lawson's tax cuts, for electoral reasons, at a time when we could not afford them. That took money out of the Exchequer, as did the cost of the job cuts that have flowed from certain aspects of the Government's policy.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) made a powerful plea for Manchester airport, and put a finger on a worrying dimension of the

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Government. Now that the Government are running out of things for which they are directly responsible and which they can sell, they will plunder other people's investments to bail themselves out of a hole of their own creation. The least that the Opposition parties can do is expose that as asset-stripping to get the Government out of the mess that they have created. It is not the ideology of privatisation for privatisation's sake.

A central concern of the British economy is our role as a trading nation. It is a truism to say that we will not be able to maintain a decent standard of living for our population unless we can trade successfully with the rest of the world. We live on an overcrowded island, and we have to use the skills of the nation to add value and to enable us to pay our way.

If any of the figures that are currently coming out demonstrate a genuine recovery in our performance, I welcome them. I am not interested in taking issue with the Government about the figures. We need to ensure that we have a clear, long-term development that will put Britain into a position of competitiveness.

I hope that Ministers will accept that we are a long way from being able to claim that, because we are in deficit to most of the major traders in the world. We have reduced our deficit with the European Community over the past few years, but we still have a deficit with it, and with Japan and North America. Spain stands out as the shining example; it is the one country that we seem to be able to export significantly more to than we import from. Our otherwise poor performance must be put right if we are to find success in the future.

There is a whole raft of things that we need to do. We need to have a strong base of manufactured products and services that add value and are competitive. We need to abandon our propensity for short-termism. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that it was short-termism that meant that, over the past few years, dividends had been maintained while profits were squeezed. That is not healthy for the long-term good of British industry. British industry may argue that that is not its fault, but is caused by the pressures put on it by the funding institutions on which it depends.

It was this argument which caused the boardroom fallout in Britain's biggest company, British Petroleum. That was why Robert Horton was forced to resign. His view was that the dividend ought to be cut, but his opponents thought that it should be maintained. They maintained the dividend to the point where the company went into loss for the first time. It is absurd that a company should maintain dividends to the point where it goes into loss, and that issue should be addressed. That is not an attack on the City of London—which has great contributions to make to our economy—but it is a weakness that undermines our long-term investment strategy.

As to the Government's own short-termism, the Trade and Industry Select Committee yesterday took evidence from the National Engineering Laboratory, and from Warren Spring. The National Engineering Laboratory is being prepared for privatisation, and when I asked the chief executive for his mission statement, he said:

"Our mission is to prepare ourselves for privatisation."

I pointed out to him that that was more of a job description than a mission statement, and that we needed to know what was the laboratory's function. I am sorry to say that I did not get a coherent answer, because of the Government's driving force.

Warren Spring is a much more serious situation. It is a laboratory which is developing practical technology in the environmental area that we need to develop. Warren Spring was being prepared for privatisation and, in response to the Government's strictures, had taken itself into profit; its site had been sold to Glaxo for £25 million to £30 million, and a new site had been promised.

Without warning, the Government announced that Warren Spring would be closed and forced into a merger with the Atomic Energy Authority. The result is that some two thirds of its excellent staff will be made redundant and 25 per cent. of its business has been lost. That action, which was taken to save a little money, has left a skilled and dedicated work force destroyed and demoralised for what in the private sector would be termed asset stripping. That is a classic example of Government vandalism, which does not serve the long-term interests of the British economy. We need to find better means of co-operation to ensure long-term investment.

Members of the Select Committee also visited Korea recently, where we were interested to discover that the Koreans have developed a new generation RAM chip. They claim to be world leaders in that work. We asked those responsible how that development was brought about. They replied, with a somewhat puzzled expression, "The industry got together and decided that we needed investment, and the Government naturally agreed to contribute their half. Isn't that what happens in your country?" That, sadly, is exactly what does not happen. Korea is not an underdeveloped economy; the average industrial wage in Korea exactly matches that in the United Kingdom.

We need to learn certain things. One of the weaknesses of our economy is that small and medium-sized enterprises do not seem to be able to achieve the same degree of technology transfer, innovation and export success as that of overseas competitors in similar companies. That failing is apparent wherever one goes.

Regardless of the reported motivation and the timing of the intervention from the Prince of Wales, his suggestion that he should be made more use of in promoting British exports should be taken up with enthusiasm. British business men and exporters who have been part of trade missions in which the royal family has taken an active part will readily admit that members of the royal family generate far greater interest in British goods than those business men can do, simply through their presence. They believe that they have been able to win business on such missions because of contacts that otherwise would not have been made.

We have an excellent overseas consular service for which many business people have reason to be grateful, but we should use those services more effectively. Those in the consular service and companies also need to understand that export markets must be supported.

One of our weaknesses is that, when we are in a recession, we put our toe in the water of the export market, but, as soon as things pick up back home, we abandon the customers that we have just found. Those customers are understandably less willing to do business with us again. The French, the Germans and the Americans do not behave

in such a manner. The Government must take on board the fact that they have a contribution to make, in partnership with British companies, to achieve export success.

I was disappointed, although not surprised, when the President of the Board of Trade did not reply to my request for information on the format of the deregulation legislation. It is fine, and good fun, for the right hon. Gentleman to partronise me—I do not mind that—but in fact he patronises not me or the Liberal Democrats, but the process by which our laws are made.

This is the only democratic forum in which we can debate and improve the details of any proposal. I must take issue with the Government if they consider it acceptable that the deregulation legislation is simply an enabling Bill, which will lead to a whole raft of statutory instruments. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said that such a process was the only option, but I hope that he would acknowledge that we cannot amend statutory instruments. If the Government get them wrong, all they can do is withdraw them and introduce different ones.

At the very least, I hope that the Government will be able to offer a detailed compromise that gives some clear idea of what the proposals are likely to be, even if the fine details are to be left to statutory instruments. We are all anxious to hear about that.

We must not underestimate the impact of regulation on small businesses. It is a matter of great concern, however, that, when the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs talks about what we consider the core factors of health and safety and fire regulations, the language he uses to justify sweeping those regulations away is that used to justify the slave trade and putting boys up chimneys. That makes me think that there is no difference between the phrase "back to basics" and "Victorian values".

The argument is that, by ridding business of regulation, more jobs will be created, but they will be jobs at any price, including the health and safety of those performing in the workplace. That is not something that the House would welcome.

I asked the Forum for Private Business for its views on business regulation. It referred to the report, alluded to by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), about the threatened proposal to cut the employer's statutory sick pay reimbursement. It put to me the following case:

"Imagine a firm of 100,000 employees. Imagine that it was hit with an epidemic of 10,000 employees in the same department all going sick at the same time. Without the rebate, the businesses will have to fund sick pay for the 10,000 while shouldering the cost of lost production and taking on temporary replacements . . . As I am sure you can imagine such a firm would suffer very badly . . . Ah well, you may say that is a very unlikely situation . . . True but imagine now a business with 10 employees, how likely is it that one employee will go sick? Quite likely: such a firm could quite possibly face even 2 or 3 going sick at the same time . . . 10 per cent., 20 per cent. or even 30 per cent. of its workforce."

If the Government persist with their proposals, such firms will simply be forced out of business and, ultimately, the net revenue to the Government will be lost. It is not even in the Government's interests to persist with that proposal. I would believe more in the Government's commitment to deregulation if they were prepared to address the burdens that they have imposed, which can be removed.

I do not have time to address the raft of other issues that I had in mind. I should like the Government to tell the House, however, about the future of the Post Office. Do they have any idea about that, because many people are asking?

As time goes by I wonder just how much of the coal industry will be left. The President of the Board of Trade may have spoken about the irritation that will be caused by amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats, which the House will have to detain itself to consider. He should remember what happened with the privatisation of other energy industries. If the Government had listened to the arguments behind certain amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats, they would have saved an awful lot of money, as well as being spared a great deal of embarrassment. Many jobs would also have been saved.

It is the Government's refusal to accept that any wisdom exists outside their own ranks that has led to the situation in which the coal industry is now being destroyed by a Government whose only ever strategy for energy has been to have no strategy.

I represent an area in which the North sea oil and gas industries are extremely important. It is also an area in which certain companies lead the way and where substantial exports are made per head of the population. In the six months since the Government introduced tax changes in the Budget relating to exploration, however, jobs have already been lost from the exploration industry, and export opportunities have been lost. As forecast at the time, those changes have been deeply damaging to the industry.

The price of oil in terms of North sea production has never been so low, whereas the costs are high. Exploration activities are already moving from the North sea to Russia, other states within the Commonwealth of Independent States and the far east. The Government introduced their tax change at an inappropriate moment. The North sea industry needs active support. We need an active exploration programme to ensure its long-term future. One does not provide that by completely removing tax incentives.

This debate relates to the core of the British economy. We must be able to add value and pay our way in the world. After 14 years, however, the Government do not yet understand how to go about that. The deregulation measures do not spell out a revolution, as the Minister for Industry inadvertently said at Question Time: they are merely another phase in a propaganda war that often misses the point.

5.59 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): It is sad that in our discussions so far no one has drawn the House's attention to the successes this year in the car industry. I should declare an interest as joint chairman of the all-party motor industry group. It is relevant to the later part of my speech that I declare my chairmanship of the community trademark office committee, and my long-standing work with trademark agents, the anti-counterfeiting group, and others on such matters.

My constituency covers the area between Birmingham and Coventry, where the dominant industries are cars and car components. Hon. Members who represent midlands seats will know that the motor industry has achieved great success, not only this year, but in previous years during the recession.

[Mr. Iain Mills]

I came to the House in 1979, to see employment law changed to the benefit of the car industry, and I was fortunate to be the parliamentary private secretary to the noble Lord Tebbit when we made the step-by-step changes in the early 1980s. The changes were a part of a package that was created by a Conservative Government to allow the car industry to manage its own affairs, and to achieve a level of productivity that is now the envy of the world.

On a trip to Japan with the all-party committee, we were told by the Japanese that they saw Britain as the most natural place to base their outward investment in manufactured goods to tackle the European markets. That was not only because of the difference between the yen and the pound, but because of our work practices, productivity and attitude. In 1979, that would not have been conceivable.

How have we managed to move from the winter of great strife, from the days of Longbridge being permanently on strike, when the car industry was crippled by bad productivity and poor reliability? I spent 20 years in the industry, so I know something about it. How have we managed to reach the point where we are admired by the Japanese and by Taiwan, which is now a high wage cost economy? Those countries see Britain as the place to invest because of our high productivity and low wage costs, and because of our good attitudes towards work.

We have accepted that people may not any longer be workers, but that they should be associates, from the chairman and the managing director down to the shop floor. In 1979 in the car industry, that would not have been possible. That has come about because of the policies of a Conservative Government. It is not often referred to by Opposition Members, but there is no doubt that their constituencies benefit from the increasing productivity. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will send my congratulations to the President of Board of Trade and to his predecessors.

It was obviously important to ensure that our car and car components industries had the right fiscal climate in which to carry on their business of producing and selling cars. That is why, with Nissan, Honda and Toyota, we have inward investment from Japan, where 80 per cent. of cars are local content built, and where 80 per cent. of those cars are exported.

Hon. Members should think that through, because it means that there will be an awful lot of new jobs. If 80 per cent. of cars which have 80 per cent. local content are exported, the Japanese firms are not in any great way competing with our domestic manufacturers. Rather, they are taking sales away from our EC competitors, companions, or whatever they may be.

I suspect that that is why our EC partners resent us, and why they are trying to reinforce their strong views that we should average our costs upwards through the social contract into a high wage cost economy, so that they will not have the problem. I hope that my right hon. Friend will pass that message on to the Secretary of State for Employment and others. It is clear to those of us involved in discussions in Japan and Taiwan that any extra imposition of regulations or costs through the social contract would be a disaster for that most important manufacturing sector of our economy.

The companies to which I have referred are basing their activities in the United Kingdom, and that is just the iceberg tip of the Japanese and Taiwanese investment in this country. We are assured by those concerned, including the Japanese ambassador, that investment will continue. Therefore, there is every possibility that part of our domestic manufacturing economy will continue to grow, and so it should.

There are also what one might call the more traditional firms which manufacture cars in this country. Those firms are not always British, but they have a high local content. For example, Peugeot has a site near my constituency in Coventry. Part of the site for Land Rover is in my constituency, as is the headquarters of Rover. Ford and Vauxhall are also familiar to me, and all those firms have had stunning successes. An increase of 12 per cent. in production during the past year is not a bad thing for a Conservative Government to look back on.

One may disagree with the exact nature of the increase in sales during August, September and October—whether it is 16 or 18 per cent.—but the fact that it will give a year-end increase in car sales in the United Kingdom is an extraordinary achievement for the industry. That has not been achieved only because of the successes of the industry, although that is the primary reason.

It has been helped by a Conservative policy of removing special car tax—a bold move, which was taken in two steps. It has stimulated sales, particularly in the fleet sector. It is often forgotten that the company car market was in the doldrums during the recession. Many salesmen and others were asked to keep their cars for three years, and later that was increased to four or five years, or up to 200,000 miles. That was because increased technology and reliability and the high quality of British-built cars allowed them to use the cars for that length of time. I am sure that many hon. Members have 200,000 miles on the clock of their cars, and I hope that they all have British cars.

I give one word of warning to my right hon. Friend. Traditionally, when the car industry is doing well—an 18 per cent. increase in home sales and a 12 per cent. increase in exports shows that that is the case now—Chancellors of the Exchequer tend to think that is a way of regulating the economy. I would ask my right hon. Friend to pass a message to the Chancellor that any increase in company car tax beyond that already in the pipeline from the previous Chancellor's tax moves would be a great mistake, and could cripple the fuel for our economic recovery.

As cars and car components are sold, there is a knock-on effect for other jobs in the car industry. That is reflected in three quarters of a million jobs in the car components industry throughout the country. I ask my right hon. Friend to make strong representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as I have done, that there must be no change in taxes—in particular, those which affect fleet or company cars—that would restrict the increase in car sales, all being well, should continue.

It would be unfair of me to speak too long, particularly as a ten-minute limitation on speeches will apply later. I would like to welcome strongly the Bill on trademarks which was given its First Reading in the other place earlier today. I have searched for a copy of the Bill in the Vote Office, and I am assured that one will be available shortly, although I am not complaining about that.

I greatly welcome the introduction of a Bill on marks. I do not suppose that Opposition Members will be fully aware of the significance of the Bill. I would draw their

attention to a parliamentary answer given to me by the Prime Minister. The answer showed that a Bill to introduce a Community trademark and to simplify the system of registration of brands and trademarks will in the first year save industry some £50 or £60 million. That is because of the lower cost to register marks, as they will no longer have to be registered to protect great British names throughout every country in the EC. It will be possible to do so from one office.

The continuing costs per annum will be about £30 million, and it seems to be an excellent Conservative measure with a thoroughly European content to which, I hope, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) will not object. The Community trademark is the most innocent of measures in terms of the Eurosceptics' attitude towards Europe. The mark is keenly wanted by the capitalist structures of industry and commerce, and will enable us to have a pan-European protection for famous brand names. There is a negative side to it, which I will come to.

The measure will be greatly welcomed by our massive trading partners of Japan, America and other areas. They want the ability to protect their marks and trademarks throughout Europe, and eventually, one hopes, through GATT and the Madrid convention, throughout the EFTA countries, and the world.

There were last-minute doubts, I understand, but I can assure the Government that the measure will please trademark and patent agents and those who are responsible for great British companies' names, and will also please industry. I understand from conversations with Opposition Members that the Bill is not controversial, although they may have detailed arguments. The speech made at the Edinburgh conference of the anti-counterfeiting group by the junior spokesmen for the Labour party suggests that the Opposition are in full support of the measures that we hope will be included in the Bill against commercial counterfeiting.

As I have not seen the Bill, I do not know whether there are provisions in it to deal with my next point. We are concerned, and we have made urgent representations, about the difficulties created at car boot sales and markets where traders show, above counterfeit goods bearing famous brand marks, a disclaimer saying, "A brand copy". That is as a result of the Price and Veys cases, brought under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968. Traders can now get away with selling counterfeits of famous names with that disclaimer.

We looked at that matter in the Committee considering the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill, which became an Act in 1988. It was made quite clear by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), who was then a Minister, that counterfeiting was a criminal act and should attract criminal penalties. I ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy to pass on to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade my strong concern that, if the Bill does not contain measures to deal with that most important point, it should be amended to include them.

I was terribly disappointed, as one who reluctantly supported my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in the Maastricht debate, to see the pork barrel politics and the less than graceful behaviour at the recent summit—not by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but by Mr. Delors and others in the Commission. They proposed a handout of European institutions based on nothing more than, "What do you want? We'll give you this if you'll agree that someone else can have that."

The Trademark Office, which will be attended by the most eminent people from commerce, industry and the trademark profession, will be located in Alicante. That might raise a ripple of laughter. The sandy beaches are delightful, but there are only two flights a day from London, and one flight a day from Frankfurt, so goodness knows how those people will get there.

Mr. Steen: The beaches and the weather in South Hams are much better than they are in Alicante.

Mr. Mills: While London is the most desirable location, South Hams would not have been a bad location. Knowing how well it is represented by its local Member of Parliament, I am sure that facilities beyond the usual would have been laid on for any trademark agents coming from Japan.

That seems to be the European way of doing things —a share-out of the most important institutions. Germany insisted on the bank, and we were bought off with the Medicines Agency. Spain, supported by all the Latin countries, also got the health and safety body—I thought that we were the health and safety experts, or so my friends from the Labour party tell me. We were the obvious location for the Trademark Office.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman think that the possibility of privatisation of the Patent Office was helpful or unhelpful in those discussions?

Mr. Mills: The hon. Gentleman raises a good point. The move of the job-heavy aspect of the Patent Office down to Newport was originally seen as an inhibition, but not in the final stages. I am assured by the Commissioners concerned that the original decision was to look at the location of the office based on suitability for the people who would use it, and on the facilities that it would offer.

I do not have to tell the House that London, with three airports and flights throughout Europe and the world, with its infrastructure of over 2,000 trademark agents, 1,000 trademark solicitors and many trademark barristers, was an obvious choice.

The Europeans are not concerned about privatisation of our national Patent Office, as long as it is operating, because the Community Trademark Office will take over, to a large extent, from the Patent Office in registering trademarks. That was not an issue. Apparently the only issue was who would deal with what to get what. I find that thoroughly objectionable, and I question my previous commitment to aspects of Europe. I have never been a federalist, but that almost makes me want to join the camp of those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who are sceptics.

I do not wish to end on a negative point. I started with a positive point, so I shall end with one. The Alicante decision is apparently final. I have written to Mr. Delors to express my strong view on it, and I shall continue to campaign. However, the achievement of a Community trademark is more important than the location of the office in terms of our commitment to Europe, the savings to our companies and European companies and our ability to be

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at the heart of Europe in promoting the Community trademark. Therefore, I welcome the introduction of a Bill on that matter in this Session.

6.14 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): I know that the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) has a long and deep relationship with the motor industry and has acted as an excellent conduit to it for Members of Parliament who want to learn more about the motor trade. However, I take exception to his remark that, throughout the 1970s, the industry was permanently on strike. That is far from the truth. It was certainly the view of the popular press, and that was how it liked to portray the industry, but it was not the truth for those working in it. I know that the hon. Gentleman worked in that industry for a long time, and he was not on strike for all that time. In fact, strikes would have been rare.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the pork barrel politics of handouts and which country gets what agency. We are getting the agency that will control pharmaceuticals. I do not know whether we are getting a good deal or a bad deal. I have recently seen research which suggests that, by the year 2000, through gene research and the advent of gene technology applications and treatments, up to 2 million jobs could be created in that sector in the Community, largely at the expense of pharmaceuticals. Hoffman-Laroche has estimated that about £8 billion-worth of sales will be lost annually as a result of that development. Whether the pork barrel politics has worked in Britain's favour remains to be seen.

The President of the Board of Trade spoke of deregulation. Although Ministers have denied, first at Question Time and then later, that deregulation will involve wholesale removal of the health and safety at work protections that we enjoy, I intend to give the right hon. Gentleman a taste of what he may expect in opposition should he introduce the measures that are rumoured and that we fear.

I do not know whether the President of the Board of Trade has extensive industrial experience or, if he has, how involved he has been at shop floor level where such measures really count. I know that some Conservative Members have such experience, and I respect them for it, but I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman has paid any attention to the different practices in large and small companies.

I worked in the engineering industry for getting on for 20 years and spent part of that time in contract toolrooms in the west midlands, mainly in the black country and Wolverhampton. As a young man with two children and a mortgage, I took risks to ensure that my rate of pay remained at a level that would sustain my commitments. I am appalled when I think back on them, but I escaped serious injury. Others did not. I shall mention a couple of cases because detail is important.

A colleague at a small contract toolroom lost his hand in a milling machine accident. It was severed at the wrist. He was a youngish fellow in his thirties, also with a mortgage and children. He was a member of the trade union, but the settlement was miserable—just a few thousand pounds for the loss of a hand. The accident pre-dated health and safety at work regulations, the milling machine was not properly guarded and he was rushing. We used to use the phrase—if it is not parliamentary language, no doubt I shall be told—tear-arsing, and it was a common or garden thing.

Before regulations on eye protection, my father lost an eye in a most painful way while maintaining a pair of dies. For the last 15 years of his life, he received a miserable pension. Like many of us, I will not tolerate a return to the practices, in small or large companies, that led to such injuries. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am pleased to hear Conservative Members applauding that sentiment.

It is true that, in modern, forward-thinking, progressive and enlightened managements in our larger companies now, such problems have largely been eliminated in two ways: first, strong, proper and sufficient legislation was introduced to regulate the way people operated machinery and the practices that they followed; secondly, it was expensive—not as expensive as my father losing an eye or my colleague losing a hand—to introduce all the necessary controls. As a result, many different and more advanced processes were introduced that guaranteed protection for people working machinery, such as tape control machinery, numerically controlled machinery and that controlled with plug boards. All those processes tended towards a solution to injuries at work.

Conservative Members point out the huge gains that have been made in productivity, not just in the past 14 years but over 20 to 25 years. That has been due largely to the introduction of technology which saves on working hours, reduces the length of process and is economic in the use of metals and the other materials that it uses. But there has been a cost. In my area of the west midlands, it has meant that 350,000 jobs have been lost.

One might say that that is how markets work, and to some extent that is right, but the Government have failed completely to recognise that what was needed was not to lose those skills that were inherent in the area that I represent—and in the west midlands generally—and about which the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) knows enough, too. It should have been ensured that those skills were channelled into productive enterprises, whether in manufacturing or service industries. That has not happened, and the price that we have paid for the introduction of the most superb technology, which was developed in this country, has been extremely high.

On regulation, today and over the past few days I have had phone calls from a small company that is just starting out in Wolverhampton. The local inspectors descended on that company and told it that the process in which it is engaged—the manufacturing, shaping and forming of resins—is not safe for the workers who use those materials, as the extraction is not sufficient. It would not be sufficient to get a simple extraction plant and connect it to the outside, because the emissions would be too poisonous and dangerous to the surrounding domestic properties.

The company contacted me and asked whether there was any way that it could be helped. The Government's loan guarantee scheme was one way, and one of the few pieces of legislation that have been exceedingly helpful —at least in theory—to small or medium-sized companies. I regret to say that many banks have refused to co-operate fully in it, even though their risk has been minimised by Government guarantees. I further regret that very few banks would entertain really small companies which

wanted assistance with £10,000 or less, because the cost of administering and monitoring the scheme would have been too expensive.

Nevertheless, I believe that it is a good scheme and I advised the company to see its local bank about it. Unfortunately, the main owner of the company has negative equity on his house. Therefore it was felt that it would not be entirely appropriate for the bank, which merely has to cover 20 per cent. of the risk, to support it on that occasion. I have sent him to another bank that I think may be more helpful.

The scheme should be working like clockwork, but it will take from six to eight weeks to process the application. That is far too long for a scheme which should have been designed to be simple and easy. It would be a start if we cut out some of the bureaucracy. It should be made easier for local bank managers to take that decision as speedily and cleanly as possible.

The company knows that it is not allowed to put its emissions into the atmosphere—quite rightly. It knows that that is right and it supports that. The company is looking for the money to assist it. Paradoxically, in that area of work, it is the kind of company that can produce all the ducting and the process that will help to take the emissions away, but it cannot get the money to start up properly even though it has a relatively full order book.

Many small and medium-sized companies should have limited liability and be able to enjoy reasonable protection, provided that the directors act in a proper way. But limited liability brings with it pretty onerous duties with regard to company accounts. I suggest that another area that would be worth considering in terms of deregulation would be a simplified set of accounts for small companies, particularly those—of which there are many—working as companies limited by guarantee, where the people working in the enterprise own and control it on the basis of their pound share and their willingness to commit assets to the company.

It seems to me that it is way over the top that such companies must use European conventions to present their accounts. For companies, particularly those limited by guarantee, we could simply go back to the balance sheet, the profit and loss account and perhaps a statement of application of funds. That would be helpful to small companies and I look forward to the Government introducing such regulations, although I may be looking in vain.

It is important that the matter of payment, and late payments, to small companies is tackled properly. That will need regulation, not deregulation. I believe that a mixture of measures should be taken by the Government to assist the collection of debt, particularly that which has been outstanding for 60, 90 or 120 days or even longer. Perhaps a statutory right to interest would assist, although I suspect that that would not go to the heart of the matter because the smaller companies would be persuaded that it would be in their interest to forgo their statutory right if they wanted to get more work from the companies concerned.

Perhaps we should look at British standard 5750. Companies are increasingly saying to their customers and clients that they conform to that standard. Would it not be appropriate before the kite-mark was agreed that measures were taken to include prompt payment of debt? That is another area that could be considered in the quest for a solution to the serious problem of small firms' debt collection.

I shall move briefly now to small firms and access to research. More than 90 per cent. of employees work in companies with fewer than 200 employees. That is a significant statistic in terms of the development of products, of innovation and even of invention. My experience of small companies is that innovation is their speciality. They may take a product and develop it to the nth degree, by ingenuity applied at the point of production. That is what they excel at. But often they need technical and sometimes research assistance.

I suggest that it would be helpful if grants were available—and I mean grants, not tax incentives, because small companies trying to develop products often do not have profits to set against the tax liability. I suggest grants, perhaps administered through universities, and especially through former polytechnics, many of which have well developed links with their local industrial scene. In that way we could gain access for small companies with good ideas. They could be properly assessed, and thought could be put into that time does not permit within the company itself.

The White Paper on science and technology which was published last summer should be developed very rapidly. We need to reach serious conclusions on how to ensure that our scientific effort is channelled into liaison with the engineering and industrial sectors so that we make the best use of British brain power and ingenuity and all that that has meant to us in the past.

If "back to basics" should be about anything, it should be about restoring the excellence that was once Britain's prerogative in terms of science. We have let that fall away. That is very largely your fault on that side, if I may say so.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I hope that that was not directed at me. I remind the hon. Gentleman that remarks are addressed to me.

Mr. Purchase: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. My speech style is a little informal, unlike that of the President of the Board of Trade which is very theatrical. I apologise and no offence was intended.

We should encourage young people to take up science as a career and ensure that they can move freely between industry, university and back again in the pursuit of a career.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): Did the hon. Gentleman not welcome the Government's recent announcement about pushing funding for students towards manufacturing rather than to the arts?

Mr. Purchase: I believe that science and engineering have been made profoundly unattractive by the rewards offered at the other end of the scale. Some phenomenal matters were brought to our attention during the 1980s under the Thatcherist rule. People with no experience, who had never set an industrial mousetrap, made fortunes. I know so many people who have worked so hard and with such effect and brilliance, but they ended up with very little.

We must make engineering, industry and science attractive. Smart graduates will not opt for the lowest

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reward; they will opt for the best reward. We must start at that end of the equation and also consider how to attract more people into those areas.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Has the hon. Gentleman had an opportunity to see the kind of educational material that is now available as part of the national curriculum, which has been prepared by the Chemical Industries Association Ltd., with which I have absolutely no connection? That material is an impressive example of what can be achieved. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the way in which the Government are encouraging trade associations to come up with schemes of that kind is a good move in the right direction? If he has not seen that material, will he look at it?

Mr. Purchase: I have not seen that material, but I saw a programme on Channel 4 one evening earlier this week in which young people backed off from the idea of a career in science or engineering on the basis that such careers were dirty and did not offer much money. They believed that there were higher rewards in the City and in accountancy and legal work.

People in education on that programme said that the advent of the national curriculum had made the position worse and not better. There may be a middle position between those two views, but if there is it is not being well communicated to the educators. They do not believe that the Government have a commitment to science and engineering careers in the way that perhaps the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) and I would like.

We socialists always end on a cheerful note as we are very cheerful people. We like a good laugh and a good joke. The horizons are there for us to search for. Young people need and deserve encouragement and this House must do all that it possibly can to ensure that they get it.

6.33 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am grateful for being called so early in this debate. As one who has absolutely no ambitions to see his name attached to any new statute on the statute book, I am uniquely qualified to talk about deregulation.

As the owner and driver of a business for 30 years, I have been on the receiving end of much legislation and regulation. It has often occurred to me that I have succeeded not because of Government, but in spite of Government. I trust that the remarks that I have to make, based on a lifetime's experience of running a medium-sized business, will be helpful to those on the Government Front Bench in terms of shaping a Bill which will be both sensible and practical.

I am pleased to support the new initiative which the Bill will represent. However, I do not for a moment underestimate the scale of the task or the obstacles that will have to be overcome. I want to instance my attempt at deregulation. This January, as a new year's resolution, I decided to make my own initiative for deregulation and I opposed the Hedgerows Bill.

People who contacted me after I opposed the Hedgerows Bill applauded my sentiments when I explained that I was attacking regulatory overkill. They supported the principle that I was trying to express. However, they said, "Mr. Gill, unfortunately you have chosen the wrong Bill to express your opposition to regulation. You have started in the wrong place. It is all the other Bills that are wrong. This Bill is wonderful and this is the one we must have." Ministers will come up against that kind of thinking time and again.

Deregulation is an idea whose time has come. It is universally supported throughout the wealth-creating sector and it is a logical initiative for a Government who have already fuelled the engine of the economy with improved labour relations, competitive exchange rates and the lowest interest rates for 16 years.

I do not intend to waste time examining the reasons for the present situation of regulatory overkill, the causes of which might include anything from special pleading, the feeling that "something must be done" and the belief that the man in Whitehall knows best, to the personal ambitions of hon. Members to get their name on the statute book and the Government's desire to be seen to be doing something. What concerns me most are the effects of over-regulation and the consequences of those effects on the long-term prospects of this country as a manufacturing and trading nation and the effects on the body politic.

I want to refer to the effect on an important area of political activity—local government. The effect of the plethora of legislation has been to dilute constantly the ability of councillors to take decisions. That plethora of legislation has certainly restricted their ability to make decisions based on common sense, local conditions or special circumstances, because it is necessary for them to take advice from the paid officials of the council who are the professional people charged with the task of understanding the rules and regulations to which we are all now increasingly subjected. As a consequence, the gulf between the elector and the elected has widened. That phenomenon is not confined to local policies. All hon. Members would do well to recognise that.

I want to instance another effect of over-regulation. It imposes unnecessary and costly burdens more upon the bona fide than on any other section of society, because those who live beyond the law clearly avoid those costs and burdens. Human nature being what it is, the powers that be—the enforcement officers—relentlessly pursue the easy targets while harder cases are written off or ignored.

To my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench I say that the law is the law. The Government have a responsibility to ensure that it is applied even-handedly and without fear or favour. One essential criterion of any law or regulation must therefore be whether it is enforceable. My colleagues will need no reminding of the fate of the unlamented community charge and the consequences of that unenforceable legislation on the Conservative party and its leader.

A further hazard of regulation or over-regulation is the scope that it affords for crime, corruption and fraud. The House will be saddened by the tragic killings earlier this week of two Ministry of Transport inspectors investigating the theft and sale of illicit Ministry of Transport road certificates. Later in this Session, Parliament will receive the Court of Auditors report, which will doubtless once again highlight examples of the fraud that has become institutionalised as a direct result of the many regulations governing the common agricultural policy.

Wherever we look and whichever way we look at it, the bona fide foot the bill. They foot the bill for the cost of compliance. I am, of course, encouraged by what my right

hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said. The regulators will in future be charged with counting the cost of regulation before a regulation is introduced. However, I make one special plea—that we do not simply count the cost to the Government of additional regulation or the apparent superficial cost to individual industries but also count the cost of the time and effort which are devoted to regulation, which are time and effort which are not devoted to producing a product or improving a service.

I repeat that it is the bona fide who always foot the bill. They foot the bill for the unfair advantage that is given to those who continue to live beyond the law, and, through their taxes, they pay for the theft from the public purse, represented by the fraud and corruption of which we are only too well aware. Perversely, the effect of much legislation can be the absolute opposite of that which is intended.

I refer to the time when the House decided that it would introduce a regulation which prevented travellers or tourists from taking more than £50 out of the country. That is going back a long time, but I invite hon. Members to consider the effect of that Act of Parliament, which was designed to ensure that money remained in this country, both in the short term and, more significantly, in the long term—it resulted in the establishment of the package tour industry. The package tour industry took off from that moment—a phenomenon that we had never seen before. It was unintended and the absolute opposite of what the Government had wanted.

Parliament must renounce its belief that every problem has a legislative solution. The Government must trust the people. The majority of the population just want to be left alone to get on with living their lives, running their businesses and providing for their families, but that is not to say that the law should not come down heavily on those who transgress the accepted norms and standards of a civilised society.

I illustrate my feelings on the subject by inviting my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to consider that, if he has a constituent who does absolutely nothing, that constituent probably has no worry or concern about regulation. If that constituent is retired, unemployed, under age or even a drop-out, regulation hardly affects him at all, but the moment that constituent sets out to do something or to make something, he is assailed on all sides. That simply cannot be right. That is something that the country can no longer afford, least of all in competition with the low-cost economies of the Pacific rim.

Business and life are about taking risks, but, on the other hand, public opinion and, dare I say it, the civil service are, generally speaking, risk-averse. Government must ensure that a balance is struck between those two competing nostrums. The Government must hold the ring between that which is desirable and that which is necessary. In seeking to achieve that balance, Ministers have my absolutely unqualified support.

There must be a presumption against further regulation, and there must be a recognition that much contemporary legislation seeks only to correct the imperfections of the legislation that preceded it. I am tempted, somewhat facetiously, to say, in view of what the House will soon have to consider, how much better it would have been for all concerned if, instead of legislating for Sundays, we had kept the fourth commandment—that might be an instance of back to basics.

We must ensure that the many commendable, intelligible and popular policies which are espoused by our Government in this Chamber are the policies that finally emerge at the end of the legislative process. Too many straightforward ideas, whether they involve paying for local government, testing in schools or food safety—incidentally, the Food Safety Act 1990, in its three years of existence, has already spawned no fewer than 81 regulations—have lost their focus when expressed in legislation. That is why I have said on previous occasions that Ministers will need to be ruthless in the prosecution of this vital battle. The obstacles and resistance that they meet on the way to deregulation may also mean that, on occasions, they have to be quite arbitrary so as to establish the greater good.

6.45 pm

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I wish briefly to consider the philosophy that underlies the Gracious Speech, refer to industry generally and discuss the proposals to privatise the coal industry.

The framework of ideas which underpins the Gracious Speech was structured by an extreme and now dominant influence within the Conservative party. Those views prevail, despite attempts by the President of the Board of Trade and his colleagues to pull back that influence. Clearly, in the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), that influence has passed to the B team. I will not take the euphemism of the B team any further.

"Back to basics" is a phrase to which no public relations people worth their salt would put their names. At one and the same time, it suggests failure and is meaningless. That point was admirably made by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in his article in Thursday's issue of *The Guardian*, when he wrote:

"who on earth could have landed us with the cry of 'Back to basics'? . . . No one has ever captained an advance by shouting to his troops 'Back, boys, back'."

Clearly, that phrase is a measure of failure. It shows that the Government have no idea how to mobilise available resources in society to make a better life for our citizens.

For the economy, "back to basics" means deregulation, as we have heard, and that in turn refers to low wages, poor working conditions and a lack of representational rights. It is clear that the Government will never learn that to motivate a work force means treating people in industry as equal partners.

In April, a secret report commissioned by the Government revealed the tragic state of British industry. The findings clearly showed that, despite being competitive on costs, the United Kingdom's product base was very weak. The President of the Board of Trade failed to mention that point. He also failed to refer to a report in June by the World Economic Forum, which showed that the United Kingdom was sinking to the bottom of the league of the 22 wealthiest nations. The United Kingdom has fewer qualified engineers than any of those 22 countries. In education, it ranks only above Greece and its private funding of research and development is the lowest of the 22 nations.

Bearing that in mind, one would have thought that the Gracious Speech would include provisions for putting in place strategies to promote competitiveness and to reverse the decline. Instead, organisations such as the National

[Mr. Michael Clapham]

Engineering Laboratory and the Warren Spring Laboratory are either to be privatised or combined. For example, the latter is to be combined with the Atomic Energy Authority.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell the House how he thinks that competitiveness would be improved by the social chapter regulations, which the Labour party supports.

Mr. Clapham: As I said, the Conservative party has failed to realise that to motivate people to reach better competitiveness in industry, it is necessary to treat people with dignity and to treat people in industry as equal partners.

The rigging of the energy market against the coal industry has made it impossible to achieve a balanced energy policy. The dash for gas threatens to destroy the entire coal industry and most of the nuclear industry. Instead of widening the market for coal and dealing with the imbalance in the energy market, the coal industry is to be privatised. The President of the Board of Trade should realise that it is a matter not of ownership but of markets. If there is no market for coal, as he has tried to point out, the Government have to intervene to widen the market. Without such Government intervention, the market stays closed, with a result that is detrimental to society.

The President of the Board of Trade mentioned nationalisation in 1947 and said that about 958 collieries were nationalised. He went on to say that privatisation would offer great qualities and give industry great opportunities. In fact, the industry was nationalised after a fashion during the first world war. At the end of the war, the Sankey commission was set up before the industry was handed back to the private owners.

In the 26 years between 1921 and 1947, the coal industry experienced its worst period of industrial relations. The loss of confidence in the ownership of the coal mining industry, the bad industrial relations and health and safety records of the industry, as well as the fact that it had fallen behind technologically, led to its nationalisation.

In the 1950s, the well-remembered Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, referred to the fact that the coal industry had gone beyond the phase of being able to serve social purposes by returning to the private profit incentive. That statement is as true of the coal industry today as it was in 1950. Deregulation and privatisation of coal mining are a recipe for disaster. As I said, the problem is one not of ownership but of markets.

All in all, the Gracious Speech is devoid of ideas for regenerating British industry. It is regrettable that there is no mention of tackling unemployment, of a strategy for industry or of unravelling the rigged market. It smacks of a Government who are being led by the nose by a particular group within the party. It also smacks of a Government whose time is up.

6.54 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): I am grateful to be called, Madam Deputy Speaker, because, as the House will know, I speak as a northern manufacturer whose family firm was established in 1845. I also speak as the secretary of the Back-Bench deregulation committee, and as one who is passionately interested in deregulation.

I shall speak about deregulation and bureaucracy, and the debilitating effect that the latter has on society. In 1952, a film called "The Titfield Thunderbolt" was made at Ealing, starring Stanley Holloway and John Gregson. Shortly after nationalisation, it told the story of a branch railway line faced with closure, which the local people wanted to take over as a private concern. They needed permission and a man from the Ministry was accordingly dispatched. The villagers' preparations were detailed and his eventual arrival was somewhat vice-regal in style. After they had presented their case, they awaited a decision from that powerful man in awestruck and expectant silence.

I saw the film on television, as a little boy in the 1960s. I could not figure out why the villagers were so frightened of him. Why were fellow Englishmen so cowed by a bureaucrat? Englishmen, who decades previously had commanded a quarter of the earth's land mass and one third of its population; Englishmen who had changed the face of continents with their cities, railways and other great engineering projects; Englishmen who had changed the way of life of entire peoples and stamped their values on civilisation—*[Interruption.]*—including the Scots—why were men who had created several fully fledged new nations now so timid in the face of a civil servant?

The answer to that question lies in the growth of the power of the state during the 20th century. The power of the state is exemplified by its power to regulate, and is underpinned by our English willingness to be regulated and our inherent respect for the law. It is a power personified by the civil service.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am fascinated that the hon. Gentleman was inspired into politics by "The Titfield Thunderbolt". Is he arguing that deregulation will get back England's empire?

Mr. Sykes: Certainly not. I am arguing for a commercial empire nowadays. The hon. Member comes from a country which receives an awful lot of English taxpayers' money. He should remember that. He should also note that the British empire—one of the greatest in the world—was built by the fusion of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish blood. That is what has made this country so great, and it is also why he is one of the few Scottish nationalists in this place.

In the private sector, man's inclination to build departmental empires is constrained by the bottom line —the balance sheet and, not least, the bank manager. No such restriction tempers the bureaucrat, so he is always looking for new areas over which to exercise his influence. He can do so through a large number of agencies.

Let us consider one—local government. I served on Kirklees council for some years. Kirklees was spawned by the absurd Local Government Act 1974, since when its vast gridlock structure has clamped itself securely to almost every aspect of local life. Kirklees is a council with more than its fair share of Labour councillors. *[Interruption.]* I hear Opposition Members cheering. They should instead regret the fact that, because we have so little to fear from Her Majesty's Opposition, my hon. Friends are induced to direct their fire at their municipal cousins.

Across a bewildering range of everyday activities we all have to deal with bureaucracy. It can be a frustrating experience hacking one's way through the permafrost of

officialdom—except that in Kirklees the permafrost is harder and colder and its icy grip has frozen Huddersfield town centre.

A good example: in the late 1980s, the private sector proposed to build a modern undercover shopping centre, to be ready by 1993, so that we could compete with other towns; but the Labour council decided that it could manage things better itself and used the regulations then in force to do so. The result was all talk and no action, and no shopping centre yet or for many years to come. That is what an over-regulated municipal Labour council can do.

Since I moved to the North Riding, I have found other regulatory bodies that stifle progress. The national park in my constituency, where the famous series "Heartbeat" is produced, is in danger of becoming a jurassic park. The planers are choking the life out of the farmers, who find themselves bogged down in a morass of refusals and red tape whenever they propose improvements to their farms. The planners want to freeze the national park in the past, so that townies will come and admire it, forgetting that it is the people who farm the land and live and work on it who have made it worth visiting in the first place.

Other regulatory forces are at work too. My family firm of manufacturers has a factory in Filey, near Scarborough. We have an excellent record which we are always anxious to uphold. We paid for someone to come and talk to us about the COSH—control of substances hazardous to health—requirements. We wanted to talk about materials and handling.

Instead of showing us how to lift the panels that we had been manufacturing and handling for 25 years, he proceeded to tell us what we are allowed to lift in our own factory, as if our entire work force were a bunch of wimps. Worse, he then proclaimed that no one could use any of the machinery in the joiners shop unless he was a joiner—understandable in the case of complex machinery, but not when someone wants to cut a length of four by two.

All in all, trying to comply with health and safety regulations has cost us £19,000 this year. I do not complain about that, but every week there appear to be more and more regulations to comply with. This comes at a time when small businesses are struggling to keep people employed, even without the social chapter and its effects.

Small businesses are trying to win orders abroad, where regulations either do not exist or are ignored. Small business men are frightened to death of the health and safety Gestapo, with its perceived powers to close down factories. The paperwork, the rules, the regulations, the guidelines—often misrepresented as law—and officialdom generally are all just as much a disease today as strikes were in the 1970s.

If our regulators get fed up with home-grown rules, there are plenty more to be found in directives from Brussels, such as the European fresh meat directive. On the surface, it seemed innocent enough when it left the Commission in Brussels, but by the time it leaves Whitehall and is provisions have been magnified a hundredfold, it gives frightening new powers to enforcers up and down the land, and imposes hugely inflated costs on butchers and slaughterhouses that come within its scope.

Many decent businesses have been forced to close, and we should be angry about that—angry about the livelihoods that have been lost, the more so when we recall that some countries in the EC do not obey even their own laws, let alone laws from Brussels, as the RSPCA film taken in a Spanish abattoir showed only last week.

One such decent company in my constituency was the F. H. Wilkinson and Sons slaughterhouse, which, like my family firm, had been trading successfully for 150 years. I believe that every single one of those years should count for something. Neither the firm nor its customers nor its employees could understand why the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wanted to design the company out of the future.

When it eventually went to the wall, it went quietly with no fuss, believing as we all do that the law exists ultimately for the good of us all. The real reason why it went to the wall, however, was that Ministers and Members of Parliament did not stand up for the firm when it really mattered—when the bureaucrats were laying their plans in 1990.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): The hon. Gentleman is clearly passionately in favour of deregulation, but 71 per cent. of current regulations were introduced by his party since it came to office, 10 per cent. of them while the hon. Gentleman has been a Member of this House. How many of those did he vote against?

Mr. Sykes: I dispute those figures. I happen to believe that many regulations that start out with good intent are maladjusted by people working further down the line. The hon. Gentleman well knows that many regulations from this place are misinterpreted further down the line——

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Mr. Sykes: I will give way in a minute.

Mr. Fatchett *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is well known that, if the Member who has the Floor does not give way, other hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mr. Sykes: When I wrote to MAFF asking for help for my constituent, I received a reply from Whitehall written by a bureaucrat with a safe Whitehall job and a nice Whitehall pension. He told me that my constituent's business was closing down because of market forces. It was not. This decent family firm was closing down because of dark, blind and foolish forces with all their destructive powers.

These were the same dark forces that led to a small grocer in Saltburn who had failed to display a health and safety notice in his shop being fined £750. They were the same forces that fine someone £1,000 for dropping a crisp packet, the same forces that forbid people to fly their own country's flag and which seek to prosecute brave soldiers who have fought for their country in defence of freedom. Yet the same forces allow criminals and thugs to roam the streets, because it is said that gaol does not work.

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): My hon. Friend has referred to slaughterhouses having to close down. We are always told by the European Commission that the same rules are applied with equal rigour throughout Europe. Might it therefore be helpful to arrange for an exchange of our inspectors with those from Italy, Spain, France and Germany so that we can be sure that they are imposing the same regulations with the same force?

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friend makes a good point, to which Opposition Members would do well to listen. The Spanish regulate themselves according to the doctrine of mañana, which could usefully be adopted here.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Is my hon. Friend aware that many of the veterinary inspectors in this country have been imported from Spain because we do not have enough to check on what is happening in our slaughterhouses, as a result of which there are no vets in Spain to carry out inspections there? So the abuses that have been vividly portrayed on television recently can go on unchecked.

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friends are making my speech for me—I can always rely on those behind me to do that.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman has not answered my question. He says that he feels strongly on behalf of his constituents, so will he tell us how many regulations he has voted against since becoming a Member of this House?

Mr. Sykes: I should prefer the hon. Gentleman to listen to the debate with his ears, not his mouth. I have explained that many of the regulations from this place are misinterpreted further down the line. That is part of the psychology of bureaucracy.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the committee of which he is secretary and which is powering forward the whole idea of deregulation is likely to mean that the Government scrap 3,500 regulations this year, which is at least as many as have been brought into force since he became a Member of Parliament? Does he agree that that is not bad for the second year of a Parliament?

Mr. Sykes: My hon. Friend makes my point again.

The effectiveness of any political idea depends on the skill with which it can be integrated into the practice of government. This Government proved that throughout the 1980s, and in the 1990s deregulation is a political idea whose time has come. I believe passionately in deregulation. It goes to the root of my political beliefs and of the realities of political life, both in the United Kingdom and in Europe, as we approach the year 2000. The Bill flows naturally from the Prime Minister's success in securing the opt-out from the social chapter. It flows from the idea that deregulation means more investment, more jobs, more prosperity and more success for Great Britain in Europe and in the world at large.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the House of Madam Speaker's ruling that there will be a 10-minute limit on speeches between the hours of 7 and 9 pm.

7.9 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): After listening to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes), I was unsure whom he disliked most—people from Scotland, men from the Ministry or bureaucrats from Brussels. Surrounded by all those "dark forces", I must say that it is miraculous that his family firm has managed to survive. If he ever finds out who is running this shambles of a country with regulations that have inflicted so much disaster on companies in his constituency, he should tell the House.

It is highly appropriate that we are debating trade and industry, because two important Scottish industries have been lobbying hon. Members today. The Salmon Farmers Association has been arguing that a great deal more is needed from the Government in terms of looking for effective European Community action to stop the Norwegian dumping of farmed salmon, which is destabilising the market. The salmon industry is critical to many rural areas in Scotland.

The farming and food processing industry in Scotland has been lobbying hon. Members from north of the border about the statistical blunder of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Scotland, which is causing a crisis in both cereal and livestock farming in Scotland. The industry is looking for effective action to redress some of the damage, which will cost it up to £20 million in farm income unless something is done.

The connection between those two industries is that, in one case, the industry has found Government action to be useless and in the other case, the industry has found the Government's action to be positively damaging. In both cases, I hope that Ministers will pass on to their colleagues the urgent need for effective action in those vital Scottish industries.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the energy industry, especially the activities of British Gas. I suggest to the Government that, before they proceed with any further privatisation in the energy market, they should clear up some of the mess that previous privatisations have left in the energy industry.

When the President of the Board of Trade returned from his recent illness, he found his desk groaning under the weight of the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's inquiry into British Gas. In response to the commission's inquiry, British Gas is talking about shedding one third of its work force—some 20,000 jobs throughout the United Kingdom—and restructuring its gas business. An announcement was supposed to be made on Monday, but it has been delayed. However, I can give the details of it to the House.

British Gas intends to restructure its business into five functional areas—gas transportation and storage, contract trading, public gas supply, installation and contracting, and a retailing division. It is interesting that that reorganisation is being made before ever British Gas has heard the comments of the President of the Board of Trade on the commission's report. That suggests that British Gas already knows the President's conclusions, or it does not care, and will restructure its business anyway.

As part, and as a result, of that functional restructuring of business, British Gas will eliminate the regional tiers of management. That includes the elimination of British Gas Wales and British Gas Scotland, and its chairman and management board. The consequence of that for the Scottish economy is that perhaps an additional 2,000 jobs in the gas industry north of the border will be lost. The removal of the Scottish management tier will also result in the loss of further decision-making jobs.

At this stage, there is no guarantee that any of the headquarters of the new functional divisions that will be created will be in Scotland. Indeed, initial signs are that, at least in the property management division where decisions have been announced, the Scottish division headquarters will be located in Manchester.

My point is that there can be absolutely no confidence in the attitude of senior management in British Gas to their responsibilities to their Scottish employees and Scottish customers. I would not say that the senior management of British Gas do not know where Scotland is—they know that it is that area to the north that supplies the resources which are used to produce a profit of about £1 billion a

year. However, there is no indication that any concept of Scottish interests has any bearing whatever in decisions that are being made by the company at present.

About two years ago, I was able to turn on the gas supply in St. Fergus village. As many hon. Members know, that village is the largest gas terminal in Europe, yet for some 15 years it had no domestic gas supply. Two years ago, that wrong was rectified when a gas supply was at last brought to St. Fergus and the villages surrounding it. At that time, British Gas gave a public commitment that the gas supply would be extended to further villages in the Buchan area in my constituency. Indeed, some of my constituents invested in gas appliances, looking forward to the day when they would be connected to a gas supply.

People in these villages are now being offered the gas supply, but at a cost of £1,200 to £1,300 per household. In villages such as Rosehearty, Sandhaven and Longside—the flares from St. Fergus light up the evening sky in all those villages—people can see the gas platforms where the resources come from to generate gas profits. Yet people in those villages are being offered connections to a gas supply at a price that is well beyond the reach of the average family in my constituency.

People in those villages, and many other people up and down Scotland and beyond, are falling victim to the game of commercial chicken that is being played between British Gas and its regulator, Ofgas. British Gas does not want to extend its gas network at present, because it believes that it might fall into the hands of another company. Nor does it want to extend its domestic gas network while regulations ensure that it can be used by any one of its competitors. The casualty in all that is customers who cannot be connected to a gas supply at a reasonable cost.

During my investigation of the problem, I found that British Gas in London had instructed the Scottish division to change its marketing allowances in an unfavourable way. Previously, its marketing allowances reflected the fact that Scotland was an underconnected gas area. However, by diktat of its London headquarters, British Gas in Scotland was forced to change its marketing allowances to make it even more expensive for people north of the border to be connected to a gas supply. The eventual effect is that, in the part of the country that will suffer most from value added tax on domestic fuel, many people are being denied access to the cheapest form of energy for domestic heating.

Before the Government embark on any further chaos and confusion in the energy market, they should sort out the chaos and confusion that they have already created. Not content with exploiting Scottish staff and Scottish customers onshore, British Gas is also involved in anti-Scottish behaviour offshore.

It has a controlling interest in the central area transmission system pipeline which currently pipes gas from the central North sea to Teesside. That pipeline was built by public subsidy. Indeed, £200 million was used to subsidise the CATS consortium to build the pipeline over the past three or four years. Scotland became the first country in history to pay a consortium of oil companies to take away its most valuable natural resource. That resource was then used through the CATS pipeline to undercut and undermine England's indigenous natural resource—its coal.

Now there is debate about the destination of Britannia gas. Britannia is the largest of the new gas condensate developments. My concern is that British Gas will have not only a controlling interest in the CATS pipeline but a minority interest in Britannia. It is also the potential buyer for gas at St. Fergus or, indeed, a Teesside landfall point.

It is difficult not to believe that it is in the interest of British Gas to ensure a Teesside landfall point for Britannia gas, although that will be substantially against the Scottish interest. It is difficult not to believe that British Gas will use its position in the marketplace, and all sides of this bargain, to send Britannia gas through the CATS pipeline network to Teesside.

My argument is that many previous privatisations have given companies virtually a licence to print money at the public expense. British Gas is being given a licence to exploit the Scottish people.

If there is to be a private-sector reorganisation of that company, it should be along regional lines. There should be a regionally integrated company in which Scotland will be properly represented. It would be far better, however, if the Government were to legislate to bring the public utility of gas back into the public sector in Scotland and so allow the energy resources of our country to be used for the benefit of our people and Scottish companies.

7.19 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): It has been difficult for me to select exactly the right day to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I wish to raise one or two matters of particular relevance to my Portsmouth constituents and to the Gracious Speech, which do not necessarily fall into today's debate on trade and industry. I shall have to mix into today's set menu a little a la carte.

It is a truism which cannot be too often repeated that, above all else, trade and industry, whether manufacturing or service industry, want and need the maximum freedom to make profits and to invest, as well as to be helped in every way possible by the Government rather than to be hindered by Government.

I had great sympathy with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) when he said that, when somebody decides to start a business, too many other people make it their business to check him on this or that. He is assailed from all sides with bureaucratic forms and demands. That must make him feel, as it did me when I was in business, and my late father when he was building that business, as if he has a mother who, always harassed by her children, shouts, "Whatever you are doing, stop it".

That is sometimes how business men feel when their efforts are met by regulations from central and local government. Often many just feel like stopping. Indeed, in recent years many have been impelled to stop by the burden of regulation and by demands made on them, particularly in difficult economic times.

As we have been reminded again and again through bitter experience in recent years without profitable business, employment suffers, taxes do not meet public expenditure, borrowing soars, growth stutters and insupportable pressures bear down on every aspect of Government expenditure—the good, the bad, the necessary and the unnecessary.

Everyone understands that there must be proper health and safety standards in employment, and that the law has a part to play in enforcing employment and consumer rights. But it must be recognised that every regulation beyond essential matters is a regulation too many. It was profoundly depressing to hear that the Opposition are

[Mr. David Martin]

likely to fight the Government every inch of the way on a Bill which will tackle regulations that should not exist or should be altered. I have no doubt that we will hear the sort of ludicrous, ridiculous, petty-minded tirade that we have heard today from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

I do not for the life of me understand how yet higher total taxation than we already have can be thought to help our economic problems. When did it again become fashionable to believe that the Government filching money from the hard-won earnings of individuals or businesses was better for us than leaving that money with individuals and businesses to make their own decisions on spending, saving or investing? When did it again become fashionable to believe that Ministers and bureaucrats make better decisions for us than we can do for ourselves?

Principally, it is growth in a low-inflation, competitive economy, such as we now have and such as we had in the 1930s, 1950s and 1980s, which will settle public debt and fund public services, not the growth promised by higher taxation, so beloved of Socialist Oppositions but never delivered by them when in government. The only growth ever to be delivered in that way has been a growth in debt and in inflation.

Competitiveness in domestic and overseas markets, and stringent attitudes and actions on regulations are precisely what are needed. That is this Government's policy, as set out in the Gracious Speech and developed so energetically and well today by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

On deregulation, I should like to raise some matters of concern to those running private nursing and rest homes in my constituency—each one a small business. The ministerial announcement earlier in the year inviting suggestions for reducing red tape in this area was generally welcome.

Some regulations are vital. For example, independent inspection should apply equally to local authority and privately owned and run homes, and there should be proper fire precautions and regulations on room size. The Registered Homes Act 1984, while meeting matters of genuine concern, sometimes went a little far. We must look again to see how matters have worked out in practice. We must not let low standards flourish again or cowboys re-enter a business which in recent years has successfully expelled them. Nevertheless, we need to consider how things can be improved.

Let me give the House some examples where action should be taken. It is not necessary for a home to have a test of all electrical circuits and appliances every six months. Generally, it should be possible for a home to be given a certificate of general competence: not the BS 5750—that is not appropriate to rest and nursing homes—but something along those lines. Once it is granted, there should be a period, for example of three years, when those running the home are trusted to maintain good and safe standards and when such rigorous, frequent and detailed inspections as are carried out at present are not required.

There should be a close study of the number and content of forms required when an individual patient or resident is admitted. One must speak and listen, as I have done, to those who run these homes to understand what a problem this is to those who are attempting to supply a service that is vital in today's world.

A much clearer definition is required of what appliances, such as incontinence pads and special mattresses, can and should be supplied by health authorities free to the individual patient or resident, and what requires payment. There is considerable variation in practice and considerable confusion as different rules apparently apply to a BUPA hospital and a private nursing or rest home. That certainly needs to be looked at closely, and clarification introduced where confusion reigns.

The Gracious Speech also contains a promise of legislation for the reform of student unions. This will affect Portsmouth university. I welcomed hearing yesterday from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education that, while student membership will be voluntary, core student union services will be protected. There have been worries that sport, for example, will be under threat. It is most important that we make it clear that that is not the case, and that all types of sport will be recognised as an essential part of university life.

Finally, I welcome the promise of further action on law and order. Money and ingenuity have been showered at the problem of lawlessness in every year that the Government have been in office, and rightly so. It is not for lack of effort that so many problems remain. The general public recognise that, and know that further measures, which I hope will be successful, will come from this side of the House, as set out in the Gracious Speech.

The need to provide better protection for the public, more consideration for the victim, better organised police forces and better help for the police to detect crime, arrest criminals and see them properly punished when convicted is well understood by those I represent. The Government deserve every support in pursuing those welcome objectives this Session.

7.28 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), but he will understand that I disagreed with a large part of his eloquent speech.

The President of the Board of Trade gave us a rip-roaring, truly ripping, high-decibel, provocative diversion of a speech. It was a "Mike the Ripper" speech. Clearly he has returned as a healthy contender in British parliamentary politics.

There was a steelworks some 10 miles from my home in my constituency, called Brymbo. The smelter is now closed; indeed, it no longer exists—I last saw it earlier this year on a large convoy of trailers being transported towards Birkenhead docks, and I believe that it is now being erected in the Republic of China.

The Deeside titanium smelter used to stand at the heart of my constituency. It was the only smelter of its kind in western Europe and was a strategic industry. It has been allowed to close and is currently being dismantled, labelled and bagged. Early next year, I shall probably see it on low loaders in convoy, heading towards Birkenhead docks where it may be exported to Korea or Malaysia. I hope that I am wrong, but the work force there are broken-hearted at the closure of a successful smelter.

Also in my constituency, 700 people made an executive jet. They are the finest plane makers in the world, but the

Government allowed that production process—some of the finest manufacturing in Britain—to be sold, lock, stock and barrel, to an American company.

There are successes in my constituency: we have Toyota and Sharp and, wider afield in south Wales, there is Sony and Bosch. However, the rate of loss in manufacturing in Wales has been huge. The mining industry has been decimated; the textile industry no longer exists; the brick industry has virtually disappeared; and the cement industry has been pruned back harshly. The steel industry has only two centres of production, although those are fine centres. Our railways have been starved of investment and virtually no apprenticeships are to be had. That is the manufacturing record.

Britain's greatness was always rooted in our manufacturing industry and capacity for manufacturing. We were paramount in engineering and innovation. We were a great industrial nation with apprenticeships, technology and scientific know-how. We had the investment, manpower, skills and record. We were a power in the world and were looked up to as a manufacturing state, and we were all proud of our status.

The Queen's Speech is devoid of a strategy to defend or promote our manufacturing base, which is much smaller than it was but 10 years ago. I want to see my country, Britain, at the top of the world league of manufacturing nations and I want her to reclaim her industrial greatness. Large-scale unemployment could be ended by manufacturing and the profits from successful manufacturing could be invested in jobs, schools, hospitals, homes and pensions so that our fellow citizens could have civilised, dignified and happy lives rather than, as is the position for many millions now, lives of worry and humiliation.

My charge against the Government and my criticism of the Queen's Speech is that the Cabinet lacks a strategy for Britain to secure her industrial future for the next century. Our country faces a serious situation. In the early 1980s, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Chancellor Geoffrey Howe and the Secretary of State for Industry, Keith Joseph, acted disastrously for our nation and manufacturing industry. By their obstinate and misguided policies, they allowed the catastrophic loss of more than 2 million manufacturing jobs, which is why we lack capacity in manufacturing today. It is the tragedy of our society and our nation's status against its competitors in the world.

I am deeply disappointed in the record of the President of the Board of Trade. He did well in tackling the problems in Merseyside and had something to show for his commitment and energy, but he has failed as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Although he is in rude health—good theatrical health—he is now an extinct volcano in the Cabinet. He should look at the attempts made by the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who had been a Minister responsible for labour and for the regions. When unemployment rose in the mid-term of his premiership, he reversed policies and tried to cope with a rising crisis. The present Prime Minister should try to do the same and adopt a strategy.

The outlook for manufacturing in Britain is grim. I am sorry to say that we have an almighty Executive dedicated to market forces and neglectful of manufacturing. The same overmighty Executive has squandered all the revenues from North sea oil and failed miserably to invest them in manufacturing to secure the future of our society and economy in the next century. The Government have no strategic policy for our economy. Successive Conservative Cabinets have betrayed Britain's industrial future. Perhaps the present Cabinet should be lodged in the Tower of London for its betrayal, because it has a great deal to answer for.

7.37 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Having listened to most of the debate, I have noticed the difference between the speeches on the two sides of the House. The speech by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was all doom and gloom—one of the most depressing speeches that I have ever heard—whereas the speech by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was really stimulating, very enthusiastic and gave us hope for the future. All the speeches that I have heard from Opposition Members have been depressing, while those from Conservative Members have expressed hope for the future. The public outside will judge the Labour party by their depression. I was extremely depressed by what Labour Members said.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Well, cheer us up, then.

Mr. Steen: I shall cheer the House up. During the last Session, I sought leave to introduce three Bills to deal with deregulation, all of which drew attention to bureaucratic absurdities. My arguments were the same on each occasion —that bureaucracy is getting the better of business and enterprise is being stifled by over-zealous officialdom. I suggested that it was the most debilitating disease in the nation and was delaying our recovery. My analysis concluded that many rules were innocuous, even those from Brussels, but the problem was the massaging of directives from Brussels by Whitehall officials, of which there are far too many. They deploy their talents in putting sharp teeth in fairly harmless guidelines coming from Brussels. In that respect, our problems are often self-inflicted.

Another aspect of the same problem is the over-zealous interpretation of legislation from Parliament and byelaws from local authorities, not to mention the rules and regulations from SEFRAs—self-financing regulatory authorities. That is the backdrop against which I approach and welcome the Government's deregulation initiative.

When the Bill is introduced, no doubt the Opposition will suggest that it reveals how defective the Government are, as they should not have passed the rules and regulations in the first place. It is important for the Opposition to realise that rules and regulations that we wish to bury have become irrelevant in the fast-moving society in which we live. It is better to repeal them than to allow them to remain on the statute book if they are no longer relevant.

Is deregulation so different from repealing statutes? Deregulation picks out items from a number of Acts and puts them in a composite deregulation package—I do not understand what the fuss is about. It seems normal that Governments of either political party should repeal Acts of Parliament when they are no longer relevant. We are merely picking out a few rules and regulations from various Government Departments and putting them into a package in a Bill—there is nothing much in that.

The new aspect of the matter is the way in which the Government are going about the process. The Government

[Mr. Steen]

are taking such action because the House of Commons is passing too many laws. The amount of bureaucracy generated in the House is enormous. Therefore, for the first time, we are reducing the number of rules and regulations to balance the scales. I am in favour of the deregulation Bill announced in the Gracious Speech. I hope that we shall have a bumper deregulation Bill every Session.

Deregulation is nothing more than repeal. A progressive and flexible Administration will constantly try to perfect the statutory framework by repealing legislation that is no longer relevant. The speed of change and the pressures of everyday life require a constant awareness by the Government of the need to throw out antiquated and irrelevant bureaucracies. There will always be too many regulations.

The problem may not just be the rule, but the way that rule is interpreted, as can be seen with the legislation on royal parks. Section 1(9) of the relevant Act states that one must first obtain the Secretary of State's permission before using any apparatus for the transmission, reception, reproduction or amplification of sound by electrical means. Over-zealous interpretation of that byelaw resulted in my being asked to stop using my portable telephone while walking my dog across St. James's park. A polite official said that I could not use a portable phone inside the royal park as I was in breach of the byelaw. If that is not an example of over-zealous interpretation, I do not know what is. I have been overwhelmed by letters from all over the nation following the incident when my car was removed because one of its tyres was straddling the next bay. I mentioned that in one of the speeches I made on deregulation.

Rules and regulations should exist to help the public. Officials should try to serve the public, not use the rules as an oppressive way of damaging public relations. Over-zealousness has become the hallmark of a new British disease that attacks the public in an aggressive and hostile manner.

Ticket collectors on British Rail have a job to do. Last Sunday, I came up from my constituency—one of the most beautiful in Britain, in south Devon. Within 30 seconds of my boarding the train, a ticket collector had presented himself. He was on the spot before I had put away my luggage or taken off my coat. He politely asked me for my ticket. Half an hour later, another ticket collector appeared and tapped me on the shoulder while I was having a well-earned snooze after a hard weekend's work in my constituency—beautiful though it is. He tapped me on the shoulder and asked to see my ticket. I said that I had been asleep and asked him to leave me alone. He said that he could not do so as he had not seen my ticket, which I then gave him.

Later, when I was having another snooze after we had passed Reading, the same ticket collector tapped me on the shoulder again and asked to see my ticket. I said that he had already seen it once—in fact, twice. He said that he had seen it only once, as another ticket collector had seen it on the first occasion. I asked him what had happened to my ticket as I had been travelling on the train for only two hours. I did not think that it could have become out of date or invalid in that time.

There is a further intrusion on the comfort of British Rail passengers. Before each train arrives at the station, there is an announcement of the immense number of connections possible if one leaves the train at that station. One can imagine all the wonderful places that could be visited if one took the various connections. To crown it all, there are endless announcements about safety. Before a train arrives at a station, an announcement tells passengers not to open doors and to take luggage off the train carefully.

There are three buzz words, of which one is "safety"; every time the word "safety" is used, it triggers endless announcements by British Rail. The three buzz words are security, hygiene and safety. We need look no further than the Palace of Westminster. If one mentions security and hygiene, people's eyes glaze over and their cheque books come out. I presume that is why there are 24 security attendants at St. Stephen's entrance and £30,000 was spent on new machines in the name of security.

There are so many officials in some parts of the Palace of Westminster that it is difficult to get into the building. The corridors of the Palace are full of fire officers, who are presumably increasing the number of safety measures. So many new fire doors have appeared that it is difficult to get into the Chamber—one's entrance is also obstructed by the thick carpet. There are so many officials that I sometimes have difficulty in getting into my office in Dean's Yard. When I open the front door, I am confronted by a myriad of officials whom I have to ask, "Excuse me, may I get by?"

I have never seen so many people checking things. If a new valve is put on a radiator, somebody checks it. The television screen in my room is cleaned, the windows washed, and another group of people change the light bulbs. More people arrive to say that the light bulbs are not the right ones. I have never seen so many people checking and rechecking at the public's expense.

Another buzz word is "hygiene". It is said that the kitchens in the Palace of Westminster are out of date and need to be renewed. The amount of money required to do so is, apparently, approximately the same as that needed to build a new hospital in a middle-sized town. It is as if the officials have seized control of the place so that it is run by them and for them, rather than for us—to provide a service for Members.

The existence of buzz words, together with over-zealous enforcement locally, is at the root of the problem. However, there is another overriding problem—one of attitude. We can change the attitude of public officials only if they start to see themselves in a different way—as servants, not inquisitors, of the public. For that reason, the United Kingdom fails to make the progress that it deserves. Our energies are drained away from increasing wealth and jobs in order to handle the demands from officials—not to mention finding the money required to assuage their thirst for enforcement. It is as if bureaucracy has gone mad, and its principal task has become building obstacles rather than bridges.

We have not schooled our public officials to understand their role in British society and their task of helping industry and private individuals. Too often, public officials see the public as enemy number one and view the business man as dishonest. How many business men have said to me that the VAT man treats them——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but bureaucracy is now falling on the hon. Gentleman. I call Mr. Paddy Tipping.

7.47 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): When the now noble Lord Parkinson told the Tory party conference that he was going to privatise the coal industry, he heralded the decision as dealing with the last great bastion of nationalisation. "Last" is the key word, as the timing was not fortuitous, but the result of a deliberate strategy. That strategy was: first, privatise the principal customers by creating a duopoly; secondly, ensure that the market is rigged, and only then extract vengeance; as the momentum towards legislation develops, keep talking down the coal industry and highlight its lack of prospects; when the mutterings in the Conservative party about the course being followed become louder, issue a White Paper, commission studies, but do nothing. The Government did nothing.

Vengeance is a powerful emotion, and when it becomes a vendetta, nothing less than total destruction will satisfy it —that is what is happening to the British deep-mine coal industry. Over the past year, since October 1992, the closure of 24 collieries has been announced, and approaching 20,000 men have lost their jobs at those and other pits. It is no wonder that all over the United Kingdom, and especially in Nottinghamshire where promises were made, miners feel that the Government have turned their back and broken promises. There are fears that worse is to come.

Does coal have a future at all? The short answer must be yes. The long-term prospects are brighter, but those will follow a painful period of readjustment in the short term. A hurried and botched privatisation will destroy the industry before the 21st century. The generators' market for coal will be 30 million tonnes next year. That contract expires at the end of March 1998—three years after the possible vesting date of new, privatised coal companies, which I understand the Government plan to occur on 1 April 1995.

Even after allowing for other variables—the production of coal from opencast mines and the market for domestic and industrial coal—in the current year, British Coal has been over producing to the tune of 20 million tonnes. It has been stockpiling coal at 250,000 tonnes a week. That is exemplified by the 50 million tonnes of coal held in stock by British Coal and the generators. A market of 30 million tonnes could be satisfied by the output of, at most, 15 collieries. That figure does not allow for any significant reduction in British Coal stocks. It is clearly an output that any private sector pit owner would want. How the stocks will be dealt with is the key issue of coal privatisation.

The Government look set to close half the coal industry as quickly as possible. They may take actions that will destroy more than 15 collieries, which would be sad because, in the long term, in 15 years' time for example, the prospects for coal will be brighter. By that time, gas supplies in western Europe will be much tighter and significantly more expensive. Whatever happens as a consequence of the much promised and delayed nuclear review, it is unlikely to result in a crash programme of nuclear power station construction, the environmental consequences of which must be considered.

What about decommissioning and disposal costs? In 15 years' time, the big, pulverised-fuel, coal-fired power stations of today will be coming to the end of their natural lives. In 10 to 15 years' time, we will see an emerging shortage of electricity generating capacity and a shortage of anything other than coal to feed it. At that time, there is good potential for minehead, combined cycle coal-fired plants, which will be highly efficient and non-polluting.

To exploit that long-term potential, we must retain our coal industry. Some have argued that the coal reserves will always remain even if the collieries close. That is a complete fantasy. Energy prices would have to go through the roof before it is commercially viable to sink new mines.

The real danger is over-dependence on gas. That dependence is destroying coal and could destroy the nuclear industry. A further danger is the neglect of research and investment into new, clean-coal technology. I have heard that Tory Back Benchers are planning to revolt over a possible £1 billion defence cut that they believe will put the security of the country at risk. That £1 billion could be used to provide our energy supplies. To put 25 pits on a full care and maintenance basis would cost £100 million per annum—£4 million per pit per year. All 25 pits could be saved for 10 years at the cost of that defence cut. Ten years will be sufficient to realise the folly of our action. We shall be held to ransom over gas contracts and the international market.

To arrive at that long-term realisation, we must manage the short term. We must also navigate the medium term —the period after 1998—which will be the most difficult and crucial. In the short term, we can live off the productive capacity that already exists in our pits. In the medium term, deep mining must be capable of earning and retaining sufficient profitability to justify the continual reinvestment in replacement capacity, which is an important feature of the deep coal mining industry. Unless we can earn and retain profit, coal mining in the United Kingdom will not be economically viable on a sustained basis.

I am utterly convinced that a fragmented coal industry —the Government's desire to sell off British Coal in five packages is a fragmented industry—will not survive into the medium to long term, for four main reasons. First, there would be a grotesque imbalance of market power between the generators—the big players—and the new, privatised coal industry. Generators can purchase their fuel wherever they like, but United Kingdom coal producers have no other market than the generators.

The massive overhang of stocks at the pits makes their position even more weak. All the generators have to do is play one coal producer off against another and they will be able to dictate the price of coal and capitalise on any savings that are made in the industry. Those benefits will not be passed on to consumers because the electricity generating market is not truly competitive. The only way to prevent privatised coal from being eaten alive by the generators is to sell the industry in one piece. Even then, life would be rough.

Keeping the industry together would also spread the risk. A fragmented coal industry of 15 pits would result in companies with one, two or three collieries as well as perhaps some opencast mining. A business composed in such a way would not survive or have the strength to ride the inherent difficulties in coal mining.

In a fragmented industry, there would be a risk in doing anything new. Old practices would prevail and new, exciting techniques would not be tried by small companies which owned one or two pits. A unitary industry would ensure that the best safety practices were preserved.

We must fight for the coal industry. It is a strong and good industry facing its last chance. The miners have done

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

everything they have been asked, and more. The wheels of time are turning; it is their last chance and we should not destroy the industry.

7.57 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): After the successful summit in Brussels in 1988, my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher said:

"The creation of the single European market by 1992 is regarded by the British Government as the most important objective of the European Community".

It was important then, but it is doubly important now. Conservative Members believe in the single market because we believe profoundly in the importance of free trade and we want Europe to be at the centre of a free-trading world. We believe in the power, supremacy and wisdom of the free market and that commerce—not politics—is the greatest unifying force available.

At present, Europe faces both a crisis and a challenge. There is a crisis of decreased competitiveness in world trade and an increase in regulations. It has a reduced share of the world market and a higher share of world unemployment. I sometimes think that we have an obsession with nationality in the Community. We talk of French models of Europe, or what the Danes or the Germans want. There are only two models: a free-trading Europe at the centre of a free-trading world—a Conservative Europe—or a socialist, harmonised, regulated, inward-looking Europe. Our challenge is to compete and create a meaningful place for Europe in the free trading world.

I congratulate President Clinton on his success in pushing through the north American free trade agreement. The agreement gives Europe both a clear signal and a clear warning. It signals the declining importance to the United States of European trade; it shows the President's personal increased commitment to free trade. It also shows Europe —as Europe must be shown—that it should rely on world competitiveness if it is to survive.

We must, as a European Community, reaffirm our commitment to competition, free trade and deregulation; we must make Europe work. There is no point in some of my colleagues, both in the House and outside, saying that they wish we were not in Europe, because we are in Europe, and we must make it successful. We cannot be in NAFTA, we are not on the Pacific rim, and the Commonwealth is not a viable trading entity. We must also make it clear, however, that Europe cannot survive on internal trade alone, as the French Government might wish to believe. We must trade outside.

We in the House of Commons must state both what we want and what we do not want for Europe. We certainly do not want what the Labour party wants—a social dimension. Beneath the veneer of concern for workers' rights expressed by Opposition Members is the fear—especially in foreign countries with socialist Governments —that deregulated markets will take a bigger share of the world market: a bigger share of what trade is going. The fear is that those countries will be left behind.

Increasingly, a number of European politicians are inclining to the British view of Europe, believing that we are correct—that we will secure more inward investment and a bigger share of world trade, because ours is the country that is deregulating in Europe. Sooner or later, they will realise that we are right and they are wrong. We must not be deflected by smokescreens that have been created to obscure anti-competitive behaviour.

One example is the proposed ban on tobacco advertising. Our competitors in Europe are desperate for such a ban. When they are willing to turn their backs on the millions of pounds of common agricultural policy money that have been used to subsidise tobacco growing in southern Europe, when they are willing to abandon their nationalised tobacco industries, when they are willing to use price mechanisms as successfully as we have in reducing tobacco consumption—then, just perhaps, they can have the gall to lecture us on the need for a ban on tobacco advertising. We must never be lured into a willingness to sacrifice our domestic industry simply to satisfy the nationalist aspirations of some of our European partners.

I believe that, not only in the United Kingdom but in the whole of Europe, the Prime Minister is seen to be increasingly far-sighted in opting out of both the European social dimension and—perhaps even more important—the single currency. Economic and monetary union is not about the politics of trade, the politics of prosperity or the politics of competitiveness; it is about the politics of political union. We in the United Kingdom can have no truck with that, because it is not at present based soundly on competitive free-trading principles.

If there is one area in which the challenge to Europe is seen particularly clearly, it is that of one of our leading manufacturing industries—the pharmaceutical industry. As in other sectors, the challenge is whether we can develop in a free market, allowing consumers maximum freedom while ensuring harmonisation, but only with the highest possible standards and the least pro-industry bias.

If harmonisation is to be acceptable, it must do two things. First, it must provide consumers—in this instance, health services—with the benefit of a greater choice of medicines becoming available more quickly. Secondly, it must benefit the industry with less duplication and inconsistency between the regulatory processes of member states, because that burdens business with unnecessary costs. Moreover, it must always be shown that harmonisation can be achieved at the highest possible level of quality, rather than at the lowest common denominator. In Europe's development so far, harmonisation has taken place at that lowest common level; that has simply meant the best trap being available for everyone, rather than the best being allowed to go forward freely.

In the pharmaceutical industry, we have seen a fairly constant evolution in legislation since 1965. Now, at last, Europe has made the quantum leap of allowing an application for a pharmaceutical licence to be in only one language rather than 12. The United Kingdom also welcomes the better patent protection that we have experienced recently. The United Kingdom sector has immense profitability and impressive research and development records, which must be maintained; the promotion of postgraduate education in our medical schools is also extremely important. We want to protect the areas in which our businesses are ahead. We in the United Kingdom must be in the business of protecting our market leaders, and allowing them to function in a free market without interference from substandard competition in Europe.

We are helping that process in two ways. One involves drug licensing. The current multi-state and concertation

procedures do not work well. The new future systems legislation, with one regulation and three directives, will work much better—to the benefit of British companies. The European Medicines Evaluation Agency will also provide technical and administrative support, and will co-ordinate pharmaco-vigilance. Perhaps most important for our industry, it will monitor manufacturing sites.

I am delighted that the EMEA is coming to London rather than going to Spain, for example. I believe that we shall be rigorous in monitoring manufacturing standards, and that the problems that we have experienced with parallel imports will therefore be minimised. We do not mind competition, but we want fair competition, and we want proper quality when it is brought into our national health service.

The implications should include quicker and cheaper access to European markets for our business, with a single application giving access to all of them. There should also be cheaper medicines for the national health service, better medicines for our patients and a wider range in a shorter time scale. This is a real example of the direction in which Europe ought to be going.

We should not concern ourselves with the minutiae of political integration. There is a way forward for Europe. I believe that commerce is the most unifying force. If we allow commerce to take its course—and if there is a real case for further integration into Europe—the case will be made by the markets alone. If we try to force harmonisation and unification on the peoples of Europe for the sake of political timetables rather than what commerce, the markets, industry and trade need, we shall be potentially sacrificing all the gains that we have made so far in Europe.

As possibly the youngest Conservative Member in the House, I believe that the next generation will have the most to lose if we make mistakes now in the way in which Europe moves forward. If we hold true to our faith in a free-trading, deregulated Europe, that will give us our best chance of grasping the future for the next generation. We have everything to gain if we succeed, and no one but ourselves to blame if we fail.

8.7 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): My mind turns, as it often does, to the Conservative party's 1979 election manifesto, a perennially interesting document. I was distracted, when reading it, by sentences such as:

"Value Added Tax does not apply, and will not be extended, to necessities like food, fuel, housing and transport."

Ploughing on, however, I found at the beginning of the first paragraph:

"This election is about the future of Britain—a great country which seems to have lost its way. It is a country rich in natural resources—in coal"—

I could not read beyond that point and continue to take the manifesto entirely seriously.

This week, the miners of Littleton colliery, most of whom live in my constituency—they were told a matter of months ago that they worked in a core pit and had a future in the coal industry that had been carved out, or the remains of it, in the coal review—were informed that their pit would close in the first week in December. I met them the other night. They said, "What more can we do? We are prepared to work in the public sector or the private sector. We have done everything and more that anyone has ever asked of us. You said that we were a core pit; now you say that we have no future." Five hundred men and their families, and a whole community, are affected. I simply pass that on to whoever might listen. There might still be somebody who is prepared to give people like that the kind of chance they have asked for.

I will address most of my remarks to deregulation. The context in which we have to consider it is, quite simply, the growth of Government. Again turning to the 1979 manifesto, it says:

"The traditional role of our legislature has suffered badly from the growth of Government over the last quarter of a century.

We will see that Parliament and no other body stands at the centre of the nation's life and decisions, and we will seek to make it effective in its job of controlling the Executive."

Then there is more about the attack on over-Government, regulations and bureaucracy.

What have we had? We have had the biggest growth in Government in modern times. We are now having to deregulate because the Government have invented the regulatory state; everything that they have touched they have sought to regulate. The whole thrust of the Government's privatisation programme has produced massive regulator strictures—most recently with the privatisation of British Rail. Those strictures were replicated across the whole range of utilities, and are to be replicated in the education system—"Death by ringbinder" as it has been called in the profession. I will not refer to what has been happening inside the health service, where managers, bureaucrats and accountants multiply by the day.

There is a sensible approach to all this. I prefer good regulations to bad ones; simple ones to complex ones; and sensible ones to silly ones. There are many regulations that the business community would like to see but the Government have not delivered. One that has been mentioned in the debate is late payment problems for small businesses. Small business men have been pressing the Government to do something about that, and it would be a sensible regulation to introduce.

Regulation has become the hallmark of the Government. The Department of Trade and Industry's report on the implementation and enforcement of European Community law in the United Kingdom, shows that both Government and officials are largely responsible for the problems that we have. Failure properly to integrate EC directives with domestic legislation has produced a maze, and it is that maze that the Government are now trying to sort out.

We have seen the development of the extended state, the regulatory state, the contract state, the market tested state and the quango state. Soon, by the end of this Government, that will account for almost a quarter of public expenditure, tripling the number of quangos that Mrs. Thatcher, in her great quango cull, was going to get rid of. That is the crime of regulatory regime that the Government have created.

The volume of legislation introduced by the Government is telling, and is a backcloth to everything that we are doing today. Since 1979, the total number of Acts passed was 861; the average number of Acts passed each year is 61·3. The total number of pages is 29,811; the average number of pages per year is 2,466. The total number of statutory instruments is 33,382; the average number per year is 2,335. The total number of SI pages is 70,088; the average number per year is 7,008.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Would the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Wright: I would give way, but other people wish to speak and the 10-minute rule applies.

In 1988 the extraordinary number of 15,403 pages of legislation were produced. People should not think that that figure is par for the course, because 10 years earlier in 1978 under, dare I say it, a Labour Government, there were 1,481 pages. The Government came to power determined to roll back the state; it would not be possible to find a bigger rolling forward.

If we look at not only the volume of legislation but its character, we find that the Government have increasingly introduced framework legislation, with great holes in it which they wished to fill by order. Everyone who has looked at this issue has said that it is one of the great trends of the times, and that it has become more so under the Government. Henry VIII clauses abound, which enable Ministers effectively to legislate. We do not know what the form of the deregulation Bill will be, but in one form it would be a constitutional outrage.

We have serious problems in both the volume of legislation and its increasingly complex character. Lord Wakeham, when talking about this in the House of Lords the other day, said:

"The truth of the position is that there is now around five times as much legislation as there was in the days when others remember how we did things."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 November 1993, Vol. 549, c. 1084.]

Unless the Government and the Conservative party confront the fact that they used to be a conserving party, that it once wanted to conserve things, and that if too much legislation is introduced, bad legislation and legislation that is insufficiently scrutinised, eventually there will be a problem of burdensome legislation which will have to be attacked, undone and undressed. That is what is happening now.

Along with other Members, I received this week—in addition to an invitation to a rather expensive lunch—a report from the Food and Drink Federation. Under the heading "Deregulation" it said:

"Whilst firmly supporting the Government's stated commitment to deregulation the Food and Drink Federation is concerned that the initiative is carefully presented to consumers as a means of increasing choice and competitiveness and not of reducing levels of safety and consumer protection.

I heard the former Chancellor, Lord Lawson, say the other day, in a notable speech, that the hallmark of the Government had become presentation. He went further than that, but I will be delicate for the moment. Many major trade organisations are saying that they are concerned——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Mark Robinson.

8.17 pm

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): This debate has been characterised by the fact that Conservative Members have accentuated the positive and Opposition Members have accentuated the negative. That has been noticeable in every speech that we have heard from them.

I will further accentuate the positive by giving a warm welcome to the legislative programme for the year, which will cover law and order, Sunday trading and deregulation. The Bills which will come forward in those areas are in response to things for which my constituents have been asking for many months. If ever there was a programme coming before the House which has been asked for by the people of this country, it is the programme of Bills before us in the coming Session.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, in his sparkling return to the Chamber, emphasise the importance of seeking a successful conclusion in the next few weeks to the general agreement on tariff and trade negotiations. Nothing could be more important for business men in my constituency and businesses in the United Kingdom.

Britain is currently well placed to lead Europe out of recession. Interest rates and inflation, as a combination are at their lowest for many years. Business costs have been forcibly but by the recession, leaving our exporters in an extremely competitive position from which they can take advantage.

My constituency may not naturally be associated with the manufacturing industry, but it is home to several companies involved in that activity. One of the better known is Cuprinol, which specialises in wood preservatives. Last year, it increased its exports by 30 per cent. It can be done. That company exports to European markets, but at least it has been able to respond to the slowdown in traditional European export markets by achieving success primarily in the middle east and the far east. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will be pleased to know that Cuprinol's export manager says that the DTI's support for export potential is "improving all the time."

As Cuprinol has shown, British industry must not be over-wary of previously untapped markets, because they represent a useful source of new opportunities. South America, for example, is another market that deserves special attention by those exporters in adventurous mode.

There is no doubt that the conditions for exporters have improved and that today's prevailing economic circumstances will encourage that trend still futher. Our current exchange rates mean that our exporters can sell goods at about 20 per cent. below the cost incurred in 1992. Britain has the lowest interest rates in Europe and inflation is now well below the European Union average. Our business taxation is the lowest in the industrial world and I hope that that will remain the case even after 30 November. Unit wage costs in Britain are falling faster than at any time since 1970 and I hope that that, too, will remain the position. Certainly it should do so as long as the European socialst manifesto never has the chance to be implemented.

I listened to a strange broadcast one Sunday morning from the Leader of the Opposition who tried to explain why he had signed up to the European socialist manifesto. At the same time, however, he went to great lengths to try to make it clear to people that, although he was a signatory, that did not amount to assent because it would not be implemented in the United Kingdom. I do not, however, believe that that signature would amount to nothing, nor do the British people.

When one listens to the Opposition one might think that this country exports little and manufactures less than anywhere else in the world. However, we export a higher percentage of our GDP than Japan and we export more per head than Japan or the United States. We have already heard today about Rover, and it is worth mentioning that, because of its efforts and those of other car manufacturers, the trade deficit in car production may well be removed by 1996. That is a considerable achievement.

The Government can take specific action in three areas to enhance our competitive advantage. The first and perhaps the most obvious action is high-profile Government backing for potential exports. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues have already

shown the way by backing United Kingdom Ltd. in their overseas tours. The Prince of Wales has made and continues to make an important contribution to the export drive. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given full public recognition of that and confirmed that his Royal Highness' role will continue and will be enhanced.

Secondly, the Government should reduce the burden on industry brought about by national and local government. That can be achieved through increased market testing, because the competitiveness that that secures leads to cuts in the underlying costs of Government services to business. That result is nothing but beneficial to businesses in their bids to win orders.

Thirdly, the Government can do much, as we have already heard today, through deregulation. I listened without surprise but with plenty of disappointment to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). Under Labour, Britain might not be so good at winning export orders but, my goodness, as the hon. Gentleman said, it would be at the top of the league of European regulators. That is obviously what the hon. Gentleman wants.

The deregulation Bill is about common sense. It is not about getting rid of sensible and necessary health and safety legislation. It is about getting rid of outdated, useless regulations, for which no proper legislative procedure exists. It is not about throwing babies out with the bath water, wholesale, as the hon. Member for Livingston would have us believe. It would not create wide-ranging powers to remove regulations without reference to Parliament. The Bill will, however, help companies in my constituency which are confronted by mountains of forms. Earlier this year, one printing firm in my constituency, Butler and Tanner, had to deal with vast paperwork because of the regulations contained in an Act passed in 1947.

Another local company, Wincanton Ltd., has a turnover of £200 million a year. It has to deal with regulations covering health, hygiene and safety. It does not object to that burden, provided it is sensible and reasonable. The Bill is designed to ensure that regulations will be sensible, reasonable and up to date, and that the cost of their implementation will not be out of all proportion to their effect.

The Queen's Speech is welcomed by many people. It is certainly welcome to businesses. It is good for business, good for exports and will certainly ensure that Britain is able to capitalise on the extremely favourable competitive position in which it finds itself.

8.26 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said that he would have no truck with the idea of political union. He said that without even a hint of embarrassment despite the fact that he stands at the heart of a political union—the political union of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The fears that he expressed for Britain in relation to European union have already been realised in relation to Scotland and its union with the United Kingdom. Conservative Members should sometimes stop to think when they demand the application of the principle of subsidiarity from Europe to Britain while at the same time they deny the application of subsidiarity from the United Kingdom to Scotland. Their argument is utterly hypocritical and cannot be defended logically.

The hon. Member for Woodspring went on to argue that he believes in a free-market, free-trade, deregulated Europe in which money can be moved at will across national boundaries by those in control of the financial markets. He did not mention that this is the Europe with 17 million unemployed people and that, in the short term, that unemployment will rise to 20 million. It is also a Europe in which the fascist right is on the march across the continent. It has failed its citizens because it is a free-market, free-trade, deregulated Europe.

Dr. Liam Fox: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAllion: I have just 10 minutes, so I will not give way.

I wish to concentrate on one part of the amendment tabled to the Queen's Speech in the names of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and other colleagues which deals with the reduced protection to the public and employees arising from legislation included in the speech: legislation which will increase the powers of Whitehall at the expense of accountability to the House. The legislation to which the amendment refers relates to that part of the Queen's Speech which promises:

"Legislation will be introduced to facilitate deregulation and to remove obstacles to contracting out by central and local government."

In other words, the Bill makes it easier for the Government to continue their programme of market testing in the civil service. In that respect, I am glad that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is in his place, as I want to refer to a speech that he gave in June 1992. I believe that the speech launched the Government's market testing initiative. The Minister made the speech to a conference that was organised by *The Sunday Times* for industrial and financial leaders. It may seem a long time ago, as it was made shortly after the general election. The Minister even began his remarks by saying that Britain had a new Government, and he went on to describe that Government as perhaps the most permanent and most secure Government anywhere in Europe.

I am sure that the Minister came to regret using that phrase. He used it before black Wednesday, and the Government's panic withdrawal from the exchange rate mechanism, before the pit closures fiasco, before the Maastricht debacle, and before the public sector borrowing requirement was revealed to be standing at £50 billion as a result of the Government's policies. In the course of his speech, the Minister referred to the PSBR as being £28 billion in that year. Is it not marvellous how within a matter of months the PSBR can jump from £28 billion in a speech by a Cabinet Minister to £50 billion? I wonder why the figure jumped so quickly, and why it was out of all proportion to what the Minister was saying.

The Minister went on to talk about a revolution in the way in which public services were organised and delivered. Of course, he was announcing the launch of the market testing initiative in the civil service. He said that the emphasis in market testing is on free and open competition. He said:

"In promoting the extension of market testing and competitive tendering, we are endeavouring to ensure that all in-house costs are calculated and taken properly into account. Our aim is to ensure competition is both free and fair."

[Mr. McAllion]

No one could ask for a fairer attitude from a Minister. Later in the speech, the Minister went further:

"I want there to be parity of esteem between public and private, based on the rival and complementary excellences of each sector."

Those, again, were laudable remarks from a Minister who was trying to be even-handed between the public and private sectors. Of course, those words were uttered before the onset of the sea of troubles that have beset the Government in the past 12 months.

I move on from the speech given by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster last June to that given by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury in September this year to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. That speech had a different emphasis altogether. He said;

"When once Government asked what shall we sell? We now ask what must we keep?"

In other words, there is to be a bias towards getting rid of Government services or privatising them in some form. The Financial Secretary went on to say:

"I believe there is significantly more scope for privatisation or contracting out of central Government functions than has previously been envisaged."

The Financial Secretary went on to describe the discussions that he had had with Ministers of every Department.

Mr. Heald *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise the point that I am sponsored by the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, he is free to do so.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to make a speech in which he heavily criticises market testing without declaring his interest as a paid consultant for a civil service union?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is entirely up to hon. Members to disclose such interests as they believe to be appropriate.

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Gentleman will know that such interests are contained in the Register of Members' Interests. I declare that interest in most speeches that I make. If I were to do so in every speech, hon. Members would complain that I was continually referring to the union. Of course I am a parliamentary consultant for the union, and I am happy to declare that fact.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. For the benefit of the House, I will say that any hon. Member who has an interest to state should state it at the beginning of every speech where it is relevant.

Mr. McAllion: I shall certainly do so in future. I shall return to what I was saying before I was interrupted in an attempt to drive me off the point.

During the discussions held between Ministers, it was agreed that in future what they called prior options would be applied when making decisions. The Financial Secretary said that of each departmental activity they must ask themselves the following questions in order of priority. The first is, "Can it be abolished?" If the answer was no, they would move on to the second question, which was, "Can it be privatised?" If the answer was again no, the third question would be asked, which was, "Can it be contracted out?" If the Minister was told that that could not be done, only then would the fourth question, "Can it be market-tested?" be asked.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told the conference in June 1992 that there would be free and fair competition and even-handedness between the public and private sectors, but there is nothing of the kind. The public sector is not even getting an opportunity to take part in market testing because Ministers are asking the prior questions. Only when the questions have been asked do they bother with market testing or matching the civil service departments against their competitors in the private sector. It is a complete stitch-up in favour of the private sector. The Minister knows that, as does every other Minister and every hon. Member.

I understand that the messenger service for the Office of Public Service and Science has been contracted out. There was no market testing, and the Department was not given a chance to test its bid against the private sector bid. The contract went straight to a leading private sector company which put in a loss-leader bid. It is honouring the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1986. It will pay the same wages and will have the same holidays and pensions conditions. It will do so for less money than the public sector can do it because the company is anxious to have the prestige of being the messenger service for the Department.

In other words, the Minister is putting up the prestige of his own office by selling it off to the private sector. The company will then use the prestige to win contracts against its competitors. That is a contemptible part of the Government's strategy. The phrase used by the Financial Secretary——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.36 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): Today's debate has been interesting, and we heard the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Wright) make a passionate plea for further deregulation. I was wondering how he intended to square that with the opinion of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who has said of deregulation that the Government are introducing new killing fields into industry.

The House was then tempted by the peculiar and bizarre vision of a European future by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion). I do not wish to lead the House down either of those routes. Instead, I shall return firmly to basics. With the Budget a week away, we will be hearing a great deal from economists; and we shall be hearing a lot of economics from politicians.

I used to be scared by economics, and I used to think that it was some type of complicated science. A few years ago I got wise about the subject and discovered that it was an art, where an enormous amount of energy, analysis, and sophisticated computer equipment is followed up by a series of enormous guesses. I am fond of economists—some of my best friends are economists, as they say—but it is important that we understand that economics is simply an analysis of what other people produce.

Trade and industry are, and always have been, the foundations of economic life. Industry is the cornerstone of our developed world. Men and women go out to work to do what they do best for the best return they can achieve.

Those people generate the money which sustains, among other things, all our public services, including health, education, and defence. In that sense, important as those services are, they must always be secondary considerations. It is only trade and industry which make them possible. I fear that Opposition Members sometimes forget that. That is why this debate is so important. We are often led to believe that it is Governments who create wealth, but they do not. They spend the wealth that other people create by making and selling things, by offering services, and by creating the economy in the first place.

I think that the benign influence which politicians have over economic affairs is often overstated—not least by politicians. That is particularly true as markets have become increasingly international, even supranational. That was one of the lessons that we all learned from the effective collapse of the exchange rate mechanism.

It is important that we recognise as politicians the limitations under which we work when dealing with trade and industry and economic affairs. When we forget those limitations, we generally cause trouble. While our capacity as politicans to influence trade and industry matters for the better through intervention is limited, the capacity to cause trouble is virtually limitless. It should—it must—be our object to set the framework which enables all those who work in trade and industry to do what they want to do, which is to prosper.

That means doing an awful lot of things that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) did not mention in his doleful speech. It means keeping a lid on inflation. It means, however difficult, not listening to those who say that an inflation rate of 5 to 10 per cent. will be all right. We all know that once inflation takes a hold it is extremely difficult to control.

It means keeping interest rates as low as possible. We did not hear about that from Opposition Members, and certainly not from their principal spokesman. We are doing that. At 5·5 per cent., interest rates are the lowest that they have been for 16 years. It means a tax regime that enables people and businesses to keep more of what they earn to spend in the way that they choose. It means an exchange rate that recognises the reality of markets and the relative position of individual economies. We have such an exchange rate and it is perhaps in part because of that that our exports are now at record levels.

It means doing all that we can to resist the destructive forces of protectionism and to foster free markets which unlock doors to worldwide prosperity. No Government are doing more to help the GATT round come to a successful conclusion than this Government. I was delighted to hear what the President of the Board of Trade said about that.

Setting the framework means reducing the share of GDP taken by the state—that is something to which we are committed. It means developing in our schools the skills that industry needs. That does not necessarily mean developing the public sector borrowing requirement at the same time. It means listening to, and working with, industry. There is now a real partnership betwen the DTI and industry aimed at developing the skills that the country will need in the years to come.

Setting the framework means encouraging good labour relations as well. It comes as no surprise that we have recently enjoyed the lowest level of strikes since records began 100 years ago. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) laughs, but it is no laughing matter—it is a great Government achievement.

I spoke earlier of the problems which arise when politicians forget their limitations. There can be no better example of that than the social chapter. We should not interfere with the terms and rates of pay that private sector companies agree with their employees. To do so is arrogance. It is also ignorance, because it ignores the intensely competitive conditions in which our businesses have to fight for their living.

I was recently in Leipzig, in eastern Germany, where I was listening to local politicians and business men talking. The subject of the social chapter came up. Did they nod wisely and mutter about workers' rights? No, they laughed. One said to me, "Look, wages and social costs have soared since unification, and so has unemployment. The average daily wage in this part of Germany is 40 deutschmarks. Thirty miles away in Poland, it is 8 deutschmarks and a little further to the east, in Russia, it is 15 pfennigs. Talk to me about skills, technology or privatisation, but don't talk to me about the social chapter."

The social chapter and other forms of bureaucratic regulation have no part to play in Europe's battle for world markets. They are devised by politicians, but that battle is being fought day after day by people in business, trade and industry. Therefore, I welcome the Bill on deregulation. I hope that it will be radical, brave and far reaching in its consequences. Nothing less will do if we are to unshackle our businesses and enable them to get on with the job of developing our economy and generating the prosperity that people want and which our society has come to expect.

8.44 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench on their anti-red tape—that is a better phrase than deregulation—Bill. I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on its importance to small businesses. Equally, the national manufacturing council of the CBI has specifically said in its document "Partners for Success" how important that deregulation and anti-red tape initiative will be for manufacturing industry. Important as it is, the Bill pales into insignificance in comparison with the huge improvement in the productivity and efficiency in British industry that has resulted from the sea change in British industry brought about by the Government's policies on low inflation, low interest rates and low taxation.

Earlier today, I reminded the House that, since 1979, manufacturing has risen by about 30 per cent. and overall output by about 25 per cent. Sadly, both fell under the last Labour Government. What is more, manufacturing industry is becoming more competitive. We are the only country in Europe to show a significant rate of growth this year. Productivity is rising and unit wage costs, which are increasingly important in an increasingly competitive world, are falling—small wonder that, as a result, our exports are up by about 15 per cent. compared to last year. When we take exports outside Europe—inside Europe, it is extremely difficult to work out because of the introduction of Intrasat—our increase on last year is even more. The United Kingdom's share of main manufacturing countries' exports—our share of world trade—has shown an improvement from 7·5 per cent. in 1984 to about 8·5 per cent. recently. That is the best figure that we have had since the mid and early 1970s.

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

It is significant that, in my constituency, a carpet company called Master Weavers is importing German equipment that cannot be used effectively over there because of the high social costs, and is making a profit here. Another company is importing heavy wheel-making equipment from near Dusseldorf in Germany. The German firm wants to concentrate its production here because of the competitiveness of British industry and work forces, rather than remaining in Germany. The managing director of that company said to me, "Mr. Coombs, if we cannot compete on the basis of low inflation, low interest rates and greater certainty than we have had for many years, we never will."

I find it amazing that, given that massive improvement in competitiveness and confidence, which is emphasised by the west midlands business survey last month, the Labour party should be seeking to weigh British industry down with the social chapter, minimum wage regulations and union recognition agreements, the like of which we have not seen since the early 1970s, and now, a socialist super-state with a 35-hour, four-day week. Those are the costs that industry most wants to avoid. I have not found one business man who welcomed the social chapter and the Labour party's adherence to it.

As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade reminded the Institute of Directors yesterday, in the land of reality, we live in a competitive world. Although productivity has improved dramatically, we still have some way to go, except in manufacturing, where we are among the world's leaders. Even the CBI recognises that, although 2 per cent. of our manufacturing companies are world class and 40 per cent. are near that, more than half our manufacturing companies have a long way to go before they reach a level of efficiency that would allow them to compete with the rest of the world.

Over the next two years, we as a country, and we as a Government, need to give to two other points even more attention that we have been giving. The first is that, in this country, although we have 400,000 new small firms every year, we do not have a sector for medium-sized firms as large as those of our competitors, particularly France and Germany. If we are to encourage them, we must consider their training needs—we are looking at that through the national vocational qualifications initiative.

There has been an improvement in the number of people staying on at school—record numbers of people are going to university and taking technical qualifications. We must look also at how they are managed so that, in the proper culture of management, that investment is used most effectively. I hope that the new one-stop shops will lead to a significant impact for small and medium-sized firms.

Compared to our European neighbours, our small and medium-sized firms rely far too much on short-term overdraft finance. As a result, they do not have the confidence to invest that those abroad have. They have dividend policies, particularly on the market, which, given their earnings, are often irresponsible—double the rate of those for the competition overseas. Too often, business angels, who might have come in and injected business capital, are deterred by unrealistically high levels of capital gains tax. We need a means of financing medium-sized companies on a long-term basis.

I should like to suggest—it was last mooted by my hon. Friends in 1986—long-term industrial revenue bonds, which would give such companies a source for long-term, or at least medium-term, finance at a reasonably fixed rate.

Obviously, low inflation will assist in providing such finance, because it drives down interest rates and makes people more certain about their future investment decisions. Nevertheless, I believe that something like the industrial revenue bond, which could quite easily replace the business expansion scheme for small companies, should be considered seriously by the Government.

My second point is that, to maintain our improvement in world trade and competitiveness, we need fair competition. I am delighted that the DTI has set up a single market compliance unit. I hope that it will do something about the barriers that particularly affect the textile industry. That industry employs 400,000 people—more than 4,000 of whom are in my constituency. Germany has the Gut scheme, which is meant to be a standard scheme but is effectively used as a way of restricting foreign imports.

Carpet companies trying to sell on contract to hoteliers in Germany find that they must be inspected for every single contract—not just overall—by regional governments who not only insist on inspecting in situ but whose representatives come to England and walk around the factories to make sure that they are doing everything right there. In terms of barriers to trade, those are the matters at which the SMCU should look.

On subsidy, particularly hidden subsidy, the Belgian Government, and to a lesser extent the French Government, have been getting away with murder for too long in subsidising, through the back door, their carpet companies. I know that the DTI is well apprised of that. I think that the SMCU should be pro-active with trade associations such as the British Carpet Manufacturers Association in investigating the kind of costing that contributes towards the entirely unrealistic pricing of which carpet companies in Europe, which are subsidised by their Governments, are capable. In that way, we would stop that practice and, as a result, move towards fairer competition in that sector.

GATT and the importance of NAFTA and other free trade agreements have been mentioned. The textiles industry in particular suffers because although it exports £4·8 billion-worth of goods every year, only £1·8 billion of that is outside Europe. Why? The answer is that there are very high tariff rules outside Europe. When exporting goods, the average tariff in Europe is about 14 per cent. In India, there is a ban—even if one can get past that ban, the tariff is 100 per cent.—in Pakistan, the tariff is 125 per cent.; in China, it is 130 per cent.; and, even in the United States, it is 60 per cent. for some goods.

I know that GATT has called for a halving of some of the tariff barriers and a lesser reduction for the higher ones. Nevertheless, more needs to be done by the compliance unit in the DTI to ensure that those tariff barriers come down as quickly as possible. If not, appropriate reciprocal action should be taken by the British Government to ensure that they come down in future.

8.54 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Like the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), whose speech I have enjoyed, I, too, would like to put in a word for fair trading practices.

Today's debate, which has focused on the manufacturing industry and deregulation, is of enormous important to my constituents. Indeed, it is of enormous importance to the entire industrial community on Tyneside. My constituency has two key pillars to its private sector economy—NEI Parsons, which makes turbine generators, and Swan Hunter, shipbuilders, which is now in receivership.

The level of male unemployment of the shipbuilding community in the Walker ward of east Newcastle is now 38 per cent. That is before the receiver has shed the work force, who are still employed at Swan Hunter constructing two frigates for the Royal Navy. Tragically, 500 men lost their jobs in the announcement last week. If something is not done very soon, the other 1,000 will lose their jobs.

It is with enormous sorrow that I take part in the debate on Britain's manufacturing base to plead with the Government that they do something to save what is left of the shipbuilding manufacturing base on Tyneside. No community deserves better from the Government. At the time of the Falkland conflict, Swan Hunter was full. Men were willingly working overtime to provide the hardware that the Royal Navy needed. Civilian workers even went to sea with the fleet to complete outfitting work as it sailed down to the south Atlantic. The shipyard workers of Tyneside have served Great Britain well, in war and in peace.

In the tragic circumstances that now confront the yard, surely the workers have a right not only to be heard in the House but to have a response from the Government, particularly from the DTI. I think that we all accept that the warship building programme will not be in future what it has been in the past, but two key procurement decisions have put Swan Hunter into its present tragic plight: the first being the procurement of auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel No. 1 at Harland and Wolff.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest mentioned fair competition. Whatever else that decision was, it could not possibly be described as fair competition. Behind Harland and Wolff was the Northern Ireland Office and some £58 million-worth of subventions from the public purse; behind Swan Hunter was a management buy-out with no sizeable commercial resource at all.

The landing platform helicopter carrier order—the second great procurement decision that has put Swan Hunter into its present plight—was won by VSEL at Barrow-in-Furness. The National Audit Office has now told us that between £25 million and £30 million-worth of reserves were used by that company to underpin its bid. There were no such reserves for the privatised management at Swan Hunter. The LPH battle is now over and I am certain that the work force at Barrow will be able to provide the Royal Navy with a perfectly suitable vessel. However, unemployment looms for the community that I represent. We are entitled to ask the DTI to do something to safeguard what is left of Tyneside's manufacturing base.

I make this plea because everything that we have asked for so far seems to have met stony silence from the Government Benches. The Government could do several things. They could sit an economic package alongside the redevelopment of the yard for merchant ship building or for related work, such as fabrication in another area. However, so far the Government have said nothing.

I understand that, in the past day or so, the Minister for Industry has pressed the case for intervention funding for Swan Hunter so that the yard can diversify into merchant ship building. That is all very well, but the yard has been in receivership for six months. The Government should have acted as soon as the receiver moved in. They should not have decided finally to make a bid to Europe some six months later as redundancy round has followed redundancy round and when the conclusion has become all too clear to those who follow these matters on Tyneside.

We are not talking simply about the destruction of a community and a way of life which has formed a substantial part of the way in which Tyneside has worked since the turn of the century. We are talking about the lack of an alternative. The shipyard workers at Tyneside have only ever asked for a fair chance to compete and for the famous level playing field. If they are not to have that, surely the DTI—which is our sponsoring Department—has a duty to encourage alternative employment or a private sector purchaser to take over the business and provide a new or renewed employment base. However, we have heard nothing of the sort from the DTI.

All that has been announced so far is a relatively small sum of money—about £2 million—for the urban development corporation. Frankly, that sum will do hardly much more than grass the yard over. The people of Tyneside do not want to be park keepers or the custodians of a once proud industrial heritage and a kind of shipbuilding theme park. They want the right to work and they expect the DTI to stand in their corner and to assert that right with them.

We have looked with admiration at the way in which the Northern Ireland Office stood up for Harland and Wolff. We looked with admiration at the way in which the Scottish Office stood up for at least two major shipbuilding yards in Scotland. They were our direct competitors. Who has stood up for the people of Tyneside? The DTI should have done that, but to date there has been no significant announcement from the Department about support for the existing shipbuilding industry or about an economic regeneration package for the region.

Work is running out at Swan Hunter. The future for the work force looks extraordinary grim. Surely it is now right for the Government to come to the House—perhaps the Minister will do this when he replies to the debate—and say what assistance will be provided to the people of Tyneside and to a community that deserves better from the Government than just the neglect and plain ignorance which are currently all that is forthcoming.

9.2 pm

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): We have heard yet another speech from the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) in the dismal Johnny litany which began with the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who opened the debate. From that speech, one would have thought that there were no grounds for optimism. We have heard about redundancy round after redundancy round. It has not been stated that, as we all know, unemployment is falling in Britain. One hundred and thirty thousand more people in Britain are in work now than a year ago.

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

The one glimmer of hope among the Opposition speeches seemed to be that of the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). He started rather well when he said that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade had made a ripping speech. There was a ripple on the Conservative Benches, as we thought that a little bit of credit was going to be given. However, the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside ruined it all by describing my right hon. Friend as "Mike the Ripper." That took all the gloss from his previously hopeful comment.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. Friend might have enjoyed that.

Mr. Heald: Yes, he might have. However, if one were looking for an analogy, a much more favourable impression would have been made by Munching Mike from the Letterland series of books. The point about Munching Mike is that he eats the unnecessary and wasteful things in Letterland. I hope that my right hon. Friend will make a meal of over-regulation in this country.

I wish to make two main points. First, over-regulation greatly damages this country's interests. To deregulate is not an optional extra; it is something that we must do if we are to compete. With the Employment Select Committee, I recently visited Japan and met inward investors who are coming to this country. Forty per cent. of inward investment into Europe comes into Britain. Inward investors are not painting the dismal picture that we have just heard. They are talking about a country which has real opportunities to offer manufacturing industry, a country with the right language, a country which gives a warm welcome to inward investors, a country with political stability, and a country with an inventive work force.

Nissan representatives will say that the Nissan product that is made in this country is the best in the world. The reason is that the company's programme of asking people for ideas on how to improve the industrial process is working much better in this country than anywhere else. Each year, 300 ideas come from the work force in Sunderland to improve the product. It is the same story at Honda. Companies that are investing in Britain praise our work force, and that shows optimism for the future. They say that almost all the conditions in Britain are right. They welcome the fact that we are in the European Community, but they sound a note of caution.

The note of caution that those companies sound is that in the EC there is a danger that we will over-regulate to the point at which we are not competitive with the rest of the world. There is a danger that in this country, where we implement regulations to the nth degree, we will not only take on what Europe is doing but make matters so restrictive that we will not have the edge that we have at the moment. No one should imagine that we can afford to lose the competition—we cannot.

We have only to look at the geography of Europe to realise that there is a core. The European Community has recognised that there is a core, through its funding for the periphery. In those areas—part of Britain is no doubt in them—one might be able to afford to be a little inefficient and have the social dimension, but what about the rest of Europe? What about the periphery that is having burdens put on it? Those burdens mean that part of Europe will not be able to compete with the other part of Europe if that continues—something which is damaging to poorer nations.

It amazes me: that socialists or people who claim to have some feeling for poorer countries that need to develop are the ones who are suggesting putting restraints on competition within Europe. We want a deregulated Europe which can compete. We have 20 million unemployed people in Europe, and estimates for the future are not good. Britain is the only country that is successfully tackling the problem. Let us look at the lessons which Britain can give.

Secondly, I refer to privatisation. From Opposition Members and trade unions we hear constant criticisms of privatisation, but we must consider what our trade unions are doing in eastern Europe. They are helping the free trade unions which have just started in those countries. Those free trade unions do not stand for anti-privatisation, old-fashioned restrictive practices or the mess that our union movement is in; they stand for apolitical trade unions. Their first act is to sign conventions on privatisation, just as the new trade unions have done in Russia. They stand up for free trade capitalism because they know from experience exactly what would happen if they did not. It would be a disaster. We need to look at eastern Europe to see what over-regulation and state industry do.

It is extraordinary that our trade unions are going to eastern Europe and helping trade unions that know all the right things because they have learnt them from history, yet they come back to this country and argue against privatisation and they are affiliated to the Labour party —all the old claptrap. The time has come when trade unions need a new language of activism, to use John Monk's words. The sooner they get it and start selling good services to their members, and doing what everyone in employment law recognises is needed, the better.

9.9 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): This has been a rather uneven debate. After a measured and highly effective introduction by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), we heard some passionate speeches by some of my other hon. Friends. At the risk of being rather invidious, I must pick out the speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on the decline of manufacturing industry; by my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) and for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on the destruction of the coal industry; by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) on the problems of small businesses; and by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on the multiplication of quangos and the rise of the unelected state. I must also mention the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on the dangers of market testing, about which I shall say a good deal more in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) made a moving speech on the collapse of the shipbuilding industry and the Government's complete failure to take any remedial action for that stricken area.

I now come to the speech by the President of the Board of Trade, who opened the debate. He may be restored to health, but he certainly lost no time in going straight into overdrive. I suppose that one might say he went from the

sickbed to a leadership bid in one astounding leap. He told us nothing about the subject that we are supposed to be debating—his forthcoming Bill. Rather as a cuttlefish conceals his retreat by exuding clouds of ink, the President of the Board of Trade spewed out personal abuse, insults, fictions, froth and lather in a great farrago of rhetorical claptrap.

As I listened to him, I was reminded of the wise words of one of my hon. Friends, "Never wrestle with a chimney sweep." Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman's hyperactivity—stabbing the air like a demented dervish on several occasions—was in inverse proportion to his consistency.

I see the right hon. Gentleman coming into the Chamber straight on cue. I am glad that I was referring to him. We are glad to see him restored to health, even if he has gone straight into overdrive. Given all the deregulation ardour that he exhibited tonight, one might wonder whether this was the same man who wrote a personal manifesto a few years ago entitled, "Where There's a Will", which advocated intervention in industry, or the same man who was going to intervene before breakfast and at every other minute of the day. All one can say is that one hopes that his latest craze will last no longer than his previous ones.

The first thing to be said about the Government's proposed deregulation Bill—what we know of it—is that it is a misnomer. It is not about lifting burdens but about removing protections. It will not lift burdens if one makes temporary workers buy their own hard hats, steel-capped footwear or other necessary clothing, but it will undermine their protection and it could put their lives at risk. The removal of regulations on lifting loads, independent inspection or internal consultation procedures will not lift significant burdens, but it may give ignorant and unscrupulous employers a licence to kill.

If food safety regulations are now described by the Secretary of State for Health as "over zealous nit-picking", why was it in 1990, just three years ago, the then Agriculture Minister described those same regulations as designed

"to outlaw the cowboys of food safety."

If they protected the public then, why do they suddenly cease to do so today?

It is no use Ministers pretending that health and safety will not be undermined by the Bill. We have only to look at their record. They have already cut the Health and Safety Executive's budget by £13 million this year. They have already cut the public grant supporting safety rep training, and they say that they will abolish it completely in 1995. They have already signalled their complacency about health and safety by making the chair of the Health and Safety Commission a part-timer; and they have already begun to subject the HSE to market testing, which will seriously threaten its consistent and discretionary approach to enforcement.

There is, however, a much more insidious and disturbing aspect to the Bill—the generalised and sweeping powers that Ministers propose to take to themselves for an open-ended expansion of privatising or contracting-out functions now covered by statutory regulation.

We have three fundamental objections to the proposal. First, it vests enormous and unaccountable power in the hands of Ministers, power which they can use to repeal an endless stream of legislative provisions simply by issuing a statutory instrument, with minimal parliamentary debate. That undermines the role of Parliament, and it takes another major step down the road to an elective tyranny.

These are the same Ministers who have set up a host of unelected quangos, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood eloquently pointed out a few moments ago. Those quangos, beyond any public accountability, now control almost a quarter of total public expenditure. These are the same Ministers, too, who over the past decade have pursued the biggest centralisation of state power this century—and now they want the power, if not with the stroke of a pen, then with the stroke of an affirmative resolution, to indulge their dogma of privatisation without having to submit to the discipline of detailed parliamentary scrutiny. We say that that is not only unhealthy for parliamentary democracy but downright wrong, and we oppose it absolutely.

Our second objection derives from our doubt about whether this move is even constitutional. Characteristically, the President of the Board of Trade simply deflected any consideration of that important issue. Our view is, however, shared by the Minister's chief officials, I have with me a letter—[HON. MEMBERS: "From *The Guardian*?"]. No, this is a management-in-confidence letter from the efficiency unit in the Department of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and it is written by the deputy director. I can understand why the right hon. Gentleman might by slightly worried about it.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am not.

Mr. Meacher: That is odd, because the letter is about a subject on which the right hon. Gentleman has had months of aggro with his fellow Ministers. The letter states:

"A common theme which has emerged is the risk of there being an unlawful sub-delegation of power arising from the contracting-out of certain statutory functions entrusted to Ministers."

The deputy director goes on to use some jargon about the Carltona doctrine, which dates back to 1943 and which allows civil servants, and only civil servants, to act on behalf of Ministers. The letter continues:

"The Carltona doctrine does not extend beyond civil servants in Government Departments . . . The legal advice is that the case law, including a decision of the House of Lords in 1990 . . . indicates that the doctrine cannot be extended beyond its present scope without legislation. It would not, therefore, extend to contractors whom the Minister might wish to authorise to carry out work on his behalf."

That is the strict legal advice offered by a senior official in the Minister's Department. The letter goes on to say:

"A general power of sub-delegation would be a constitutional innovation, and it may necessarily involve a wide order-making power to amend primary legislation which could in itself be controversial."

I am sure that the Minister remembers it well, but I would be glad to give him a copy of the letter.

The matter was taken up by the Minister in another letter that he wrote to Ministers on 2 April seeking their assistance. I quote:

"The suggested provision would have allowed a Minister to sub-delegate any function"—

we know from the other letter that that is illegal—

"to an authorised person who is not a Crown servant, by secondary legislation, as and when the need to do so is identified. Such a proposal was always bound to be particularly controversial".

[Mr. Meacher]

That is an understatement. Indeed, the Minister got short shrift.

I am pleased to say that such behaviour tends not to be contained and is more widely disseminated. I have another letter written by the Secretary of State for Scotland in April. It states:

"I can fully appreciate that a general provision to deal with the statutory constraint of delegation by Ministers to non-Crown servants might prove controversial."

That must be the understatement of the year, given the Minister's revealed penchant for giving himself sweeping and untrammelled powers against legal advice.

Tonight, we expect him to make it absolutely clear what route he intends to follow. He should make it clear whether he has bowed to the advice of his officials or whether he is in the same category as the Home Secretary, who likes to think that he knows better than all those who are paid to advise him. We want to know what he proposes to do about the vires of his proposed legislation.

Our central objection to the proposed Bill is the substance and its effects. It will undermine quality standards. That is not simply the Labour party's view; it is the view of the independent National Audit Office. Recently, that body criticised the Ministry of Defence for its contracting-out programme. The points emphasised by the National Audit office are relevant to the Bill. It emphasised the overestimating of the savins produced, the failure to lay down proper quality standards, the inadequate monitoring of the performance of contractors and the insufficient training for Ministry of Defence staff involved in contracting out. Those are serious objections.

I move on to a matter that I regard as more serious. The Bill will severely undermine confidentiality. The search for deregulation and privatisation will end the citizen's right to privacy in areas such as tax records, drivers' records, medical details, family maintenance transactions and, if the police national computer is privatised, information about criminal convictions.

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman has just read out a lot of stolen leaked letters, does he think that it is a bit rum to then complain about confidentiality?

Mr. Meacher: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's embarrassment because the way in which he intended to advance has been shown by his advisers to be illegal and unconstitutional. It is another matter to talk about the effects of his proposed Bill to citizens.

Next year, computer tax details of all United Kingdom citizens and businesses will be handed to an international computer company for processing. Judging by the information in the newspaper today, it appears that the contract has been awarded to the United States company, EDS. That is being done despite the fact that tax records were mishandled when work was handed to a private contractor and 84,000 annual tax advice packs were sent to the wrong addresses. Now we are to get a great deal more.

Furthermore, the market testing of typing and secretarial work, and the information technology office in the Inland Revenue, could mean that all letters to and from tax offices will go through temporary work agencies. That must increase the risk of people's personal affairs being known in the private marketplace. The truth is that, despite the guarantees of confidentiality that the Government are only too pleased to give, the private banking and financial sector already operates a secret market in personal data, and many breaches of privacy and confidentiality have already taken place. The Bill will grossly compound an already deeply unsatisfactory situation.

That is not just our view. Three recent reports by independent and highly respected bodies drive home the danger that, in private hands, tax returns could become public knowledge. Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, exposed in a recent report the failure of the Data Protection Act 1988. Mr. Eric Howe, the Data Protection Registrar, criticised the banks for failing to protect customers' confidentiality. Sir Bryan Carsberg, the Director General of Fair Trading, has called for new rules to be incorporated into the banking code to prevent customers' confidentiality from being breached. All are highly critical of the corrupt way in which personal financial information can be traded just like any other commodity. The Bill will make an already deplorable situation a great deal worse.

Individual taxpayers certainly need to be worried. They face a major increase in the risk of snooping on their personal lives. Businesses need to be worried. Their most sensitive confidential records could be available to their rivals, at a price of course, as could information on profit projections, how much they pay their employees, their research programmes, their cash flow projections and other information that could affect their creditworthiness.

For decades, civil servants, for all the criticisms that we often make of them in the House, have handled that sort of information with integrity and discretion. Ministers do not realise that public service values cannot be written into a contract. I know that there has been a lot of talk about the need for a level playing field in competition for contracts and market testing. The Government need to understand that there is no level playing field when data protection standards in the commercial world are so inferior to those in the civil service.

Another fundamental problem is the loss of public accountability. That is not just the view of the Labour party. The National Audit Office in its 1993 annual report, which was published a month ago, pointed out strongly that civil service reforms, such as market testing and contracting out, threaten standards of public honesty and accountability.

In the light of recent experience, the NAO drew attention to four weaknesses. First, it noted weak financial monitoring and controls. It instanced what it called the major failings—I take that to be a euphemism for corruption—in the management of the £43 million computer project of the Wessex regional health authority. Secondly, it noted a lack of clear lines of responsibility and accountability. It pointed to the Welsh Development Agency where redundancy payments were made without Welsh Office approval.

Thirdly, it identified conflicts of interest. A member of Wessex regional health authority was apparently connected with a company tendering for the computer equipment. Fourthly, it discovered the improper application of financial controls when the Ministry of Defence made more than £1 million of irregular payments under an incentive award scheme. That is a bad record for market testing. As those criticisms come from the NAO, one expects that the Government might just think again.

All this arises because the private sector operates under a different ethos. That is the point that the Government simply will not grasp. The private sector does not adapt

naturally to public sector rules of handling money. It is not driven by the need to be accountable for its activities and the professional ethic is not reflected in the system of merely contractual obligations.

There are lessons which the President of the Board of Trade has yet to grasp. A month ago at Question Time, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) asked the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science, who is responsible for the citizens charter:

"Is not there a grave danger that, by market testing, contractorising and privatising the civil service, we shall end up with a civil service, such as those in many countries, run by Group 4 and Mega-greed plc?"

The Minister's reply was instructive. He said:

"It is perhaps best answered by the fact that the First Division Association, which knows our civil service as well as anybody, has said quite clearly that it is not against market testing."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 1993; Vol. 230, c. 573.]

That is certainly news to the First Division Association. I have a letter——

Mr. Waldegrave: Another letter?

Mr. Meacher: Yes, I am glad that the Minister takes such an interest in the precise sources of information, because I would not want to misrepresent the view of the FDA as his hon. Friend did. The FDA said:

"We remain very concerned about the, in our view, dismissive attitude of Government Ministers to the real problems there are surrounding confidentiality, impartial service, equality of standards, conflicts of interest, and corruption."

On ministerial accountability, far from saying that it was against market testing, the FDA said the opposite:

"To replace ministerial accountability for services by accountability through litigation may seem to be a preferable option to some Ministers, but for those citizens who are unable to buy legal advice in the first place"—

after the changes in legal aid, that will be the great majority—

"it is doubtful whether it is an attractive one, or even a possible one."

On corruption and conflicts of interest, the FDA believes that market testing is utterly deficient, which is why it says:

"Any company which bids successfully for civil service work should be able to satisfy the 1986 Directors Disqualification Act on persons fit to run a public company."

Will that requirement be implemented? The President of the Board of Trade has been silent on the matter so far. I should be glad to give way to him if he will say whether he intends to implement that important requirement. As he does not get up, I shall continue.

The FDA also says:

"It is our unequivocal view that all MPs should forego their right to sit on the board of directors, in any capacity whatsoever, of a company which may tender for public work."

Will the President of the Board of Trade legislate to require that to be so? The FDA continues:

"It has also been drawn to our attention that at least one ex-Government Minister has moved very rapidly, on giving up ministerial office, to take up directorships with a company that has won contracts within the civil service."

Mr. Robin Cook: At least one?

Mr. Meacher: Yes, I think that it is considerably more than one.

Is not there a whiff of corruption about that? What will the President of the Board of Trade do to stop it? We want answers to those specific questions tonight.

In the cabaret-style, Victorian music hall knockabout that passed for a speech at the beginning of the debate, the President of the Board of Trade threw out the silly jibe that the Labour party wanted to regulate everything. That is ridiculous.

Of course the Government should dispose of outmoded regulations or update those that are no longer appropriate, but there is a world of difference between that and adopting sweeping deregulation as a blunt instrument across the board. It is one thing to go back to basics, but quite another to go back to the dark ages of unregulated sweatshops, unprotected building sites and uncontrolled markets. Freedom for businesses has to be balanced—a term that the Government do not understand—by securing employees' safety, protecting the consumer against dangerous products, stopping environmental pollution and ensuring decent conditions in the workplace. It is because the Government despicably place cutting red tape above all else, including the lives and the health and safety of ordinary employees and citizens, that we shall vote against the measure in the Lobby tonight.

9.37 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): I join those, including some generous souls on the Opposition Benches, in welcoming my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade back to the House in his most sparkling form. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), with whom I had the pleasure of debating in a previous post, made a characteristic, prickly speech. His relationship with my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade today was a little like that of a hedgehog to a juggernaut—there was not much left of him after the President had passed over.

I do not know whether it struck my hon. Friends or perhaps even Opposition Members, but the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) seemed to have an eccentric thesis at its heart. He was determined to prove that the public sector had higher standards of confidentiality than the private sector, and he had a leaked letter from the public sector with which to do so. He used not only one leaked letter, but another—there seemed to be something odd about that thesis.

I warn the hon. Member for Oldham, West that it is dangerous to study matters by working only on the basis of stolen letters. The first letter from which he quoted was written in February 1993. It was subsequently shown by parliamentary counsel that the point raised in the letter was wrong—we do not need the powers set out in it to do what we want to do. The hon. Gentleman's use of that letter demonstrated nothing about the debate, but merely countered his own thesis on confidentiality.

There were some extremely good speeches from both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) made a speech that was all the more effective for being quiet and courteous, and obviously coming from the depths of his experience of the constituency. I can assure him that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry is, and has been for some months, in genuine and direct contact with the Commission to see whether funds can be made available to the hon. Member's constituency from the shipbuilding intervention fund. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that, like him, the Government and my right hon. Friend the Minister are taking the matter seriously.

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

I want to give an assurance to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills). He made an extremely good speech that opened up the debate. He reminded us of the transformation in British industry over the past 10 to 25 years which means that, in two or three years, we shall again be a net exporter of motor cars—a fantastic achievement. As my hon. Friend said, new methods of co-operation between management and work force are being developed by a forward-looking industry.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the trademark Bill, on which he is an expert. It is the Government's intention that the Bill should deal with the counterfeiting problem that he mentioned. I know that he will want to study the Bill closely when it is published. I was a bit depressed —as, I believe, was my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade—by the fact that, in their speeches, virtually none of the Opposition Members raised their eyes to the wider world scene—for example, the issues of the general agreement on tariffs and trade. One or two Opposition Members did so, but they were very few. They did not mention the development of the great, new free trade area in north America or issues that are far more important than many of the parochial ones dealt with today——

Mr. Garrett: We are interested in British jobs.

Mr. Waldegrave: British workers' jobs depend on those wider issues far more than on some of the whingeing that we have heard from Opposition Members today. My hon. Friends did not make those mistakes, nor did the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) who acknowledged that we are talking about issues that are at the heart of the future of our country, though he disagreed in other respects.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and, in a characteristic speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) conveyed most eloquently the fundamental point of the debate: that, as world trade opens up and we fight for free trade, if we in Europe undermine it all by rebuilding our own extra costs and controls on a European basis, we will destroy jobs in Europe and in Britain. Although it is right to look at what goes on in Whitehall and in town halls here, it is essential that when we talk about regulation we consider all the extra burdens that can and do come from Europe. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North wanted a Euro inferno of controls—a phrase that resounds nicely. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) made the same point in relation to GATT.

Let us consider, as did some of my hon. Friends, the junction at which the country finds itself. We are out of recession for the sixth successive quarter. Forecasts from the European Community, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund all say that the United Kingdom will have the fastest growth rate of any EC country in 1993-94. In the three months to September, industrial production was almost 3 per cent. higher than in the same period in the previous year, while our partners in Europe—it is nothing in which to rejoice—are still going sharply backwards. The year-on-year figures for falls in industrial production are minus 1·7 per cent. in Italy, 3·2 per cent. in France, minus 8·2 per cent. in Germany, minus 10·1 per cent. in Belgium and minus 3·3 per cent. for Japan. Remember when the Opposition used to say that there was something uniquely British about the recession, as we had caused it? I suppose we have somehow also caused those far deeper recessions in other countries.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald) reminded us, we now have falling unemployment that is below the European Community average. The figure for our employment is 10·3 per cent. —far too high, but falling. The European Community average is 10·6 per cent. on the same basis and rising.

The economist Gavyn Davies, whose opinion I believe is respected as independent by the Opposition as well as by the Conservative party, described what the recession in retrospect has turned out to be in an article in *The Independent* on 25 October. He said that it did not fit the cliché of being the longest or deepest recession since the 1930s, a recession of similar length to that of the period from 1979 to 1981 and about half as deep.

With unemployment still far too high, the concern is now that the recovery is well based and that it lasts. That is why a debate now about competitiveness is well timed, as my hon. Friends the Members for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) re-emphasised. The export performance has been very good over the past year, but we must work to maintain it.

The economy is growing steadily, with inflation at a 30-year low, productivity at record levels and unit wage costs—ultimately the most important aspect in terms of trade—are falling. Inflation stands at 1·4 per cent. and it is hard to remember that the average inflation achieved by the last Labour Government was 15·5 per cent. Our inflation rate has been below the EC average for more than two years and since December 1992 it has been below the G7 average for the first time in 10 years. Inflation has been below 2 per cent. throughout 1993.

The productivity of the whole economy is at a record level and rose by 4·4 per cent. in the year to the second quarter and in the first quarter of 1993, manufacturing productivity grew faster in the United Kingdom than in any other G7 country—by 4·9 per cent. Strikes are at their lowest since records began. Unit wage costs fell by 0·6 per cent. over the past year.

All those figures give us hope that the Government's work over the past 10 years is paying off in long-term gains to competitiveness. Our firms and our managers are playing their part, although, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said last night, there is still much more to do. There is much more to be done in research and development by the private sector. Only the few best invest at the levels we would like to see in the long-term.

Even during the current recession, however, there have been some good signs. Research and development have been cut by less than in any previous recession in British industry, and the so-called R and D scoreboard showed a 6 per cent. increase in private-sector spending over the past 12 months. It is on that basis of a new approach to R and D on the part of British industry that our White Paper proposals build a new partnership between Government and industry. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) recognised the importance of that development: he welcomed the White Paper, and congratulated us on it.

The private sector's work is vital; our whole future rests on it. It is not enough, however. People must manage their firms properly, generate wealth and go out to win orders

around the world. The first Lord Stockton, Harold Macmillan, once said, in a famous phrase, "Exporting is fun." I suspect that it is not all that much fun to win orders around the world from the Taiwanese, the Japanese and the rest and then to come back and find that the British Government are wasting your money by running their own organisations less efficiently than you are running your companies. That is why we must have a relaunched and re-energised campaign to save money in our management of the public sector—and my Department is taking the lead.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East pointed out, it is no use the private sector generating the wealth if we in the public sector do not spend it properly. It is not that we are not spending enough: we are spending £250 billion a year, which is 40 per cent. of gross domestic product—too high a proportion—and more than £10,000 per household. It is vital, therefore, that we obtain the best possible value for money.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) announced the Government's policy position as though it were a dreadful thing. The more he read out, however, the more common sense it seemed that we should first examine every function and establish whether it is necessary. If something is not necessary, let us not do it: let us not take money from the taxpayer and waste it. If it is necessary, let us ask ourselves whether the function should best be privatised and put into a market where the benign forces of competition will produce the best outcome, or whether it should be contracted out. If we need to retain responsibility for it, must we use our own people, or can we obtain better value for money by contracting it out to the private sector? If the answer is not clear, let us test. That—as the hon. Gentleman rightly said—is what market testing is all about.

As the hon. Gentleman fairly said, and as I emphasised again today, in a market test the playing field should be level. The in-house teams should have a fair crack of the whip—and they do. In the first year of market testing, which saved the taxpayer £100 million, in-house teams won more than half the tests.

The hon. Gentleman talked a great deal of inaccurate rubbish about the small matter of the office services market test in my Department. It was a perfectly ordinary market test, with an in-house and an out-house bid. If the hon. Gentleman is going to be a paid consultant on these matters, perhaps he should check the basic facts before giving them to the House.

The programme that we have launched—privatisation where that is right, contracting out where it will produce better value for money and market testing to establish whether the best supplier is in-house or out-house—has now been built into a formidable system of public-sector reform. *The Times*—which, I am sorry to say, is not always a supporter of the Government nowadays, although we hope for better in the future—wrote recently:

"Considered together, these reforms are the most comprehensive overhaul of British administration since the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the 1850s."

The reforms are already bringing great benefits in terms of cost-effectiveness to the public sector and to the taxpayer, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome pointed out.

I can give one or two examples. Customs and Excise, for example, market-tested VAT debt management. The contract was won by the in-house team—the civil servants —with savings that were suggested to be £3 million per annum. That is enough to deploy 150 customs officers in the fight against drugs or in the fight against illegal arms shipments. I am sure that the whole House will wish to congratulate Customs and Excise on today's success in Northern Ireland.

I can give an example from my Department. The in-house team won the contract for the printing and distribution of *Hansard*—which is close to the heart of everyone in the House—with savings of £400,000 per annum. That has enabled Her Majesty's Stationery Office to declare a price freeze on *Hansard* and other routine policy papers during the life of the present Parliament.

I have to ask the Opposition, under what possible argument is it wrong to achieve those kinds of gains in efficiency and cost-effectiveness for the taxpayer and the people who use such services?

Mr. Garrett: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that yesterday the head of the civil service told the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service that market testing is currently running at half its target level? Although the Minister can talk about cuts in expenditure, is it not the truth that he has not cited a single case which has shown an improvement of service as a result of market testing?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have given the hon. Gentleman some examples, and I will give him some more if he so desires. Is not a price freeze that enables the authorities in the House to spend money on other valuable things a gain in quality? I think that it is.

As to the former matter, hon. Members of the Opposition have not yet made up their minds whether this is a huge and dangerous programme or one that is not going anywhere. From their point of view, they would do better to recognise that it is a huge and important programme.

That was re-emphasised yesterday by the fact that the Inland Revenue has chosen its preferred supplier for its information technology for what is arguably the biggest piece of out-sourcing ever by a Government in the western world, certainly in Europe—£1 billion or so over a number of years. That out-sourcing had the most stringent confidentiality tests attached to it, including a condition that no data should be handled outside this country.

As to the argument that the hon. Member for Oldham, West used in relation to confidentiality, it is extremely unwise to assume that those in the private sector who owe a duty of confidentiality—and who are still covered by the law and the criminal offence of the release of any information—are less likely to behave properly than those in the public sector. Most people in this country work in the private sector. They are as honourable and behave as well as people in the public sector. I do not belittle those in the public sector by saying that.

We have often given examples, which have never produced any serious response from the Opposition, that many of the most dangerous and valuable secrets in the defence field have been generated by the private sector, and held there quite safely. The hon. Member for Oldham, West should not pursue those arguments that seem to imply that there is something inherently untrustworthy about those who work in the private sector.

In the eccentric part of his speech where he demonstrated the confidentiality of the public sector by reading from leaked letters, the hon. Gentleman seemed to

[Mr. Waldegrave]

say that there was something odd about the fact that we appeared to say that if we needed to change the law to do something, we should bring forward an Act of Parliament to do so. That is what we will be proceeding to do in due course, and it will be debated by the House. If something is not currently within the law, and we need new legal powers to deal with it, that is how we should set about it; we should pass a law and debate it before Parliament. I am not sure what point the hon. Gentleman was trying to make in that respect.

I have said many times that we will seek to extend the Carltona principles in order that we can delegate. It is not clear at the moment whether we can delegate only to civil servants. As I have said many times before, in the House and in public, for the purpose of clarity we should extend those principles. There is no particular rhyme or reason why work on payroll can be delegated, but not in regard to some pensions. That should be looked at individually, to see what is best for those who use the services and best for the taxpayer. That is a change in the law that we will propose, and which will be debated before the House.

The Labour party is in a muddle on contracting out and market testing, except for the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who is in no muddle. He has always been against it. I pay tribute to him on his complete consistency on the matter. He said from the start that all the contracts in the health service, which have enabled it to save £150 million a year for patient care, should be cancelled. Perhaps he still believes that. He is, however, more and more out of step with those in his party who are rather more forward-looking.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is on record as saying:

"There is a wide acceptance that the division between contractor and provider that compulsory competitive tendering has produced is sensible. It has meant that in areas of basic services there are now clear definitions of what services should be provided."

According to Dr. Lawrence Silverman, who is the Labour leader of Berkshire county council, albeit temporarily—*[Interruption.]* From his sensible comments, he sounds a good Tory. The hon. Member for Oldham, West should learn from him, because he speaks common sense. He has said:

"If the private sector can provide computing, payroll and other financial services cheaper than the in-house bureaucracy, then we owe it to the people of Berkshire to make these savings and put the money saved into direct services."

That is what rather more up-to-date Labour people than the hon. Member for Oldham, West have said. As Joe Rogaly said in the *Financial Times*:

"Labour continues to be perceived as the party of bureaucracy. Labour's mission appears to be the maintenance of bureaucracy. It is as if it has not only missed the public sector reform bus, it never saw it coming."

I believe that is right.

As Lord Jay, my colleague at All Souls, once said, Labour remains the party that believes in its heart of hearts that

"The gentleman from Whitehall knows best."

One notes the use of the word "gentleman". That is what the Labour party still believes in its heart of hearts, but that is not surprising since a large number of Opposition Members are sponsored by the unions concerned with deregulation. That point was made robustly by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes).

It is obvious that the Labour party will miss the bus once again on the deregulation campaign, just as it missed all the buses to do with privatisation, market testing and efficiency in the 1980s and the early 1990s. The Labour party is now getting itself into position to defend every last regulation brought forward by every last pressure group.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): This is rubbish.

Mr. Waldegrave: All the work done by Christopher Booker, all the examples written about in the *Sunday Telegraph* and all the examples given by my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and for Scarborough have simply passed the Labour party by. It will go into the trenches to defend every single regulation when it comes to it. There is one exception to the trend, the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition. *[Interruption.]* That causes groans from those below the Gangway, but then the right hon. and learned Gentleman often does that.

Mr. Cummings: I am not the Leader of the Opposition and this is all rubbish.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Leader of the Opposition said recently that the burden on British industry from regulation was putting jobs and businesses at greater risk. He went to the Confederation of British Industry and said much the same.

That rather reminds me of the famous occasion when Harold Wilson went to Portsmouth to make a speech and said, "And why am I speaking about the Navy?" He paused and he said, "Because I am in Portsmouth." [HON. MEMBERS: "The speech was given in Chatham."] I am sorry, it was Chatham. I was just seeing whether the Opposition were awake and they have confirmed the story. Why was the Leader of the Opposition talking about deregulation? Because he was talking to the CBI. When he comes back to the House he will oppose everything that we propose, along with the rest of the Labour party.

The campaign that the President of the Board of Trade has launched is mirrored around the world. I read today about the German campaign on deregulation. The Germans have correctly noted that the advantage that Britain, the United States and other countries have gained over the location of industry is now putting them under extreme pressure. The same thing is happening in Japan.

My hon. Friends the Members for South Hams (Mr. Steen) and for Ludlow made it absolutely clear that we will push this measure through under the leadership of the President of the Board of Trade. We will face opposition all the way from the Labour party, which will stand for public bureaucracy, red tape and for the man from Whitehall or the town hall knowing best.

The Opposition's stance will be of great help to us in the years ahead, as we will be able to remind the population that the Labour party has not changed one whit. It is still the same old Labour party representing the public sector unions against the interests of the consumer, representing the bureaucracies of the past against modern management methods and representing everything that the hon. Member for Oldham, West so passionately believes in. He remains the antique, ancestral voice that believes in all of that.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 319.

Division No. 2] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim

Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.
Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Matter of the implications of the Budget for Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall

not commence before Four o'clock nor continue after the Committee has considered the Matter for two hours at that sitting.
—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

PETITION

VAT (bus and coach fares)

10.18 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I wish to present a petition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Will hon. Members please leave the Chamber peacefully and quietly?

Mrs. Golding: I wish to present a petition, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), which expresses the fears of many thousands of our constituents that the imposition of VAT on bus and coach fares would be an intolerable burden for them.

Many of those people pay fares to travel to colleges, to work, to visit relatives, to shop and to help out in the voluntary sector. Any increase in fares would cause them hardship and would also result in a loss of business and probably jobs in our local bus services, especially the Potteries Motor and Traction Company.

'To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament her assembled. The Humble Petition of the people of Newcastle sheweth That the case for VAT on bus and coach fares is unsound on financial, transport, planning and environmental grounds. Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will take care to reject any moves to impose VAT on bus and coach fares and to ensure the maintenance of zero rating on public transport.
And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray'.

To lie upon the Table.

Set-aside (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10.20 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I hope that the House will agree that, albeit short, this debate is a timely opportunity to allow the House to make some representations and to seek clarification from the Government on a subject which is causing concern on both sides of the House. I hope that, if they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Members for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), a well-known constituent of mine, will add their voices and make my submission an all-party one.

There is great concern because cereal producers in non-less-favoured areas of Scotland face potential swingeing penalties this year and possibly even greater losses in subsequent years. Those losses are harder to contemplate because they were completely unexpected and came after a very difficult harvest.

I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will agree that there has been much comment in the recent past about the issue, some of which has generated more heat than light, and some of which has been unfortunate from our point of view. Unfortunately, such comments have come from both sides of the argument. I should like to try to draw a line under that rather emotional approach, put it firmly behind us and look forward rationally to what can be done to deal with the difficulty. None of us wants to be in the present situation. We must try to find a way out of it.

As the House will know, area aid payments were put in place to compensate for the drop in farm income expected as a result of the 30 per cent. drop in price support. The general set-aside scheme offers assistance to cereal producers who are willing to leave untouched 15 per cent. of their productive land in order to be eligible for area aid payments in compensation.

It was always accepted by policy makers that the overall costs of that package would increase in the short term in order that supply and demand could be better balanced in the longer term. Indeed, the Minister himself was reported this year expressing satisfaction that the support funding paid by his Department would be increased this year.

The deal that was struck in Brussels—the MacSharry proposals for the three-year period until 1996—was welcomed by the industry because it was regarded as a reasonable package of measures that would provide some stability for the foreseeable future. It was hardly surprising then that such great concern was expressed when the full implications and extent of the 5·4 per cent. penalty for the majority of Scotland's arable land became known.

Of course, that concern is not restricted to the farming industry. A detrimental effect will be felt by all sectors of the cereals sector, whether it be growers, merchants or processors. There will also be further knock-on effects in downstream industries such as road haulage. There have been estimates of up to £20 million as the full cost of the present penalties to the industry if the measures are implemented in full. Of course, that pays no regard to the longer-term effect of loss of markets to places and producers outside Scotland.

The irony is that Scotland has been very successful in taking cereal areas out of production—successful

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

compared with other European countries. The figures show that clearly. The crux of the problem is the way in which the base area was originally calculated. Census figures for the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 have been invested with a significance that they were never designed to bear. To suggest that farmers have overshot by 5·4 per cent. assumes that 20 per cent. of Scottish farmers have an average 27 per cent. additional arable land.

Various permutations of the figures can be arrived at, but it stretches credibility to suggest that this is what has happened. I must therefore tell the House that the industry has no confidence in the calculation of the base reference area. Census forms may well be statistical tools that can identify and confirm trends, but they have suddenly been used for a crucial financial calculation, and that calculation is seen by the industry as deeply prejudicial to Scotland.

No one should doubt that this penalty discriminates against Scottish cereal producers in the Community. We must find some mechanism to mitigate the financial consequences of these penalties. If we do not, we may risk driving producers out of the system altogether. The Minister knows that it is voluntary. They will then resort to large-acreage, high-yield, high-input crops, thus destroying the whole objective that set-aside was put in place to achieve.

We must therefore get Ministers to accept that there is a problem and to agree to use their best endeavours, within the rules, to find ways of mitigating the proposals and penalties, especially next year.

I understand that the president and officers of the National Farmers Union for Scotland, who lobbied this place effectively earlier today, met the Secretary of State for Scotland this afternoon. Interpreting the statement issued by the Secretary of State after the meeting, it looks as though the industry will get nothing more than tea and sympathy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): My hon. Friend is presenting his case with considerable restraint and responsibility, but is he aware of the depth of frustration and anger felt by the farming community in his constituency and mine because of the apparent intransigence on the part of the Scottish Office? Does he agree that, unless this matter is properly resolved, there may be such a crisis of confidence that any reasonable relationship between the industry and the Scottish Office may break down for ever?

Mr. Kirkwood: I do indeed. That point has also been made to me by my right hon. Friends the Members for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith): a real head of steam is building up, and if the Government do not recognise that, they will get their just desserts in the form of retribution later on.

Early press reports suggest that the Secretary of State believes that the industry is already receiving large sums of taxpayers' money. That is to ignore the tiny profit margins and negligible returns on capital earned by most farm businesses in the arable sector. It also ignores the fact that the rural economy :depends on a viable farming industry for survival. It further ignores the fact that there are ramifications for processors, who will in future be forced to buy grain and proteins from other countries.

In any case, it is not so much a question of money; it is more a question of simple justice. There is a great deal at stake. There is a growing perception that Scottish Ministers are simply not willing to fight for Scottish farmers. As the Minister will know, a precedent has already been set in Germany, where an admittedly smaller overshoot has already been accommodated without penalty, and most other EC countries have not even submitted preliminary returns and may be quietly cooking the books to their own advantage.

Neither the industry nor I suggest that anything underhand should be done but I want to put two questions squarely to the Minister and I hope that he will have the chance to answer them this evening. First, will he review the validity of the census data from which the base area was calculated? Secondly, will he agree to make urgent approaches to the Commission to explore ways of getting around the effects of this penalty?

In conclusion, I firmly believe that, with significant political will, a way around the problem can be found. I hope that the Minister will give the House an assurance and a clear undertaking that he will use his best endeavours to sort out the mess quickly.

10.29 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I thank the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for giving me the opportunity to speak in this short debate. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware that there is a large cereal-growing sector in Tayside. People in that sector are deeply concerned, because they do not understand how the figures were calculated. As they received information that told them effectively to ignore the set-aside data previously supplied, it would seem that there is a strong case for re-examining the figures and making suggestions that will restore the confidence not simply of the National Farmers Union but of all the farmers in the good relationship that they have enjoyed with the Government in the past.

10.30 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) for allowing me a few minutes of his time. I join him and the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) in appealing to the Minister to intervene even at this late stage to avoid a serious injustice in rural Scotland. I must declare a personal interest in this problem.

My main concern is for the 374 lowland farmers in my constituency and the tens of thousands of other people whose jobs depend on cereals—maltsters, millers, road hauliers and many other people throughout Scotland. It is important to emphasise that many of them depend on spring crops which are now in jeopardy as a result of the present crisis. All those people are vital to the Scottish rural economy.

They face an immediate and serious crisis because of the failure of the Scottish Office to declare accurate baseline cereal production statistics to the European Commission. That statistical discrepancy is 23,000 hectares, which is equivalent to one third of the whole area of East Lothian. The discrepancy is the only reason for the 5·4 per cent. penalty that rural Scotland now faces.

Scottish farmers have not broken any rules, but they, alone in the whole of the European Community, now face discriminatory penalties. It is bad enough that the mistake was made in the first place. But frankly, it beggars belief that Scottish Office Ministers do not appear to be lifting a finger to put things right. They can, and they must do so. If the problem had been in Norfolk rather than in northern Scotland, it would have been dealt with long ago.

The 5·4 per cent. cut will hit rural Scotland hard in 1993-94. But my worst concern is that there will be bigger discriminatory penalties in subsequent years unless the baseline is corrected urgently. So the Scottish Office must acknowledge that the original figure declared to the European Commission was badly flawed, and the baseline area must be corrected immediately to avoid permanent damage to the Scottish rural economy. It is up to the Minister. I hope that he will say something positive tonight.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I welcome this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on initiating it. It gives me an opportunity to answer various points that have been made in the press over the past few weeks and, of course, among farmers themselves. As hon. Members said, it is important for farmers to know the true position. It is detailed and complicated, but I will try to explain it.

First, I want to put the matter in perspective. We need to be clear where the overshoot fits into the whole arable area payments scheme and exactly what sums of money are involved. I appreciate that in the east of Scotland, especially in the Roxburgh and Berwickshire constituency, farmers had a rotten harvest. I understand that they feel upset about this matter, but they must appreciate that we are tightly constrained by the regulations of the common agricultural policy.

To give an indication of the sums of money that we are talking about, it is probably easiest to give an illustration. A typical arable farm of 600 acres is a reasonable illustration for many constituents of the hon. Members for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). Let us say that, of the 600 acres in the non-less-favoured area, cereals account for 425 acres and oilseed rape for 85 acres. That means setting aside 90 acres. If there were no penalty and the overshoot had not taken place——

Mr. Home Robertson: There was no overshoot.

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman should wait and listen.

—the cereal income under the new payment scheme would have been £22,700, the oilseed income £17,100 and the set-aside £8,700. The farmer would have received £48,500 on a 600-acre arable farm.

With the overshoot penalty—I will explain why it is there—the payment, subject to final approval from the Commission, would total £46,000, so there would be a loss under the present scheme of £2,500.

Everyone must please remember that this is a new grant. We are talking about £46,000 that was not available last year, but is this year because of the change in the common agricultural policy. It is a very large sum indeed.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The Minister's measures will take £20 million out of Scottish agriculture. Can he explain why he is more constrained than the Germans? Will he make clear the basis of his figures in these calculations, which are in extreme doubt?

Sir Hector Monro: That is what I am about to do, if the hon. Gentleman would contain himself.

If there is no overshoot next year, the increase on the same farm for the same crops would be up to £56,800. If there is an overshoot, the farmer would receive £53,900. These large sums are coming under the arable aid payments scheme. I welcome that, and hon. Members must realise that the sums are so large that we must be extremely accurate about what we are talking. If farmers are receiving that sort of extra income, they must not go round saying that this is disastrous for the rural economy. It will not be so.

The hon. Member for East Lothian made a valid point. To meet the overshoot next year there must be a 5·4 per cent. penalty that is uncompensated. That is why I have included that figure in the £53,900 that the farmer with 600 acres will receive. The calculation is simple. If the hon. Gentleman has a friend with 200 acres or 1,000 acres, the total is plus or minus on the £53,900. That is a big and important sum for farming. A good number of farmers in the east of Scotland will receive over £100,000, including some in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Hon. Members should not be so critical of the sums that farmers will receive under this scheme.

Under the penalty scheme that I have explained, income next year will be 17 per cent. up on this year.

Mr. Welsh *indicated dissent.*

Sir Hector Monro: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. The figures have been carefully checked and are correct.

The reductions in payment, in effect because of the overshoot, are due to one fact only, and that is the extra cropping this spring. That is the significance of the 23,000 hectares. This is brought out not only in the integrated administrative control system form but in this year's summer agricultural returns. There has been a substantial increase in cropping this year. That is why the baseline has been exceeded and overshot by the 5·4 per cent.

Mr. Welsh: The figures are cooked.

Sir Hector Monro: Will the hon. Gentleman stop saying that the figures are cooked? They are absolutely accurate.

The increase in arable area payments will be combined with other increased payments to Scottish farmers so that the total direct agricultural support available in 1993-94 will be some £300 million, an increase of almost 60 per cent. on this year's support of £188 million.

It is therefore true to say that there has been a substantial increase. Farmers have been on far too low an income for far too long, and I welcome the substantial increase this year. That should be acknowledged. With interest rates now down to 5·5 per cent. and inflation down, farmers should feel more confident about the future.

I shall now go into the figures in more detail so that hon. Members can understand how they have been compiled and why they are accurate. I can give a categorical assurance that the figures used by my Department in relation to the overshoot are accurate. My officials take

[Sir Hector Monro]

considerable care and expend considerable efforts in their statistical work. I regret that others, sometimes in the press, misrepresent and misunderstand the figures.

CAP reforms were introduced in May 1992, following vigorous opposition by the Government to the MacSharry proposals, which Opposition Members accepted. The reforms were a victory for my Department, which was much criticised over that event.

During the summer of 1992, we discussed with the NFU and others how best to introduce the arable area payment scheme to the benefit of Scottish farmers. With the NFU's agreement and encouragement we secured an LFA/non-LFA split so that the grain-growing areas—non-LFA, represented by Opposition Members—would receive more grant, to reflect their higher yields, than grain growers in the LFAs.

The compensation is substantially in excess of that required to overcome any fall in prices. The scheme was introduced to compensate for falling grain prices. I appreciate that there has been a bad harvest, but, on the whole, grain prices have remained remarkably steady, and far above expectations when the policy was introduced.

The Commission required member states to submit their average cereal acreage for 1989, 1990 and 1991 by September 1992. The only means of knowing what the acreage had been was our agricultural returns. So we averaged them out, and that was what the Commission accepted and put into the regulation. That made a total base area of 551,192 hectares, which was split giving LFAs 160,348 hectares and the rest—390,944 hectares—to non-LFAs.

A difficulty arose in the spring, because farmers have increased their cropping by 23,000 hectares over the base figure. That sounds an enormous sum, but by adding it on as five hectares here, 10 hectares there, over a large number of farms, it has brought the increase. The substantial increase in the cultivation of grassland and a switch to oilseed rape has made the difference between the base area and the accurate figure of what was actually sown this summer, which was proved by the IACS forms and backed up by the agricultural returns in the summer of 1993.

Mr. Home Robertson: How can the Minister possibly say that there has been such a massive discrepancy as 23,000 hectares? That is a third of East Lothian. Is he saying that Scottish farmers failed to set aside their 15 per cent. as required? If so, he is right that they should be penalised. But as the accurate IACS figures plainly show what the real figures are, that is what we should be working on. It cannot be justified that Scottish farmers, alone in Europe, must face those penalties in uncompensated set-aside next year. Surely he must do something about it.

Sir Hector Monro: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that a number of other countries are in trouble with the Commission about overshooting the figures given. If we overshoot again in the coming cropping season, we shall be in worse trouble. It is important that farmers understand that they must either come out of the scheme and do what they like or stay in it and be responsible, not overshoot as much as they did last year.

The difficulty has arisen this spring because of the increase in 23,000 hectares over the base figure. That has been backed up by the agricultural returns of this mid-summer. That is a statement of fact. The only way that we could conceivably have obtained the figures in the autumn of 1992 was from the agricultural returns averaged over the previous three years. We have every reason to think that those figures were accurate, and that it was right to propose them as the baseline for this country. If we do not accept that, the position will get worse.

The object of the CAP is that, in return for restricting grain acreage, large sums of compensation are offered. The object is to reduce the amount of grain grown. The compensation was designed both to counter that reduction, and to offset the fact that the price over three years was to drop by 30 per cent.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister is talking about difficult technical matters. If I am following his argument, the Minister seems to be saying that he has some evidence that farmers have not been taking 15 per cent. set-aside out of production. Has he evidence of that? If he has no evidence, the farmers have not been breaking any rules.

Sir Hector Monro: I am not saying that our farmers have not been setting aside land—they have been, and they have been compensated for doing so. But a great deal more grain has been put into the ground than was anticipated by the baseline of August 1992. England is different in that respect, because a number of farmers in England have decided that they can go by market forces and grow much more grain, particularly for malting, over and above the market price that they receive for feed barley, perhaps being grown ineffectively in Scotland.

The system is entirely voluntary. If farmers do not wish to use it, they are entitled to grow as much as they wish. Farmers can even do both—they can apply for the compensation under set aside, and still grow more grain, uncompensated, if they wish to make up the tonnages that they feel are necessary, for sale or for stock feed.

I am keen that we should resolve the problem. I have some sympathy for those with problems, but we must accept that the baseline is accurate. We have substantially increased our cropping. With the large sums of money that are coming to the farming community through the scheme, there will be no threat to the rural economy. The maltsters and the grain merchants will have adequate stocks of grain. There is every sign that the countryside and the farming industry will benefit substantially from the scheme and from the rest of the money, which has been put into the farming industry during the current year and is guaranteed for next year under the common agricultural policy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have made clear our willingness to look at any hard information that the industry puts forward. We will watch our position in Brussels carefully. There is no sign yet that the Commission is considering a general dispensation for the application of penalties.

The full position of all member states is not yet known. Six or seven member states are having difficulty convincing the Commission of the acceptability of their figures. I hope to have the Commission's final approval to pay the revised rates and to start making the payments next month. Even with the revised payment rates, considerable sums of money will go into both the LFA and the non-LFA sectors.

It has been a successful scheme, and all the farmers who participate in it are glad that they do so. I know that they are cross that some of them are losing perhaps 5 per cent.

of the gain they obtain from the new grant that is available to them. But as the sums of money are so large, the farmers should be able to accept that the additional sowing of crops this spring has been the root cause of the trouble. We must be careful what we do next spring, so that we do not overshoot again, and then overshoot still further the next year.

As I have said, we are anxious to find a solution. But hon. Members should not be optimistic that the Commission has yet found a way forward to make——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at ten minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 25 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the British Waterways Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read for the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lenient Sentences

2. **Sir George Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in extending the Attorney General's right to appeal against lenient sentences.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I expect shortly to be in a position to lay an appropriate order before the House.

Sir George Gardiner: May I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's initiative as part of the continuing war on violent crime? May I also welcome the extension of the scope to refer unduly lenient sentences for indecent assault and cruelty to children? Will my right hon. and learned Friend not close his mind to further extending the categories? Is he aware of the extreme public anger over unduly lenient sentences on youths who are found guilty, for example, of theft and car crime that in some cases involve penalties of a holiday in the sun?

Mr. Howard: I try to never close my mind. It is right that that power, which was first given to the Attorney-General in the Criminal Justice Act 1988 in the teeth of most fierce opposition from the Opposition parties, should be reserved for the most serious offences. I shall certainly take into account what my hon. Friend has said.

Mr. Allen: In view of that answer, will the Home Secretary tell the House and the public why crime has increased by 124 per cent. since his Government came to power in 1979?

Mr. Howard: Crime has increased by similiar amounts in almost every country in the western world. The Government have taken action to deal with crime by giving the police and the courts more powers and by giving the Attorney-General powers to refer lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal—all taken in the teeth of opposition from the parties opposite.

Stolen Goods

3. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made as a result of stolen goods being sold at car boot sales.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): That information is not available. Records are not held in a form that allows the identification of such offences.

Mr. French: Is my hon. Friend aware that there is growing evidence that car boot sales are used to convert goods stolen from homes, factories, shops and vehicles into hard cash? Such sales are being used to fulfil the original purpose of the fence. Will he redouble his efforts to ensure that that practice is stopped?

Mr. Wardle: There is no doubt that there are instances of car boot sales being used to dispose of stolen property, but there is certainly no evidence that most traders at car boot sales are other than law-abiding citizens. If my hon.

Friend has such evidence, it is important that he gives it to the chief constable of Gloucestershire, as the police must make an operational judgment and decide what action to take at car boot sales. My hon. Friend will be aware that Gloucestershire trading standards officers are liaising with their counterparts in North Yorkshire to consider a registration scheme for such car boot sales and similar casual sales.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister admit that car boot sales can make a valuable contribution to local economies and are a good way of recycling household products that the owners no longer require and wish to sell? The Minister would be well advised to study car boot sales because, when they have sold off the national assets to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement, the Government will have to come down to car boot sales.

Mr. Wardle: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that, if he or any other member of the public has reason to believe that there are goods of doubtful origin at car boot sales, the principle of caveat emptor applies, and the principle of partnership with the police applies, so that the police are made aware of cases where they need to take action.

Mr. Spring: Is my hon. Friend aware of the anachronism whereby in a market such as Bermondsey, it is possible, between sunrise and sunset, to purchase an object and to obtain good title, even if the object has been stolen in the first place? Does my hon. Friend agree that such markets simply act as a conduit for stolen goods and should be abolished as soon as possible?

Mr. Wardle: If there is any such evidence, it is a matter for the Metropolitan police. I am sure that the House is aware that the disposal of stolen goods through car boot sales is covered by section 22 of the Theft Act 1968 and that the maximum penalty is 14 years imprisonment. That applies in other similar casual sales and markets.

Police Clear-up Rates

4. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the six most successful police forces in England and Wales in terms of clear-up rate in 1992; and what is the establishment of each of those forces.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The highest clear-up rate in 1992 was in Dyfed-Powys with an authorised establishment of 969, followed by Gwent with 1,010, Merseyside with 4,706, Lincolnshire with 1,206, Suffolk with 1,233 and equal sixth Cumbria with 1,187, Lancashire with 3,229 and Wiltshire with 1,181.

Mr. Ainger: Is the Minister aware that the figures prove that small is beautiful in relation to police forces—not only beautiful, but efficient and effective? Will he now announce that Dyfed-Powys police force and Gwent police force in particular will not be subject to any amalgamation, because they are the two most efficient forces in the country?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the good performance by Dyfed-Powys police, who are to be congratulated on achieving the highest clear-up rate. The chief constable attributes his success to a combination of traditional community policing in partnership with the public, and the use of the latest police technology. Those are precisely the features of policing that are enhanced by my right hon. and learned Friend's reform proposals. More police officers will be released for front-line duties, and chief police officers will have the freedom to spend their money where they judge best, whether on computers, on new technology and equipment or on anything else.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures are largely meaningless unless one has regard to the number of police per head of the population in a county force? With that in mind, will he take note of the fact that Cambridgeshire, for example, has fewer police per head of the population than is the case for any other county?

Mr. Wardle: I hear my hon. Friend's eloquent bid on behalf of Cambridgeshire. It is true that the correlation between clear-up rates and establishment or strength figures depends, at least to some extent, on the type of area policed and on the type of crime that is prevalent. Some categories of crime have a far higher clear-up rate than others.

Mr. Michael: Will not the Minister acknowledge that six of the eight highest performers among police forces are among the 11 smallest, and that all are threatened by his amalgamation plans? Will the Home Secretary now abandon his bid to take powers in the forthcoming police Bill to dictate police force mergers?

As the Home Secretary has today claimed to support the police, will he also acknowledge that the latest figures for the police establishment, given in a parliamentary answer to me last night, show a drop of 224 police officers since the general election? Does not that make a mockery of the Conservative election promise to provide an extra 1,000 police officers this year?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman knows that this Government have increased the number of uniformed officers by almost 17,000 and, by the process of civilianisation, by another 6,600. My right hon. and learned Friend's proposals will allow an increase of a further 5,300. The hon. Gentleman talks about the reform proposals. The White Paper set out the conditions under which the ground could be cleared for amalgamations; no such amalgamations were suggested.

Mrs. Angela Knight: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Derbyshire police force has again been refused a certificate of efficiency, and that it is still under establishment. Will he confirm that the principal reason is the repeated lack of funds granted to the police force by the county council, including reducing the chief constable's budget proposals by £6 million this year?

Will my hon. Friend further join me in congratulating the policemen and women in Derbyshire on the excellent job they do in difficult circumstances? Will he assure me that our right hon. and learned Friend's proposals to separate the police authority from the county council will result in the force being able to recruit more policemen and women, which my constituents in Erewash and the rest of us in Derbyshire want?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She will be aware that the White Paper proposals will allow chief officers the leeway and freedom of judgment that she describes. I am sure that she agrees that for Derbyshire, or

for any other police force, ultimately improvements in police performance and clear-up rates will depend crucially on locally focused policing and on working in partnership with the public to help to prevent and to detect crime, with more officers being away from desks and on the beat, and with modernised police management bringing offenders to the courts to be dealt with fairly, swiftly and decisively. All those circumstances are provided for in my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals.

Crime Prevention

5. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the expenditure of his Department on crime prevention measures in the west midlands in 1992-93.

Mr. Charles Wardle: During the year, three safer cities projects in the west midlands received nearly £1·1 million. The region has also benefited from the £284 million spent on the West Midlands police and, in some part, from the £200 million spent by Government Departments on crime prevention related measures across the country.

Mr. Burden: Will the Minister reflect on the case of one of my constituents, a pensioner who was mugged in her own home? That crime went undetected and unreported for two days, because she was afraid to go out and no one was around. She was finally discovered by the home help. Does not that indicate the need for a proper partnership between the local authorities, the police, the public and the agencies involved? When will the Government do something about it? Does the Minister think that cutting the safer cities programme will contribute to that partnership?

Mr. Wardle: The safer cities programme has not been cut. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, in Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, there have been 20 local projects, delivering more than 3,000 crime prevention schemes. The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the need for partnerships, and I hope that he will support the Government's legislation when it is introduced later in the Session.

Nationally, in the west midlands, Solihull and Birmingham we have the activities of crime concern schemes, and city challenge in Birmingham, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. We have some 23 safer car parks schemes receiving awards in the west midlands. As to the safer cities project, it was ever the plan that, after an initial period, it would move to other localities. The local partnerships to which the hon. Member has alluded can then carry on with crime prevention schemes, and people such as his constituent will feel safer, because everybody will then be involved in crime prevention.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is it not becoming daily more obvious that one of the major reasons for the increase in crime in our society, particularly by juvenile offenders, is the constant diet of violence and depravity with which they are fed by television and video and computer pornography? Is not one of the strongest actions that the Government can take to prevent crime to ban this constant diet of trash that is causing so much harm, particularly among the young?

Mr. Wardle: My hon. and learned Friend will appreciate that we have the toughest laws in the world on video recordings, and it is a subject which will continue to be kept under review. He will be aware that the British Board of Film Classification is even now reviewing the matter to which my hon. and learned Friend refers.

Mr. Grocott: Many months ago, the West Mercia police authority took a decision to release 10 senior officer posts in order to request authority from the Minister's Department to appoint 26 constables for the same money. When the Minister looks at the level of policing in that police authority, will he urgently consider that request, because, many months later, it is still awaiting a decision from his Department? The money should be available for a further 26 constables, but only 10 have been allocated. If the Government are serious about cutting red tape, they could start by cutting it in the Home Office.

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman makes the most powerful endorsement of the Government's proposals which will be considered by the House. The whole purpose of the White Paper proposals is to get away from the idea of police chief officers having to bid for extra resources in terms of uniformed posts. Following the legislation, they will be free to make their own decisions about what ranks to appoint, how many police officers to have and how much of their resources to deploy on computers and other equipment.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

6. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will have considered all the recommendations of the Royal Commission on criminal justice and made decisions on them.

Mr. Howard: I have already announced decisions on some 30 of the royal commission's recommendations. Other recommendations are still under consideration; but I cannot yet say when conclusions will be reached.

Mr. Riddick: The right to silence, which the commission examined, has been the criminal's friend for many years now. Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his decision to end it has been widely welcomed by police and public alike? Does he agree that, for the change to be effective, we need to end the right to silence not just in court but in police cells? Will he seek clarification from the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who is mysteriously absent today, and who was wriggling all over the place during Tuesday's debate?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. The hon. Member for Sedgefield has informed me of the understandable reasons for his absence today; but the substance of my hon. Friend's point is absolutely right. For some time now, I have sought to elicit the Opposition's stance on the matter. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has made his position clear: he appears to agree with me that the innocent have nothing to worry about. I wish that the hon. Member for Sedgefield and others on the Opposition Front Bench would agree with the hon. Member for Brightside.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Home Secretary aware that the trial of the murderers of James Bulger, which ended yesterday, might not have taken place? There were strong submissions from defence counsel that an impartial trial was impossible because of media speculation, hype and

investigation before the trial started. The judge had to give serious consideration to their plea, which he eventually refused.

Is it not the case that, sooner or later, a trial will be refused because the media have carried out their own investigations? Will the Home Secretary ensure that, in introducing the Criminal Justice Bill, he takes another long look at what the media are now doing? Offenders can often get off, because the media have queered the pitch.

Mr. Howard: The case to which the hon. Gentleman refers has caused us all to reach deep into the recesses of our hearts, and to ask ourselves whether anything could have been done to prevent it—and whether anything could be done to prevent any recurrence in future. I do not propose to rush into any snap judgments. I shall study very carefully what the judge said, and what has been said by others closely connected with the case, including the police superintendent who led the investigation. I shall take all those matters into account, including the point raised by the hon. Gentleman. If there are any lessons to be learnt from this unspeakable crime, we must certainly learn them.

Mr. Heald: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that many lawyers welcome the abolition of the right to silence, believing that it will lead not to any loss of civil liberties, but to a better criminal justice system—a system focused far more on the pursuit of the truth, and far less on the adversarial cat-and-mouse games that are so bad for our courts today?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree. This proposal should not give rise to any concern. The innocent have nothing to fear from answering questions; they have nothing to hide. It will be for the prosecution and the judge to invite the jury to draw whatever inference they think fit from answers, or failures to answer. Those inferences will, of course, vary from case to case; but this is a sensible proposal to improve the efficiency of our system of criminal justice, and to make it much more likely that the guilty will be convicted and the innocent acquitted.

Victim Support Schemes

7. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what extra resources he will be giving to Victim Support schemes.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): We have increased our grant to Victim Support this year by £1·1 million—from £7·3 million to £8·4 million. I cannot give details of future funding for Victim Support in advance of the Budget statement on 30 November.

Mrs. Mahon: The Home Secretary will be aware that Victim Support considers that far too little. Nearly 1 million people were referred to the organisation last year —a 19 per cent. increase on the previous year. In my constituency, three part-timers and four volunteers try to cope with the ever-rising numbers; sometimes they have to close the door and turn people away. Is it not time that serious consideration was given to funding this valuable service properly, rather than on a piecemeal basis?

Mr. Maclean: It is not funded on a piecemeal basis. The hon. Lady speaks of a 19 per cent. increase. In the past two years, Victim Support has received a 48 per cent. increase in funds, and it has received an increase of more than 60 per cent. over the past three years. That is a phenomenal increase for any agency funded by the Home Office, or any other Government Department.

Two years ago, we told Victim Support well in advance that we would be increasing its funding from £5·5 million to £7·2 million to £8·3 million. We told it that there would be generous increases, and gave it time to plan accordingly how to use all that extra money.

Mrs. Peacock: What other measures will my hon. Friend be introducing to help victims?

Mr. Maclean: The measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend at Blackpool were not simply about reforming the criminal law but about accepting the recommendations of the royal commission on helping victims of crime. We intend to put them into effect as soon as possible. In addition to funding Victim Support, there is much that we can do to help victims have confidence in the criminal justice system, as well as having the most generous compensation system for victims of crime of any country in the world.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the Minister give serious consideration to filling a gap which exists at the moment, either directly through Victim Support or through other schemes, to give some professional long-term support and bereavement counselling to those who have had family members murdered?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman raises a very good point. My officials at the Home Office have talked to families for bereaved who came to see them specifically. I have studied what they had to say and I am sympathetic to the point that families who have lost relatives through murder or other circumstances are a special category with special needs. Victim Support does some very good work with them. However, I have an open mind on how we can best help that special category of people who have lost relatives through murder or manslaughter.

Sunday Shopping Day

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of the level of support shown by the public on Sunday shopping day; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The Government introduced the Sunday Trading Bill on 19 November. It contains three options for reforming the law on Sunday trading. Hon. Members will take into account the popularity of Sunday shopping as well as many other matters when they come to choose among them.

Mr. Coombs: Does my hon. Friend accept that the message from Sunday shopping day was that the overwhelming majority of people in Britain want the issue of Sunday shopping resolved in this Session of Parliament by the House and the other place? Does he further agree that the proposals in the Bill under the general aegis of the Keep Sunday Special campaign are too close to the present regime of the law to work, and that what the population said they wanted on Sunday shopping day was a thoroughgoing dose of deregulation to get this sorted out?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that the overwhelming number of hon. Members and those outside want Sunday sorted out, but which way is of course a matter for debate on the Bill. I am quite certain that my hon. Friend will argue his last point vigorously during those debates.

Mr. Cryer: Until the legal position is resolved, is it not true that, by opening on Sunday, the large stores are actually breaking the law and encouraging others to do likewise? As most of the questions to the Government today have been about breaking the law and catching criminals, is it not disgraceful that they have not asked local authorities to prosecute those stores that are continuing to break the law and flout the criminal justice system in quite a disgraceful way? Is it not an inducement to commit crime? Is there any connection between the Government's inertia and the provision by firms like B and Q of generous contributions to the Tory party?

Mr. Lloyd: Two things are perfectly clear about the present law. First, it is the local authorities' job to enforce it; secondly, it has been widely breached. It was breached by many small shops long before it began to be breached by large ones.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind the tens of millions of people who showed that they want Sunday to remain special by not turning out on Sunday shopping day?

Mr. Lloyd: Everyone, whatever their point of view, can respect those who do not want to shop on Sundays for staying at home. Nor is there any question but that, from all points of view, Sunday is a special day. The questions are: what sort of special day and how far should the law prescribe it?

Crime, North-West

9. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent crime figures for the north-west.

Mr. Howard: Notifiable offences recorded by the police in the north-west region rose by 2·6 per cent. in the 12 months ending June 1993, compared with an increase of 3·8 per cent. for England and Wales as a whole.

Mr. Parry: Is the Secretary of State aware of the increasing number of drug offences in the north-west? In particular, is he aware of the number of drug seizures and arrests by the police, and the number of guns and other arms found by the police? Is the Secretary of State satisfied with law and order in the north-west, particularly Government funding on Merseyside and in Manchester?

Mr. Howard: I am certainly not satisfied with law and order in the north-west and that is why I have announced a series of far-reaching measures to improve law enforcement and enhance confidence in our system of criminal justice in the north-west and in other parts of the country. We have seen an enormous increase in spending on law enforcement, on the police and in other ways, since the Government took office. We must ensure that the police become the most effective police force that it is possible to make them. That is the object of my reforms.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that what people in the north-west really want, including those in my constituency in Blackpool, is to see implemented all the measures that he announced recently, also in Blackpool? In particular, they want to see those who are convicted, especially of violent crime, serious crimes of dishonesty and drug-related crime, locked up because they know that custodial sentences are effective, not least because they ensure that offenders are kept in custody and stopped from preying on the victims?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend has captured comprehensively the mood of the people of the north-west, and I took particular pleasure in the fact that it was possible for me to make my speech of 6 October in the north-west in Blackpool.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I was happy to hear the Home Secretary say earlier that he will not be making any snap judgments about the James Bulger case, but will he join me in condemning those who have already made snap judgments, particularly those in the media who sought to sensationalise the most sordid parts of that case? Will he also join me in extending the deepest and most profound respects of the House to the Bulger family who have shown such forbearance in their terrible tragedy in the past nine months?

Mr. Howard: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in extending our deepest sympathy and consideration for his constituents, the Bulger family. The whole country has mourned with them in the terrible plight that they have suffered. It is understandable that there should have been the widest public interest in the case. I agree that we should not rush to snap judgments, and I have no intention of doing so, but it is entirely understandable that people should wish to explore the possible reasons, if they can be identified, for this dreadful crime.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: As my right hon. and learned Friend is aware, Macclesfield lies within the north-west. Will he accept that there is growing concern in my constituency and other areas of the north-west about the increased incidence of burglary, theft and car-related offences? I welcome the provisions in the Queen's Speech that will be part of the criminal justice Bill, but will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the best way to deter would-be offenders in those categories is for them to realise that if they are caught they will be severely punished, and that he must therefore give the courts, particularly in dealing with young juvenile offenders, the appropriate punishment to fit the crime?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend. The objective that I seek to achieve with the measures is to make criminals much more afraid of the prospect of being caught, convicted and punished than they are at the moment. That is the object of the measures that I shall be bringing before the House shortly.

Mr. Alton: Is the Home Secretary aware that many people throughout the region will join him in his remarks to the family of James Bulger?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also accept that many are concerned that the video that was mentioned in connection with the tragedy—the video "Child's Play 3"—was scheduled to be broadcast on Sky TV tomorrow evening? Does not that demonstrate that the levels of violence that are transmitted via video and televison have

reached unsurpassed levels, and that that does not square with the claim that was made earlier today from the Dispatch Box that we have the toughest laws in the world?

Does not the Home Secretary accept that many will be looking to the Government, through the new criminal justice Bill, to find ways of dealing with gratuitous violence? Does he agree that programmes that revel in violence and harrowing scenes undoubtedly must have an impact on the young people who watch them, and that those programmes should be removed from our television screens?

Mr. Howard: I have great sympathy with the point raised by the hon. Gentleman. He will recall that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister expressed similar sympathy when the hon. Gentleman raised the point earlier this week.

It is important that we should not rush into snap judgments on those matters. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary was right a few minutes ago when he referred to the exceptional stringency of the regime that we have in place. I will reflect on what the trial judge said in the Bulger case and on what others have said, including the police officer who was in charge of the case. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that the British Board of Film Classification is conducting research into that matter, and I shall want to take account of all the available material before I reach any conclusions.

Bail Offenders

10. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to deal with those who repeatedly offend while on bail.

Mr. Maclean: Offending on bail is a serious problem. We intend to use the criminal justice Bill, which will be introduced shortly, to remove the presumption in favour of bail in all cases where a person who is already on bail is charged with an offence triable on indictment.

Mr. Kynoch: I am sure that the country will welcome the proposals, bearing in mind the cases that one hears of throughout the country of offences being carried out by people on bail. Is my hon. Friend aware that the bail measures are different in Scotland from those south of the border? Will he liaise closely with the Secretary of State for Scotland on the issues to try to ensure that the benefits are learned north of the border also? Will my hon. Friend give an indication of the impact on the crime rate that he expects from the measures?

Mr. Maclean: I assure my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is liaising closely with us on the matters. My hon. Friend will be aware that Scottish law is different and that it would require a different criminal justice Bill to take the measures into Scottish law, should the Secretary of State wish to do so in the near future.

We expect the measures to make a significant impact. I am alarmed by research that suggests that as many as 50,000 offences may be committed by people who have been charged with an offence, been granted bail, and have then committed more offences. The whole House will agree that that is unacceptable—and because I think that the whole House will agree, I look forward to the official Opposition supporting our proposals.

Dr. Hendron: When the Secretary of State is considering his statement on those who offend while on bail, will he consider also making a statement on a constituent of mine by the name of Gerard Power who is at present in Belmarsh prison outside London? It is proposed that he be extradited to Germany. He has failed to get out on bail, and the Germans have said that they have been looking for him——

Madam Speaker: Order. I regret having to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but his question does not relate to the subject under discussion. His question relates to extradition. Might I suggest that the hon. Gentleman makes a direct representation to the Secretary of State, who I am sure will deal with it right away? I cannot allow questions that bear no relationship to those on the Order Paper.

New Prisons

11. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress his Department has made in providing more prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Twenty new prisons have been built and opened since 1979. The 21st new prison, at Doncaster, is due to open in April next year. A further six new prisons are planned. Sites for the first two have been identified at Fazakerley in Merseyside and at Bridgend in south Wales.

Mr. Shaw: Will my hon. Friend accept that it is a commonly held view that more prisons and more prison building will result in less crime, more fear among the criminals and less fear among our constituents? Will he also accept that Conservative Members want the Home Office to get on and build more prisons?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is certainly right to say that prison takes the worst criminals out of circulation, while they are in prison, and it certainly serves as a deterrent for a considerable number of those contemplating crime. His view was well expressed in last Tuesday's debate by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) who said:

"Prison is necessary; those who ought to go to prison should be put there, and if that means more prisons, more prisons should be built."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 344.]

We are building them.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Minister agree that one way of relieving the pressure on prisons would be to release the innocent? In that connection, when can we expect him to complete his consideration of the Carl Bridgewater case which, it is obvious to most sensible people, has collapsed?

Mr. Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering that case at the moment.

Mr. Nicholls: Does my hon. Friend agree that when the public realise that, even under this Government's measures, people who are sent to prison are given remission automatically without having to earn it, they find it a scandal? Is it not the case that one advantage of more prison places being available will be that people can serve their full sentence?

Mr. Lloyd: The Criminal Justice Act for which my hon. Friend voted has brought more closely into line the sentences handed down by the courts and the time served. Every prisoner will serve at least half of his sentence and, in addition, time is spent on supervision after the prisoner

is released. It is essential that prisoners re-enter society being supervised to ascertain the kind of life to which they are returning. That is not possible if they serve the whole of their sentence in prison.

Ms Ruddock: Will the Minister confirm that the present crisis of prison overcrowding in the north-west has led to the renewed use of police cells? Does he recall that, between April and July last year, the Greater Manchester force spent £7 million paying police officers to guard prisoners in police cells? Does he think that that is the best way of mobilising police officers in the fight against crime?

Mr. Lloyd: It is not the best way of using police officers' time, but the Prison Service and the criminal justice system has to accept those prisoners sent to it by the courts. That is why we have announced an extra prison-building programme, why we are building new house blocks, why we are using the estate far more effectively and why we are considering other alternatives in the short term. We now have far fewer prisoners in police cells than two years ago and there is far less overcrowding. I hope that the hon. Lady will accept the great advances that have been made.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the new private prisons at the Wolds and Blakenhurst have been an outstanding success? Does he share my confidence that the six new prisons, which he and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary plan to build, will be more successful if they, too, are private sector initiatives?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that use of private management within the Prison Service is raising standards across the whole service. What my hon. Friend says about standards in the Wolds was borne out by the chief inspector's report. Blakenhurst will be inspected next year, and I have no doubt that the chief inspector will have equally complimentary things to say about it.

Broadcast Interviews

12. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions on which he gave official interviews on national broadcast programmes on radio and television between 27 July and 18 November.

Mr. Howard: I have no such list.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Home Secretary not realise that hardly a week passed during the long recess without his talking about shake-ups and changes in the police, the administration of justice or the Prison Service? Did not such talk, and the fact that his colleagues in other Departments controlling local government, social services and education were doing the same, precipitate uncertainty, lack of confidence and controversy in all those public services? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not think that when public services, including those responsible for the special needs of primary school children, do not perform as well as they might, the Government might take some of the responsibility?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's original question on the Order Paper was about my appearances on the "Today" programme. I have announced a comprehensive set of policies on law and order, in which there is considerable public interest. I understand why the hon. Gentleman does not want anyone to know about those policies, but I want people to know about them, and I have every intention of setting them out as vigorously and as often as I can.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the Anglo-German summit in Cologne.

Dr. Wright: What will the Lord President say to the 500 miners and their families at Littleton colliery in South Staffordshire? They were told a few months ago that Littleton was a core pit, and that was confirmed in the coal review, yet now they have been told that their pit is to close in a fortnight's time. When the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), who cannot be here today, and I saw the chairman of British Coal this morning, he told us that Government action was the direct cause of the closure, and that only urgent Government action could stop it.

Today, when the whole nation is in anguish following the events in Liverpool, I ask the Lord President: should not the Government do all that they can to strengthen families and communities, rather than destroying them?

Mr. Newton: The whole House knows that the Government have put about £20 billion into helping the coal industry since we came to power and that we have offered additional assistance to help the industry to sell coal at world prices, but that, at the end of the day, we cannot insulate any industry in this country from the fact that people do not want to buy as much as is being produced.

Q2. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sumberg: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend drastically to reduce the number of police cautions given to young offenders? People in my constituency are outraged at the fact that such people get away with it, and they demand a return to basics—*[Interruption.]*—to the basic principle of making the punishment fit the crime.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend certainly may remind me of that fact, and I, in turn, remind him what the Home Secretary said a few days ago. My right hon. and learned Friend said that he believes that there is too much cautioning, and that too many young people have come to believe that they are virtually entitled to commit a crime and to receive nothing but a caution until something else happens. My right hon. and learned Friend believes that cautioning should be reduced, and his new guidance will reduce it.

Mrs. Beckett: Returning to basics, does the Lord President agree with the Prime Minister that the national insurance Bill will mean that most wage earners will pay £3 to £4 more per week, and that the total effect of increases in value added tax and national insurance and of cuts in mortgage interest relief and tax allowances will be that a typical family will pay £8·50 more per week in tax from April?

Mr. Newton: I should find a greater degree of credibility in the right hon. Lady if on this occasion—as on the previous occasion on which she and I had one of these exchanges—she showed the slightest understanding that increased funding of the national insurance fund is needed to ensure that we can continue to maintain our obligations to pensioners. As the right hon. Lady was for some years a senior Front-Bench spokesman on social security, I find it surprising that she does not understand that. Perhaps she needs to go back to basics.

Mrs. Beckett: Is the Lord President saying that he does not support what the Prime Minister said last Tuesday?

Mr. Newton: I am saying that the Government are taking—as they announced in the last Budget—and will continue to take in the forthcoming Budget responsible action to ensure the future of this country's economy so that we can maintain our promises to Britain's pensioners.

Mrs. Beckett: Does the Lord President remember that the last Budget was the biggest tax hike in British history, and put the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) narrowly ahead of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Howe, in the league table for increasing taxes? Would it not have been responsible of the Government to tell the British people that before the last election?

Mr. Newton: What I remember about the last Budget was the Leader of the Opposition telling us that the judgment made in November would be whether the March Budget had brought down unemployment. He said:

"If Conservative Members want that to be a test, we shall make it a test for the Government."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 199.]

The Government have passed that test, have they not?

Mr. Heald: Can my right hon. Friend tell the House when Britain last had low inflation, low interest rates, falling unemployment and rising output? Does he agree that that is good news for Britain and for north Hertfordshire—and that good news is something which Opposition Members would not recognise if it jumped up and bopped them in the face?

Mr. Newton: As I indicated in my previous reply to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), no doubt we shall soon have the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) trying to pretend that the test that he put to the Government earlier this year was not what he meant at all. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have the lowest inflation for a quarter of a century and the lowest interest rates for more than 15 years. At a time when unemployment in this country is 10·2 per cent. and falling, in the rest of Europe it is an average of 10·6 per cent. and rising.

Q3. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Trimble: Recalling that we entered the talks process last year with the objective of replacing the Anglo-Irish Agreement and thus reducing Dublin's role in our affairs, does the Leader of the House agree with recent editorials in *The Times* that the problem of disenchantment and militarisation of the Unionist community cannot be ended by the very diplomatic structures that created the problem? Does he agree that the only course that would command widespread acceptance in Northern Ireland would be to govern it fairly as part of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman asked his question, as he always does, with genuine sincerity—and I hope that I will reply with equal responsibility by repeating what was said by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister only last week:

"Nor will we compromise on the vital principle that there can be no change in Northern Ireland's status without the freely expressed consent of its people. It is for the people of Northern Ireland"—

including the hon. Gentleman—

"freely and democratically to determine their own constitutional future."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 28.]

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the pound has risen on foreign exchanges at a time when we have reduced British interest rates to the lowest in Europe is a tribute to the management of the economy and, in particular, to the reductions that we have made in inflation? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that only by continuing to reduce inflation will we be able to reduce interest rates further, to the benefit of industry and of the British economy as a whole?

Mr. Newton: The short answer to that question is yes. As a result of our success, which I outlined earlier, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has felt it possible to make a further reduction in interest rates. That is the background to the Budget and to the continuing policies that the Government will pursue to bear down on inflation and make further progress possible.

Q4. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hanson: Does the Leader of the House think that it is fair for the Government to have broken their election promises by raising national insurance contributions and VAT at the same time as refusing to raise taxes for those such as the chairman of Direct Line Insurance who paid himself £18 million this year?

Mr. Newton: I have already dealt with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. He will well know that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has frequently expressed the view that those responsible for determining rewards in the private sector should set a proper example to those in that sector. It is a matter for them to determine. I hope that the hon. Gentleman might have acknowledged the unusual background to this. Direct Line was started from scratch in 1985. It now employs 2,000 people, 900 of them taken on in the past year. It has 1·25 million

customers and is growing at the rate of 25,000 customers a week. As a company, it has done a good job for consumers.

Sir Teddy Taylor: What is the purpose of the Anglo-German summit that the Prime Minister is attending today?

Mr. Newton: The purpose of the Anglo-German summit is to continue and develop co-operation between the two Governments on a wide variety of matters of great importance to everyone in Europe and in the House, including the advancement of the GATT negotiations.

Q5. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ainsworth: Has the Leader of the House had time to see the report of the Public Accounts Committee into what it calls a catalogue of mismanagement at the West Midlands regional health authority? What will the Government do about the culpable individuals and what do they intend to do to restore the accountability of public officials to the communities whose moneys they spend?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the report and I hope that I need hardly assure the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will consider it with great care. I wish that the hon. Gentleman had acknowledged that a great deal has already been done, nationally and in the west midlands, to address the problems raised by the report. The health authority already has a new chairman, a new chief executive, new senior managers and new non-executive members. None of the individuals criticised by the report is still with the authority.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I invite my right hon. Friend to turn his mind to the issue of animal welfare in Europe? Will he tell the House whether the European Commission reports about relaxing the European ban on the import of seal pelts and other seal products are true? Will he try to ensure that we do nothing to relax the battle against unnecessary suffering of animals in this country and the rest of Europe?

Mr. Newton: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that the Government, who have taken a leading part in Europe in encouraging greater concern for animal welfare, will continue to ensure that those interests are properly represented in European discussions.

Q6. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gerrard: Did the right hon. Gentleman see the report in Monday's *Daily Express* that the Prime Minister is determined to provide nursery education for every three and four-year-old and recognises the value of such education in preventing juvenile crime and delinquency? Will he convey to the Prime Minister the fact that, assuming that the report is true, it represents a welcome change in Government policy? Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for Education knows about it, because it seems that he knew nothing about it on Tuesday? How much extra money will there be next year for new nursery schools?

Mr. Newton: I did, indeed, see the report. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that in recent years there has been a substantial increase in the amount of provision of various kinds, both private and other, for children at school age. I also know that a crucial ingredient in countering the sort of argument that the hon. Gentleman seeks to advance is the fact that children start full-time school in this country earlier than in almost any other country in Europe.

Mr. Allason: Following the conviction of Michael Smith last week, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is high time the Security Service took full responsibility for all aspects of positive vetting? Is he ready to tell the House whether a decision has been taken by the Government to pass this case to the Security Commission?

Mr. Newton: I would not wish to comment on the specific case, but my hon. Friend will know that in the past two days the Government have put before Parliament the Intelligence Services Bill, which it is envisaged will increase the openness, transparency and accountability of the services to which he refers.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Sunday Trading Bill.

Motion on the European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European Investment Fund) Order.

TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER—My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget Statement.

WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget Debate.

THURSDAY 2 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget Debate.

FRIDAY 3 DECEMBER—Motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

MONDAY 6 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget Debate.

It may be for the convenience of the House to know that the debate on the Budget will be concluded on Tuesday 7 December. It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the Christmas Adjournment on Friday 17 December until Tuesday 11 January.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 a.m. to consider European Community documents as follows:

TUESDAY 30 NOVEMBER:

Committee B, document No. 8107/93 relating to the fourth framework programme for research and development.

WEDNESDAY 1 DECEMBER

Committee A, document No. 7825/93 relating to school milk. Committee B, document No. 4569/93 relating to state aid to the coal industry.

[Tuesday 30 November:

European Standing Committee B-Relevant European Community document: 8107/93, Community Research and Development; relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 79-xxxvii and HC 79-xxxix.

Wednesday 1 December:

European Standing Committee A-Relevant European Community document: 7825/93, school milk; relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 79-xxxvii

European Standing Committee B-Relevant European Community document: 4569/93, state aid for coal; relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 79-xxiv and HC 79-xxix.]

Mr. Brown: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement.

Is it not unusual to hold a Christmas Adjournment debate on a Friday? Is not that debate limited to three hours? As the Government have named no other business for the Friday in question, does not that give us a finish at 12.30 pm for 1 pm, instead of 2.30 pm for 3 pm? Does not that represent an erosion of the time usually given to Back-Bench Members of the House?

Will the Leader of the House tell us something about Opposition Supply days? We would certainly like an Opposition debate before the Christmas Adjournment.

The Leader of the House has told us of the Budget debate next Tuesday, but the House has not yet debated the report by the Select Committee on Procedure dealing with the unified Budget process. I think it would be right to give the House a chance to debate these matters before we are launched into the new procedure.

Finally, may I ask the right hon. Gentleman to have a word with the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has announced a new system for the television franchises—taking advantage of the fact that the stock markets were open, but overlooking the fact that, unusually for us in recent times, the House of Commons was also open? The regulations to which he has referred have still not been laid before the House, but we will want an opportunity to debate them.

Mr. Newton: I take note of the hon. Gentleman's last point. Those regulations would indeed need to be discussed by the House, and we shall look for an opportunity to allow that to happen.

I note the hon. Gentleman's request for a debate on the Procedure Committee's report on the unified Budget arrangements, but I am manifestly not in a position to offer such a debate at the moment, given that I am speaking on the Thursday before the Budget, which is to be delivered on Tuesday with the debate on it taking place immediately thereafter. No doubt the House will wish to make some progress with the Sunday Trading Bill on Monday, too.

I recognise the understandable desire of the Opposition for Supply days, although there seem to me to have been fairly substantial opportunities for debates in the past week that were not wildly different from Supply days and there will be substantial further opportunities for almost any argument to be made during the debate on the Budget, which we have extended by a day.

On the subject of the motion for the Christmas Adjournment, the hon. Gentleman is right in saying that it is unusual to deal with it on a Friday, but I was grateful to note that he did not suggest that it was improper. I think that it is entirely suitable business to be done on a Friday. He is also right in saying, however, that Standing Orders limit the length of the debate, whenever it takes place, to three hours and I see no reason to alter that. If he is suggesting that private Members are losing time, I would point out that Friday is a Government day.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): The Leader of the House must have seen the report of the efficiency unit on proposed changes in the central civil service. A report on that subject is due from the Treasury Select Committee early in the new year. Those are important impending changes in the machinery of the state. I hope that my right hon. Friend can give us an assurance that there will be an early debate on these important matters.

Mr. Newton: I agree with my hon. Friend that they are important matters. I cannot, I am afraid, promise an early debate, but he may well be able to find an opportunity—for example, in the Adjournment debate to which I have just referred—to make the arguments that he wishes to make.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Can the Leader of the House confirm that the Government intend to give the House an opportunity to consider options for Sunday trading reform? Will he therefore say a word or two about how he proposes to do that? Presumably that will not be embraced in the Second Reading, but some space will be allocated for the Committee stage to be taken on the Floor of the House so that all hon. Members can choose between those options.

We have had a very good Procedure Committee report, considering the longer-term aspects of how we might debate the Budget motions. Will the Leader of the House give the House an undertaking to consider carefully what happens this year, with a view to perhaps bringing forward next year the type of reforms that were suggested by the Procedure Committee?

Mr. Newton: I genuinely note the latter point. I think —although I accept that not everyone would necessarily agree—that, although we have added a day to the Budget debate that will be especially directed at public expenditure, which in a way reflects a response to some of the Procedure Committee's points, on the whole it would be wise to consider our experience this year before coming to firm conclusions about every possible type of change that might be required.

It is unequivocally our intention to provide time for part of the Committee stage of the Sunday Trading Bill to be taken on the Floor of the House. That will not be on the Monday that I have just announced for Second Reading, but I hope that at an early stage there will be time on the Floor of the House in Committee, during which the options can be considered and, one hopes, one of them decided upon. The hon. Gentleman has, however, been around long enough to know that the precise handling of those matters —for example, the question of the order in which things are done—is ultimately a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means, and it would be a rash Leader of the House who would seek to tread on that prerogative.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Leader of the House inform the House what progress has been made towards the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that we have always made it clear that we would not rule that out, but that we feel that it needs to be considered in a wider context. He also knows that the Procedure Committee has been considering, once again, the question of the way in which such a Committee might be composed. Obviously we shall study with care any suggestion that it makes.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that the announcement by the Secretary of State for National Heritage of the removal of restrictions on takeovers for ITV companies will take regional diversity by the throat and squeeze the life out of it? Especially because the Secretary of State has not come to the House to make a statement so that we can question him, will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that, when the regulations are laid before the House, we shall not be confined to an hour and a half's debate but will have a whole day in which to debate that issue, which is so vital for the people of the country?

Mr. Newton: I accept the hon. Gentleman's wish to ensure that there is proper opportunity for debate when these matters are brought before the House. However, it does not follow that we should make special arrangements relating to the amount of time; we should simply stick to our usual procedures.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the growing public concern about the Child Support Agency. May we expect a Government statement before Christmas about the changes that should be made to that agency?

Mr. Newton: I shall draw my hon. Friend's request to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend referred to the concerns felt about the agency; he must be equally aware that my right hon. Friend is aware of those concerns and is examining them.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Will there be an opportunity next week—and, if not, before the Christmas recess—to discuss agriculture? Perhaps a day could be devoted to that, as is usually the case. There is great controversy in Wales about the discrimination in the payment of support for cereal growers, which is substantially less in Wales than in England. We need an opportunity to discuss that and other vital matters.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake to find time before Christmas for a debate confined to agriculture. However, I foresee one or two opportunities when the hon. Gentleman can make the points that he wishes to make.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In view of the spate of serious mechanical failures that have brought huge stretches of London's underground to a halt—most notably yesterday—putting at some risk not only the economy of London but, more seriously, the potential safety of passengers, will my right hon. Friend suggest to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that he comes to the House next week to make a statement on how the serviceability and the fabric of London Transport underground can be maintained at current levels of Government investment?

Mr. Newton: The whole House will understand why my hon. Friend has raised that point—the considerable inconvenience, to put it no higher, caused to many Londoners. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked London Transport for a full report on the incident as a matter of urgency. Therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further. I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend. Indeed, he will be in the House to answer questions on Monday.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that he has turned down 10 separate requests for time to debate various matters? Nevertheless, at the beginning of his statement he said that the House will rise, all being well, on 17 December. Is he aware that that means that this Parliament, in the calendar year 1993, will have sat for no more than seven months? Parliament will not have been in session for five months, which must be the longest period in 20 years during which Parliament has not been at work in a non-election year. All the important matters that have been raised need to be debated. It appears that all this Tory Government are concerned about is getting away from here so as to avoid criticism from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Newton: To borrow the hon. Gentleman's elegant terminology, what this Tory Government are concerned about is, as far as is possible, responding to the understandable wish of hon. Members to have as much advance certainty as possible of the dates of recesses—something for which there have been extensive demands. We also recognise that, for the great majority of hon. Members, a very large part of their work is conducted within their constituencies and needs to be combined with their duties here.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate next week on the first 21 years of the work of the Open university? I declare an interest as I am in my 14th year as a member of its council —unpaid, of course. The work of the university has been admirable in so many ways, in particular among the unemployed and with second-chance education. This House should debate that matter, which would also give us the opportunity to welcome you, Madam Speaker, as chancellor of the university.

Madam Speaker: That is an appointment of which I am very proud.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that the whole House would wish to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on that honour, along with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) whose work for the Open university —an institution that I greatly admire—is well known. Since my hon. Friend may not be expecting me to offer immediate time for a debate, he has made his point well in a more brief fashion.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): During the debate on the Budget next week, will the Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers take the opportunity to explain to disabled workers who are employed in Remploy establishments across the country and who are lobbying the House today why their 118 per cent. increase in productivity over 10 years should be matched by a 5p per hour rise in pay for those deserving workers?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that Remploy aids many thousands of disabled workers with the help of a substantial amount of Government money. Rightly, the Government have taken the view that it is appropriate that the restraint that is being applied to public sector pay generally should also apply to institutions that are funded by Government money.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate next week to consider the water charges regime in the south-west? Does he agree that a debate would provide an excellent opportunity for the Government to bring the House up to date with the worthwhile initiatives that have been taken in Europe and that it will enable the people of the west country to understand that those efforts have been criticised rather than supported by the Liberal Members in the area who say that they are also concerned?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his recognition of the way in which my hon. Friends have sought to raise in European discussions the issues arising from the urban waste water treatment directive, which have been substantial and will continue to be so in the south-west. I can assure him that those efforts will continue. It would not be beyond my expectation or comprehension if Liberals in the south-west were in effect pursuing one policy in what they said here and another elsewhere.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House give serious consideration to promises that the Government have made that next Monday's Second Reading of the Sunday Trading Bill will be a free vote for all Members? Will he also use his influence and ask his Cabinet colleagues to stop undue pressure on workers, especially those employed by Woolworths, who are being compelled to sign contracts before the Sunday Trading Bill is even discussed? I share the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that there should be more time made available for discussions, especially of the Sunday Trading Bill, rather than curbing debates to one day for Second Reading.

Mr. Newton: The Government's position has consistently been that the appropriate course was to ensure a free vote on the options—on one of which the hon. Gentleman is a considerable protagonist—of the various ways of carrying out reform. The Government are firmly of the view that it is necessary to make some changes to the existing Sunday trading legislation, which everybody acknowledges is unsatisfactory and why the Bill has been brought before the House.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the proposition that my hon. Friends have included in the Bill, related to the right of whether people work on Sundays.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on Government policy for encouraging the large-scale voluntary transfer of council housing to housing associations by district councils? Does he agree that such a debate would provide a valuable opportunity to highlight the advantages of such a policy to existing tenants and to the homeless in areas such as Wychavon district—whose application for such a transfer is currently before the Department of the Environment—to increase resources for repair and maintenance of the existing housing stock, to guarantee levels of rent and to provide 1,000 new houses for social housing in Wychavon?

Mr. Newton: It occurs to me that, given that we are approaching a unified Budget in which it will be in order to raise issues relating to public expenditure as well as other matters, my hon. Friend may find an opportunity in the next week or so to inject that point. If by some chance he does not find such an opportunity, he will have my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment here next Wednesday.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Does the Leader of the House appreciate that his answer to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on nursery education a few moments ago was profoundly unsatisfactory? Will the right hon. Gentleman make time available for an early debate so that the confusion about the Government's policy on nursery education can be clarified once and for all? Will he confirm that the pledge that all three-year-olds should have the opportunity for nursery education was first uttered by Baroness Thatcher when she was Secretary of State for Education and Science 21 years ago?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) in the earlier exchanges this afternoon; nor can I promise an early debate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): As a large part of the purpose of politics is to reduce avoidable disadvantage, distress and handicap, and to promote well-being, and as the family has a large part in that, will my right hon. Friend consider giving the House the opportunity of having a debate in the near future on the family perspective and the family life cycle in social and economic policy?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend, whom I know well in relation to these matters, has been pursuing his philosophy about them for as many years as I can remember; I very much respect him for that. I cannot promise a specific debate between now and Christmas.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Will the Leader of the House think again about his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies)? Has the right hon. Gentleman had any contact today with any of the employees from Remploy, who have come here from all over this country to protest about the 5p an hour increase in pay? Is it not intolerable that some of the lowest of the low-paid workers in this country, who also face cuts in their standard of living from the imposition of VAT on gas and electricity, and other new imposts, should find themselves, at a time when they have increased productivity, losing compared with many other people? Will he arrange for a ministerial statement next week in considered reply to the complaints that have been made in this House today by employees of Remploy?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman knows, perhaps better than anyone else in the House, that because of my having been Minister with responsibility for disabled people, I know a good deal about Remploy and have a very great regard for what it has done. Indeed, I have sought to encourage that in various ways over the years. Nevertheless, I think that my point in response to the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) was reasonable. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Departments concerned will undoubtedly consider the representations made, and I am sure that they will reply to them appropriately.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the immense hardship and suffering endured especially by pensioners during the very cold weather, and recognising that most of them will not receive a single penny, is it not very important that the Cabinet tells the Chancellor of the Exchequer that there is no justification in putting into the Budget next week the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel? Is it not the case that, if there was a free vote in the House, any move to introduce VAT on gas and electricity would be defeated? We should bear in mind that the nightmare that so many pensioners now suffer will become that much worse if the Chancellor's plans go ahead.

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman has obviously noticed, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is here in person to hear his recommendation for the Budget and he will no doubt reflect on it. For my part, as a former Social Security Minister, I observe merely that the cold weather system to which the hon. Gentleman referred has been significantly improved in recent times. Triggers that have already taken place this winter will result in almost 180,000 payments worth more than £1 million.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Has the Leader of the House noticed that the Public Accounts Committee report on the West Midlands regional health authority recommends that officials should be reminded of the need for honesty, openness and fair dealing? Will he arrange for the Secretary of State for Health to follow the example set by the Secretary of State for Wales in dealing with the report on the Welsh Development Agency and to make a statement to the House about what she will do about the Committee's recommendation?

Mr. Newton: I have made some comments about the action that has already been taken in respect of the issues that the Public Accounts Committee looked at in relation to the West Midlands health authority. I will of course draw the hon. Gentleman's request to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Further to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) about housing associations, will my right hon. Friend talk to our hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment about the possibility of a debate on housing associations in general? Many hon. Members whose constituencies are in London are concerned about the burgeoning power of housing associations. If we had such a debate, we would be able to tease out many of those problems.

Mr. Newton: I have already drawn to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester the fact that the Secretary of State will be here next Wednesday, and that there may be an opportunity then to make that point. As for a specific debate, I cannot undertake to have one before Christmas, but I note my hon. Friend's request.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): As has been said, is it not a disgrace that people who are disabled and working for Remploy achieved a 118 per cent. increase in productivity but took home only £120 a week? Is not that evidence that we should consider introducing a minimum wage for such people in this country?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows our view very well—it is a view that is widely shared—that the introduction of a national minimum wage would do nothing more than reduce employment. That would not be to anyone's advantage. As to Remploy, I have adverted to it twice already. It is an important organisation and provides opportunities for many thousands of disabled people that they would not otherwise have. I think that it is right that it should operate within the framework of the public sector.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Does the Leader of the House share my concern that Standing Committee A on European directives, which should have met yesterday morning, was cancelled at short notice? Had it sat, the Committee would have discussed the directive that will reduce the subsidy on the milk that goes to children in our schools. Such a reduction would deny many of our children school milk or a large burden would fall on the local authorities. As Europe is impinging more and

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more on the lives of our people, will the Leader of the House arrange an early convening of the Committee before the end of this Session?

Mr. Newton: I will look into that request.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Can I persuade the right hon. Gentleman to find time to discuss the termination of the iron and steel employees' readaptation benefit scheme, ISERBS? The scheme was terminated in a reprehensible way by his right hon. Friend, on a Friday afternoon in a written answer. There are still tens of thousands of steelworkers in employment in Britain, but the European steel industry is in crisis and it is likely that some British steelworkers will lose their jobs next year. If they do, that great scheme will no longer be available to them. Does the Leader of the House accept that what has happened is scandalous?

Mr. Newton: I certainly do not accept that what my right hon. Friend has done is scandalous, but I will bring to his attention the fact that the hon. Gentleman thinks that it is, together with the request that he has made.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Why does this House meet so little nowadays? We have just had 14 weeks off in a 17-week period, and there will be another three and a half weeks when the House will not meet. It is no use the Leader of the House saying that hon. Members work in their constituencies. Everyone knows that the hon. Members who work in their constituencies are the hon. Members who work on behalf of their constituents in the House. Since the Prime Minister took office, the House has sat for only 60 per cent. of week-day time. It has almost packed up. At a time when there are many attacks on our democracy, such as the attack on the franchise, should not the House meet more frequently so that the subjects raised today can be discussed?

Mr. Newton: Of course I accept that hon. Members work here on behalf of their constituencies. The fact is that they work in two places, both here and in those constituencies. It is appropriate to strike a reasonable balance between the opportunities to work in both places, and I think that the Government have done that.

May I return briefly to the question asked by the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty)? I have been advised that the debate on school milk is expected to take place next week.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Against all convention, the Secretary of State for Health has refused to meet hon. Members representing Liverpool constituencies to discuss the proposed closure of the accident and emergency unit at Broadgreen hospital. On 8 November, Alder Hey children's hospital in Liverpool had to make an urgent appeal on Granada Television for staff to return to help in the intensive care unit that night. The Government's policy has brought about a scandalous position in the national health service in Liverpool. Should not the Secretary of State for Health make a statement to the House next week—or is she frit?

Mr. Newton: I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House without reservation that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not frit. I shall draw her attention to the points made by the hon. Gentleman. He will know, however, that there has been a substantial increase in the number of places in paediatric intensive care—if that is what he was referring to—and that considerable efforts are being made to improve and extend the training of those who work in those places.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate next week on the financial consequences of schools becoming grant-maintained? The increased amounts being spent by those schools are no longer available to the education authorities, which must either win contracts to provide services or slim down their bureaucracies accordingly.

Such a debate would enable us to point out that Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled Kent county council has done nothing either to win contracts from the grant-maintained schools or to slim down their bureaucracy. The natural consequence is that council tax payers are hit, or that economies are made—for instance, cuts in real education services in the remaining county schools.

Mr. Newton: I am well aware that many education authorities have responded very sensibly to the changes in the operation of education systems, in exactly the way that my hon. Friend clearly thinks right. That has been very productive. I am sorry to hear my hon. Friend's view that Kent has not responded appropriately, and I acknowledge the manner in which he has raised the matter.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May I repeat the earlier request for a debate on the operation of the Child Support Agency? A debate would enable us to explain that, when we write on behalf of constituents who are worried sick about excessive claims, and excessive charges for making those claims, we receive bland, platitudinous letters telling us, for example, that there is to be a standard assessment. It is the standard assessment about which we are complaining.

We know that court orders are being overridden—ridden over roughshod, indeed. That is no response at all. There is an urgent need to modify the Child Support Act, and to clarify the agency's role, so that justice can be exercised. The targeting of people who are paying maintenance, and who have made sacrifices, should stop; the agency's real purpose—chasing fathers who are not making responsible payments—should start, because it has not started yet.

Mr. Newton: I do not accept the latter part of what the hon. Gentleman has said. Let me repeat what I said earlier: my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is aware of the concerns that have been expressed, and he is examining them carefully.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): In reply to a question from his hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) about yesterday's catastrophic breakdown in London underground services, the Leader of the House said that Transport questions would take place on Monday. Question 9 will be our first opportunity to raise the matter, and we may not reach it.

Madam Speaker: We will if I have anything to do with it.

Mr. Banks: We look to you, Madam Speaker; but there is sometimes a problem with the replies, not to mention the questions that precede them. We have Government

statements on all sorts of arcane, bizarre and Byzantine issues, yet after something as bad as what happened yesterday, with 20,000 people stuck in tunnels and millions of people delayed or prevented from getting to work at enormous cost to London's economy, there is total silence from Ministers. Will the Leader of the House prevail upon the Minister for Transport in London, who has a busy, not to say an exhausting schedule, we understand, to come to the House tomorrow and make a statement?

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said earlier, except that I have confidence in the ability of your vigorous chairing of our proceedings, Madam Speaker, to ensure that Question No. 9 is reached. I probably have sufficient confidence in the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity to suspect that he may find a way of getting the point in before Question No. 9.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As Government policy has failed to discourage young people from taking up smoking, and as there is proof that advertising encourages young people to smoke, may we have a debate on early-day motion 1 so that we may consider prohibitions on the promotion, sale and advertising of tobacco?

[That this House calls for a ban on tobacco advertising.]

Will the Leader of the House give a guarantee that there will be a free vote when that debate takes place?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman, who takes a keen interest in these matters, will be well aware that the Department's discussion document on the effects of tobacco advertising was published in October 1992 and comments were invited on it which are now being considered. He also knows that the Government have continued to oppose the draft EC directive ban on tobacco advertising on the ground that such action is not necessary for the completion of the single market.

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): Has the Leader of the House had the opportunity to look at early-day motion 44 dealing with software failures at the Sizewell B nuclear power station?

[That this House congratulates Computer Weekly on its concerted campaign to expose the serious deficiencies in the safety software at the Sizewell B nuclear reactor in Suffolk and on its recent decision to bring to the public notice a hitherto unpublished report by the Health and Safety Commission Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations which highlighted the lack of any evidence about the reliability of the primary protection computer software; and calls upon the Government to consider such reports when drawing up the terms and conditions for the long-awaited review of the nuclear industry.]

Will he find time for an early debate on nuclear power and the future of the industry?

Mr. Newton: I am not in a position to comment on the campaign that I understand is being run by *Computer Weekly*. As regards the 1994 review of nuclear power, the Government are considering options for the scope and form of that review.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 10 DECEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Sir Donald Thompson
Mr. Ken Livingstone
Mr. Nigel Waterson

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:—

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith.]*

The Economy

Madam Speaker: Before we commence today's debate, I should inform the House that I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. I have also selected for Division at 10 o'clock the amendment standing in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democratic party.

4.8 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But note that, to pay for Government mismanagement, election promises are being broken again by raising national insurance and other taxes; humbly regret that the Gracious Speech excludes a new industry, skills and employment policy for Britain; demand urgent measures to end mass unemployment and to implement the skills revolution; and call for the reconsideration of the policy of imposing VAT on fuel and the removal of the threat of further cuts in vitally important public services and in Britain's welfare state.

Instead of a Gracious Speech whose individual measures do little or nothing for industry, nothing for employment, nothing for skills and nothing for rebuilding the economic and social fabric of Britain and that does nothing but pursue the old, tired and crude dogma of privatisation and deregulation, the British people need a new Government programme.

Looking to Tuesday in particular, we need a Budget that first acknowledges and faces up to the mistakes of the past, secondly takes new measures to strong recovery now, and thirdly, tackles the fundamental problems of rebuilding our economic capacity for the future.

We need a Budget that is pro-fairness, pro-industry, pro-jobs and pro-investment. We need a Budget for fairness that will bridge the gap between rich and poor by attacking poverty and therefore promises to abolish VAT on fuel. It would therefore reduce the £8·50 burden that the typical family will have to pay in higher taxes on what they spend and in their pay packets as a result of the Government's economic mistakes.

Secondly, we need a Budget that is pro-jobs and pro-industry, and therefore not only releases past capital receipts so that we can build, and introduces the energy-saving and job-creating programmes that we have put forward in our submissions, but encourages employers to take on many of the long-term unemployed by rebating the national insurance contributions.

Thirdly, we need a Budget that is pro-investment, with not just the working party but a task force that will get

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public-private partnerships moving quickly, a small business grant scheme, a technology investment allowance so that we can move ahead in innovations, and the creation of regional development agencies in England to match those in in Scotland and Wales.

We therefore need a Budget that faces up to our three problems of a trade deficit, a borrowing deficit and a jobs deficit with 2·8 million people unemployed; which recognises that the root of our problem is the smallness and diminished capacity of our economy; which understands that the deficit will return, as will the trade deficit, and unemployment will remain high, unless we tackle those basic and fundamental issues, and which recognises the importance of Government having a role in helping to ensure the investment that we need in people, industry and our social and economic fabric.

The Government talk about people accepting personal responsibility for their actions. Is it not about time that the Government and Ministers assumed some personal responsibility for their actions? This month, Japan, with 2·5 per cent. unemployment, has introduced its third programme to inject resources into the economy. This month, America, with far lower unemployment than ours, is planning a world employment summit. This month, a new Government in Canada are announcing a programme that will bring more people back to work. Yet only this Government believe that it is better for the unemployed to be doing nothing, because they do not believe in the case for Government doing anything.

The Opposition's argument is that, after all the economic experiments from 1979 onwards—monetarism, the medium-term strategy, the 1988 Budget, the promises of a balanced budget that have led to the biggest deficit that we have ever had—here in Britain, the Government, if they do not change course, are about to repeat the mistakes that gave us the stop-go economics of the 1980s.

That is why we need a Budget that faces up to the reality that our economy is suffering from a diminished capacity. It is 5 per cent. smaller than it was at the beginning of the 1990s. Manufacturing, which lost 15 per cent. of its capacity in the recession of the 1980s, has lost another 5 per cent. of its capacity already in the 1990s. During 14 years, our manufacturing industry, even in the oil-rich years, has grown by only 5 per cent., while in Japan growth has been more than 50 per cent. and in America, more than 35 per cent.

But the problem that the Chancellor and previous Chancellors have refused to face up to is that the economy will remain smaller than it should be unless we have a strategy for investment and a policy for industry for the future.

Investment in manufacturing workers is now half the world's best. Investment in manufacturing has fallen in real terms since 1979. Investment in manufacturing as a share of our national income has been falling, while in Japan, Germany and France, it has risen. This year, business investment is a smaller proportion of our national income than at any time for the past 30 years.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman and perhaps educate him on some of our policies.

Mr. Forman: The hon. Gentleman talks about the importance to the Opposition of investment, particularly in manufacturing, but how will the European socialist manifesto, with all its extra costs for employers to which his party is committed, help investment and net return?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has come into the Chamber late, and I suspect that he has not read the manifesto that has come from Brussels, so let me tell him what it says. It says that we are committed to jobs, industry and investment for the future, and that is more than can be said for Conservative Members, who have presided over the worst situation for investment in the recession that we have had since 1990.

The problems of the British economy are, first, diminished capacity, secondly, lower investment than our competitors, but, thirdly, which the Chancellor must face up to next Tuesday, the fact that investment in our economy is still falling despite an autumn statement that was meant to enable private investment to take off.

Since the autumn statement and the Budget, investment has continued to fall. Investment in private industry and manufacturing, and investment generally in business, are still falling. If the Government do not face up to that, they will be sowing the seeds for the next recession. Our measures for industry in the Budget would include enhanced capital allowances, a small business grant scheme, new investment agreements between banks, financial institutions, and industry, measures to improve the social and economic fabric, and to take the European regional and social fund money that the Government have failed even to collect over the past few months.

The measures also include those which would enact the skills revolution and would end the discrimination against the unemployed undertaking training. Measures would be included to regenerate regional, industrial, and investment incentives for training and education, and to create a new partnership with business in a new university for industry for our country.

The tragedy of the Government is that they cannot even begin to think of the measures which are necessary for the future. All they are doing is giving the country the plight of having to pay the bills for their past mistakes. That is what taxing pensioners for their fuel is all about. That is what threatening even more tax rises to the tune of £8·50 per week is all about. That is what taxes on what we spend and taxes on our pay packets from April will be all about. Those proposals are all to pay for the mistakes of the past, and they go against every promise made by the Conservatives at the general election.

The issue of the Budget is whether the Chancellor will listen to the British people and whether he will now change his mind as a result of those people telling him what is right for the country. The first thing that I want the Chancellor to do on Tuesday is to abandon the proposals for VAT and to be fair in his taxation policy.

Let us just recall the background to the subject. The increase of VAT on fuel is unfair. It will affect pensioners severely and will hit the weakest and the frailest most. The severely disabled and the housebound, who rely on heating for more hours per day than many others, will be hit harder than anyone else.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how the Labour party would meet Britain's commitments on carbon emissions that were made at the Rio summit?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should know that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who speaks for the Opposition on the environment, issued proposals at the previous Budget that would do four times as much to reduce carbon dioxide emissions as anything that the Government propose. Let us be absolutely clear that the VAT proposals did not arise because the Government had suddenly gone green. They arose because the Government moved the nation's finances into the red.

Mr. Arnold *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. It seems that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to give way again, as he has just done so.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should be reminded of what the Prime Minister said at the general election about such a proposal for VAT. *[Interruption.]* Before the hon. Gentleman shouts, he should listen to what the Prime Minister said. The Prime Minister said that the Conservative party had no plans to increase VAT.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): Will the hon. Gentleman now take the opportunity to answer the question that was posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman would have an answer if he read the energy and environmental programme that was put out by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn. The energy efficiency measures included the insulation of people's homes to cut the amount of energy that people would have to use. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are in a difficult mood this afternoon. Perhaps that is because they are waiting to cast their ballots at 6 o'clock in the 1922 Committee.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the Labour party specifically excluded VAT on heating and fuel from those areas which it would exempt from VAT? Fuel was the only area where VAT did not apply, and the Labour party refused to say that it would not put VAT on fuel. Does not that suggest that it was planning to do just that?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has got it absolutely wrong. The Labour party was not committed to putting VAT on fuel, and I challenge him to produce such a commitment. I will happily give way to him if he can read the commitment out.

Mr. Hendry: The Labour party specifically stated a number of areas where it would not impose VAT. The only area not mentioned and which is currently zero-rated for VAT was fuel and energy. That suggests to many of my hon. Friends that the Labour party had plans to impose such a tax.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman may have convinced himself, but he will never convince the country with such statements. He knows perfectly well that I asked him to read out Labour's commitment to put VAT on fuel but that he could not do so because it does not exist.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: Oh, the hon. Gentleman has it.

Mr. Jenkin: I am happy to read an extract from "Looking to the Future", which states:

"Zero rating on items such as food, fares, books and children's clothing should remain an essential part of the VAT system. We will use the tax system, as well as regulation, to help protect the environment".

The document did not mention fuel, but it did mention protecting the environment; what conclusion are we meant to draw from that?

Mr. Brown: I notice that, when challenged, the hon. Gentleman could not read out our commitment to put VAT on fuel. He should apologise to the House for wasting time.

Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must stop shouting from a sedentary position. The quality of our debate is not improved by it.

Mr. Brown: I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman if he can explain what I am about to read out from his election manifesto in Colchester, North. He said that there were 10 good reasons to vote Conservative; the fourth was "low taxes". Can he explain that?

Let us be clear about the nature of the pledge made before the election. On 27 March, the Prime Minister was asked:

"Can you give the same pledge that Mrs. Thatcher did in 1987 that you will not extend the scope of VAT to children's shoes and clothing, gas and electricity and food?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"I've made the pledge in the past. I have made it clear."

Why did he then break election promises made by the Conservative Government?

Before the Chancellor announces his Budget on Tuesday, let him be absolutely clear about what people will think of the compensation schemes he is suggesting. I warn him against VAT compensation schemes which will be the minimum he can get away with rather than the best that the Government should be doing for pensioners and others. I remind him of the motion signed by hon. Members, even Conservative Members, who said quite clearly that they would not allow such a compensation scheme to go through and would not support VAT in its present form unless every pensioner were given compensation for the rise in VAT.

Without a compensation scheme that involves every pensioner, the Chancellor has no majority in the House for pressing ahead. The best compensation for which 10 million pensioners and others who are worried about VAT will be looking would be the abandonment of VAT on fuel altogether.

Let us be clear not only about promises on VAT but about other promises made by the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet on tax generally. Let us be clear about what was said during the election campaign, not in offhand remarks made casually around the country at late-night meetings but as the central element of the Tory campaign on television and in the newspapers.

The then Chancellor was asked on "Channel 4 News" whether he would increase taxes. He said:

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"We will not have to increase taxes. I cannot see any circumstances in which that will be necessary."

He was asked:

"Does that mean direct and indirect taxes?"

He said:

"Yes."

The Chancellor will never be able to persuade the country, much as he has tried, that the Government have not betrayed a very clear promise that they would not increase income tax. The Prime Minister said at the time not only that taxes would not rise but that they were going to fall. He said:

"We will make further reductions in the rate of taxation, but perhaps not at the rate of a penny a year."

Was not that supposed to be taken as a commitment?

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): The hon. Gentleman criticises the increase in taxes announced in the spring Budget. Will he tell the House how a Labour Government would deal with the budget deficit if they did not increase taxes? Does he support the Conservative Members who advocate cuts in public spending?

Mr. Brown: The first thing that I would do is to refrain from breaking promises made to the electorate during a general election campaign.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): The hon. Gentleman will recall that, during the election campaign, his party advocated the abolition of the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions. For the sake of clarification, I ask him whether that is still his party's policy.

Mr. Brown: Our policies are going before the Commission on Social Justice, and we will produce— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand that it is the Conservative party, not the Labour party, that has broken all its promises on tax.

On 28 January, the Prime Minister made another promise. He said:

"There is no plan to raise the level of national insurance contributions".

Yet now the Government are not only increasing national insurance by £3 to £4 a week for the ordinary employee, but are considering reducing the benefits that people receive from their contributions. I can think of no situation more unacceptable than having to pay £3 to £4 a week more in national insurance contributions while, as is suggested by some members of the Conservative party, any unemployment benefit that one might receive is cut by half.

Before Ministers feel that they might have escaped, let me remind the Chief Secretary to the Treasury what he said about national insurance in his personal election manifesto:

"Higher tax and national insurance would hit those who work harder and do overtime".

What does he say now? In America, George Bush said, "Read my lips; no more taxes," increased taxes and lost an election. I predict that the Prime Minister who said, "Read my manifesto—it is all mine—no more taxes," will also lose an election because of what the Government have done.

The fear is not only of what the Government have done on taxation but of what they are doing to public services, despite all their election promises. Their manifesto made promises on child benefit. Under the heading, "Supporting Families," it said:

"Child Benefit will remain the cornerstone of our policy for all families with children . . . Child Benefit will continue to be paid to all families, normally to the mother, and in respect of all children."

If that promise was made to the electorate, why has a review been set up with the specific object of examining the case for withholding child benefit from people with income or capital above a specified level? Does that not show that the Conservative party is prepared to break yet another election promise to the country?

What about the Conservatives' promise on pensions? Pensions were to be the foundation of the Government's policy for retirement. Yet what is the object of the review that has been set up within the Department of Social Security? Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not know about it. Its brief is to consider the idea of opting out of contributory benefits—unemployment, sickness and invalidity benefits, and especially retirement pensions. Does the Chancellor wonder why the country will never trust the Conservative Government again?

What about the public spending cuts that the Chancellor says he will announce in various departmental budgets next week? A few weeks ago, he talked a great deal in interviews about blood on the carpet, and said that Departments' budgets would be cut by millions of pounds. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister said this about the Conservatives' public spending commitments:

"We will stand by the figures in the Red Book. I see no reason why we should not meet our promises. We have allocated our reserves; we have seen these concerns in the past; it has not been necessary to change plans".

What are we to make of a Government who are now cutting public spending? What do they say now? If incompetence was their excuse for being guilty of breaking promises, perhaps we should have to take what they said into consideration. As we saw this afternoon, the Government bluster all the time about broken promises for which they do not even begin to apologise to the country for having broken. The Chancellor was at it again recently, when he said that we should not take him seriously when it was a matter of

"half-sentences taken from shredded speeches that someone delivered on a wet night somewhere in Dudley and then quoted out of context in order to maintain the pretence that we have broken our promises."

I suppose that is a case of, "You can read my lips, but not on a wet night in Dudley."

We will quote not half-sentences from Dudley but full sentences. I have the manifestos issued in Dudley, where the Chancellor thinks it is not important to examine what was said. The Conservative candidate for Dudley, East promised in his election manifesto:

"We will get taxes down to 20p in the pound."

Does anyone think that he would have secured 20,000 votes if he had told the voters of Dudley, East that the Conservatives would increase VAT and taxes all round?

The Conservative candidate for Dudley, West began his manifesto:

"You can depend on John."

He was referring to John Major. He continued:

"The Conservatives have the policies, the will and the leadership to see Britain through."

The main brunt of that candidate's manifesto, which was issued to people not just on wet nights but every night in Dudley, was:

"Tax is the dirtiest word in the Conservative philosophy. Unlike the Socialists, who are going down the disastrous pathway

of higher taxation and national insurance contributions, taking money out of your earnings, we have started on a pathway to 20p in the pound."

The Conservative candidate for Dudley, East won by a majority of 5,789 votes. Would any of Dudley's 12,000 pensioners have voted for that candidate if they had known that VAT would be imposed on fuel?

The Chancellor, instead of telling the people of Dudley that they should not bother to listen to Conservatives, should go to Dudley to apologise to the people there for what is happening. The Conservative victory in Dudley was won on a complete fraud.

It is not only Labour that is unhappy with the Conservative Government. I have just read an extract from a letter sent to Conservative supporters by the treasurer of Hornchurch Tories, in which he askes them to buy tickets for the Christmas raffle. He writes:

"You may ask, why I should buy anything from the Conservative Party, given the way that they have managed the country recently? We believe that the message to the Government is that you do not want VAT on fuel, you do not want any more tax increases, and you do want services such as the National Health Service improved."

He goes on to pledge that the money raised by the Christmas raffle will go not to Conservative central office but to a campaign to mount opposition against Government policy. Astonishingly for the Government, Essex man has become the enemy within. Perhaps the attendance in the Chamber now reflects the fact that divisions in the Conservative party on economic policy go far deeper than Hornchurch.

This week, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) completes three years as Prime Minister. Not one celebration is planned, not one party. There will be no street parties, and there are no calls for 10 more years. There is not even the faintest, tentative whisper of "Three more years." Not even a slender commemorative volume has been published, though perhaps it would have to be entitled, "Major: The Forgotten Years—1990-1993."

How is the Conservative party celebrating the three years of leadership? It is having a battle over who controls the 1922 Committee because of the Prime Minister's lack of leadership. The country is raging at the imposition of VAT and public services are under attack, but uppermost in the minds of Conservative Members this afternoon, and the struggle that is concerning them, is who will be running the 1922 Committee. I must warn the Chancellor that, if he speaks at any length, Conservative Back Benchers may start to get restless, and he should prepare himself for an exodus at 6 o'clock as they troop towards the door to cast their votes in the election.

The argument in the Conservative party and in the 1922 Committee goes to the heart of the Government. It is a battle between the forces represented by the Chancellor and those represented by the Chief Secretary, with the party leader not so much above the struggle as simply at its mercy.

If one considers what the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary have been saying about economic policy in the last few months, one discovers that the Conservative party is fundamentally divided, not between Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members, not between one or two people on the 1922 Committee and one or two others, but between the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary. The division is right at the heart of the Treasury.

The Chancellor tells us that he supports a single currency and big moves towards European integration, but the Chief Secretary cannot abide the idea. The Chancellor, understandably, wants to abide by his promises on pensions, but the Chief Secretary wants an opt-out scheme for young people to be taken out of state pensions. The Chancellor tell us that there will be no hotel charges for hospitals, but the Chief Secretary says that we must consider further charges in the national health service. The Chancellor said that the poll tax was a bad idea, but the Chief Secretary has never stopped supporting it and wants to get back to it.

What is happening in the Treasury as we prepare for the Budget? The right hand of the Conservative party simply does not know what the extreme right hand is doing. The Chancellor considers himself to be pro-European, pro-public services, pro-fairness, moderate rather than extreme, and centrist rather than right-wing—that is the image that he wishes to convey to the public—but is anybody in any doubt about what the country thinks about the Conservative party? It believes that the party is anti-European, anti-fairness, anti-public services, extreme rather than moderate and lurching all the time to the right. That is the direction in which policy is moving in the Conservative party.

I have one message for the Chancellor as he considers the other measures that he can introduce in his Budget next Tuesday. He must remind people of his views on VAT. He certainly has a one-club policy, which is to extend VAT to all the essentials that he can get his hands on. Is he reluctantly implementing policies that the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) imposed in March, or is the Chancellor the most enthusiastic adherent of the policy on VAT?

Let us be clear where the Chancellor stands on VAT. He wanted VAT on fuel before now. He said in an interview a few weeks ago that VAT on fuel was much overdue. So the issue for the Chancellor is not that it should be introduced, but that it should have been done sooner. That is hardly in line with Tory promises to the electorate.

The Chancellor also said that he wanted the immediate imposition of VAT at 17·5 per cent. and that it should not be imposed in two stages—first at 8 per cent, then at 17·5 per cent. He said:

"With hindsight, it would have been politically advantageous to go to 17·5 per cent. straight away and bring it in this April."

So nobody should be in any doubt that this Chancellor would have imposed more misery on pensioners by raising VAT on fuel to 17·5 per cent. immediately.

What is the Chancellor's attitude to VAT on other items? He said:

"I have always thought we exempt far too many goods and services from VAT in this country. VAT is still imposed on little over half of all sales, which is much more restrictive than the sales tax in most other countries."

Again, let us be clear about the Chancellor's views on VAT. He wanted VAT on fuel earlier, he wanted it at 17·5 per cent. from April and he wants to extend it at the earliest possible opportunity to food, transport, children clothes and to books, publications and newspapers.

Given what the Chancellor has said in the past, it is now not a matter of whether he will extend VAT but when; not how little VAT he will impose, but how much; not whether there will be further rises in VAT, but how many, and when. This is a Chancellor with a dangerous dependence on VAT.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Would the hon. Gentleman increase or

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reduce public expenditure if he were delivering the Budget? If he would increase it, what taxes would he raise to pay for it? If he would reduce it, what public services would he cut?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman does not seem aware of what is happening in this country. Public spending bills have risen in the past three years chiefly because of what has happened to unemployment, which is costing £9,000 per person. Any sensible person with a strategy to reduce the deficit and to get the economy moving again would cut unemployment—so much is clear. If the Government had any sense of priorities for the tax system, they would not impose VAT on pensioners' fuel. They would close the well known tax loopholes and anomalies that have been opened up over the past 14 years by themselves, prey as they have been to the financial interests in this country.

I have a number of questions for the Chancellor today——

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Before the hon. Gentleman gets to those questions, may I ask him whether he is satisfied that there are measures that could affect a significant reduction in unemployment but which can be achieved without any extra taxation or extra borrowing?

Mr. Brown: Of course there are—I was coming to that before I concluded my speech.

Let me tell the Chancellor what any Government could do tomorrow. They could rebate national insurance to employers who take on the long-term unemployed. They could introduce energy-efficiency measures to insulate people's homes and to get people back to work. They could release local authorities' capital receipts to allow them to build homes using the resources that they have accumulated.

To pay for these things, a Government could not go ahead with the plan to abolish stamp duty on shares—£1 billion would come to the Exchequer from that. Secondly, they could impose the windfall tax that we have proposed on the privatised utilities. Thirdly, they should bridge the gap in corporation tax receipts, of £1 billion. Fourthly, they should close down the business expansion scheme today and save millions of pounds before 31 December. That money currently gives top-rate taxpayers allowances for using repossessed homes as tax shelters to defray their tax bills. The Government could close the loophole in advanced corporation tax, which would raise large sums of money. I refer to enhanced share issues being granted instead of dividends.

That series of measures would raise hundreds of millions of pounds, and eventually billions. The Government could implement them to reduce the deficit and to deal with our problems of unemployment.

Given what has been said about the public spending reviews into which the Government have entered, is it now the Chancellor's policy to consider abolishing statutory sick pay contributions from the Government, thereby leaving employees at the mercy of their employers, afraid to be ill and eventually running the risk of being sacked simply for being ill? If that is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policy, how is it that he regards it as a higher priority than pursuing the offshore and onshore trusts which defray tax bills to the tune of millions by not paying a proper share of tax?

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman considering—the review has made this clear—the ultimate transferral of industrial injuries benefit to employers? Or will he face up to the fact that companies such as Hanson Trust pay only half their proper share of taxation, using offshore tax loopholes to avoid paying? In this way they have saved themselves millions of pounds over the past few years, and they continue to do so.

What exactly are the Chancellor's priorities? Is it the right hon. and learned Gentleman's priority to target the sick, invalids, the unemployed—or will he now target the tax avoiders and evaders who have been defraying their tax bills at the expense of us all?

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Having signed the European socialist manifesto, why will not the hon. Gentleman implement a mandatory 35-hour week?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman should do his homework. That is not in the manifesto. The Government, on the other hand, should be ashamed of not supporting the 48-hour week directive from Brussels. People are now back to having no wage protection and less and less protection at work.

I want to tell the Chancellor about the context in which he intends to formulate his Budget. No one is in any serious doubt that we are dealing with the problems of economic decline and social failure. A million children are being taught in classrooms built before the first world war. As a proportion of their age group, more young people are in higher education in Taiwan than in Britain. A third of our hospital wards were built in the days of the charity and voluntary hospitals. A million people live in slums. Rail investment is being slashed, and public investment in infrastructure is about to be cut again. The state of Britain, in short, is deteriorating because the Government do not believe that they have a responsibility to the community or to public services.

Yet everyone knows that measures could be taken immediately not only to create jobs but to improve public services and infrastructure. Before he took his job, the Chancellor said that the Government were in a dreadful hole. He said that they had no medium-term view; no agenda for two or three years ahead. He said that they had to come to an agreement about how to present such an agenda in a way that gave the Government's followers back a sense of purpose. Where is the Government's purpose? Where is the new agenda, apart from the rhetoric of "back to basics"? Where is the medium-term view?

Little wonder that, a few months later, when asked on 20 September whether the Government were still in a dreadful hole, the Chancellor said that they were. Since then, when has the dynamism and drive been shown? Where is the new energy, the new industrial policy that we need; where is the new deal for the unemployed? Have the Government dropped rail privatisation, or their proposals to extend VAT? The truth is that they have no long-term strategy, no real purpose, no medium-term or long-term view. There is no leadership, no new programme, in the Gracious Speech. There is no new purpose: for that, we will need a new Government.

4.47 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The first decision I had to take on the first day I took up my new office as Chancellor was to take absolutely no notice of any advice that I would get from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I intend to stick to that decision. It was extremely difficult to find any coherent advice in his speech today or any clues about what the Labour party's policy towards the problems that we face might be.

Given that the Opposition can choose the subject matter in our Queen's Speech debate, it was rather silly to choose a debate on the economy just five days before the Budget as there is no way a Chancellor or any other Minister can give the House any hints about what might or might not be in the Budget. It was silly also because some Oppositions might have been able to fill in the time by explaining what their own Budget propositions would be, by giving me advice, by setting out with clarity how the Labour party would grasp the present situation. We have just heard nothing of the kind. We have heard some good jokes, some bad jokes and material that was scratched about for in the most unlikely places.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline East leaves lying in front of him a most impressive pile of books. I was rather impressed by that when I saw it. I thought, "It is a pity that he has not given me notice of his authorities. He has been studying the way forward from our present position." I looked at them and could not make up my mind whether they were the House of Lords debates or whether they were statutes bound. In any event they are merely there to make it easier for him to read photostats of sales of raffle tickets in Hornchurch, which he was using as his principal authority to attack the Government.

As to what he said, as well as what he did not say, occasionally he touched on what he and his right hon. and hon. Friends in office might do if they were confronted by the current situation in the country. Every time he opened his mouth and went into one of those lists for which he is rightly renowned, every item in the list seemed to me to cost public money. It is difficult to keep a running score, with the hon. Gentleman's rapid fire delivery of great long lists of great measures that he would take. By forgoing tax and spending money, he had got through £12 billion by the end of his third sentence. From there on, I abandoned any attempt to keep pace with it.

When the hon. Gentleman gets up to speak on economic policy, he speaks like one of those till rolls coming out of a supermarket, with list upon list of high-spending commitments into which the Labour party would launch to tackle the economic problems of the day. He was given a further chance. My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) asked him an extremely relevant and pertinent question, but it was not a very difficult question. It was not a difficult question when it was followed up by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on behalf of the Liberal party.

Is the hon. Gentleman putting forward what he is proposing on the basis that he will increase spending or not, or that he will increase taxation or not? That is not a difficult question, I would have thought, for a shadow Chancellor who might have been thinking of his own shadow Budget, five days before the Budget. A crowded House heard that he was utterly incapable of giving an answer to that question, except that he went rattling off again, shortly thereafter, into a list of measures which began to include public spending commitments again.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): As to simple questions and till rolls, who created the £50 billion deficit that confronts us?

Mr. Clarke: Every country in the developed world is in recession—*[Interruption.]* If one looks through the western developed economies—the United States, Germany, France, Italy, to the United Kingdom—one finds that a protracted recession has cut Government revenues, increased Government expenditure and caused a problem of public sector borrowing which all Governments in the developed world are having to tackle. Apparently, if we had a Labour Government it would be tackled by £12 billion worth of extra public spending by the end of the third sentence of the Chancellor's Budget speech.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will give way as generously as the hon. Gentleman did if I am allowed to make a little more progress.

Let me just turn to the paucity of any response to that. It is no good trying to pretend that a £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement is not relevant to the view that the principal Opposition party has to take about our present position. *[Interruption.]* It is no good laughing at it when it is mentioned, or pretending that if we had a Labour Government in the European Union we somehow would not confront the problem which all the other member states are confronting and all are having to tackle.

It is not good enough to come back with answers based on photostats of election addresses in Dudley and the sort of tatty material that the hon. Gentleman used and, in the middle of what could have been a statesmanlike shadow Budget, actually to resort to making criticisms about our party elections, to which I personally am not party—I do not have a vote. The hon. Gentleman treads on some delicate ground. We have not had our party elections yet. We know that the Labour party has had party elections. It is clear that, to get northern and Scottish members of the Labour movement to vote for women, one has to give them no choice. That is what was revealed the last time they had internal party elections. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I am finding it very difficult to hear what the Chancellor has to say and I am sure that many other people are trying to do so. The House must now settle down. Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Clarke: Let me move on to the subject matter of the debate. Having just dealt with the one point that was trying to be made out of those election addresses for Dudley, the question of where taxation plays a part in where we are now, the hon. Gentleman plainly retreads the same speech when he comes here. Much of it he must have delivered on the stump of the last election, and much of it after the last election, trying to re-fight the last election. He had a shadow Budget at the last election—or, more to the point, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had a shadow Budget.

Under that Budget, every person earning £25,000 a year in this country would have paid £2,050 more a year in taxation. The reason was that the Labour party was fighting

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the last election on the basis of hugely expensive spending promises—promises about pensions and about child benefit—all of which were designed to win votes. I will not re-fight the last election beyond that, but it is time the Labour party discovered what its policy is, addressed the issues which confront the nation and stopped trying to re-fight the last election on the basis of total mythology about the respective spending plans of both parties and the taxation consequences which might have followed its being elected.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will turn next to the current economic situation, but first I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer accept that if he had to re-fight the last general election, in view of what has happened since, the Conservative party would be destroyed? What other word would he use to describe a party which says during an election campaign that it will not extend VAT and that it will not increase national insurance contributions, and then after the general election does precisely that? What word would he use to describe such a party?

Mr. Clarke: If we fought the last election against a Labour party with the high-spending and high-taxing manifesto that it has now scrapped and tried to forget, we would win again. We would win more forcefully when people could see the real economic problems that confront the country. We have not broken any of our manifesto commitments in the last election, and it is quite wrong to go scratching around for cyclostat material from candidates in the black country to try to prove the contrary.

Mr. Gordon Brown *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will give way, but the hon. Gentleman, having heard that I intend to move on to the present economic situation, is obviously now trying to prevent me getting there.

Mr. Brown: The difference between us and the Conservatives at the last election is that we told the truth and they did not. Will the Chancellor now tell the public: does he accept that the Conservatives promised not to increase taxes, and will he apologise for breaking those promises?

Mr. Clarke: We gave no commitment whatever to say that we would never increase taxation. It is descending —as the hon. Gentleman did in his speech—to the most puerile politics to claim that the Conservative party has ever said that in no Budget, at no time, will we ever increase any taxation. We have not said that. It is quite clear to anyone who objectively studies the present position, let alone the past position, of the political parties that in any circumstances a Conservative Government would have lower taxation than a Labour Government would have, tackling the same position, precisely because, every time they confront even a £50 billion borrowing requirement, Labour Front-Bench Members are quite incapable of stopping themselves just spending public money as the answer to every question.

Let me move on——

Mr. Brown: On that question, so that we can clear it up, the Prime Minister was asked whether he gave the same pledge that Mrs. Thatcher did in 1987:

"that you will not extend the scope of VAT to children's clothes, gas and electricity and food?"

The Prime Minister replied:

"I have made the pledge in the past. I have made it clear."

Is that not the breaking of promises?

Mr. Clarke: During the campaign, the Labour party made the strong assertion that it had costed our programme and we would have to raise the basic rate of VAT. That was spurious then and it continues to be spurious. I advise the hon. Gentleman to move on and to think about policy. He should stop fighting the last election because Labour lost it fairly and squarely. Indeed, it deserved to lose it because, while our aim was to come out of recession, Labour made hugely expensive promises that would have meant huge increases in taxation. It is obvious that, even now, it is still not prepared to forswear those increases.

Let us now move on to deal with something with which, to my astonishment, the hon. Gentleman did not deal—Britiain's current economic position. He did not deal with that because it is now much more encouraging than in any other major economy in the European Union. I have been in opposition; I am one of those veteran Members who recalls the time when the Conservative party was in opposition. I understand the difficulty of having an Opposition day to debate the economy at a time when it is clearly recovering and getting better—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members are expressing disbelief.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): At the Engineering Employers Federation briefing in October, which I attended, its director said that the upturn was over. He said that it would be funny if it were not so serious, but that it was serious and not very funny. A few days later, he was then mysteriously asked to resign. Is the Chancellor not willing to face the fact that people in manufacturing do not think that there is an upturn? Indeed, they think that there is a downturn.

Mr. Clarke: No one could accuse me of over-selling the present recovery. I agree with the sensible prevailing view that there is a recovery, but that it is fragile and needs to be stronger. If the leader of the EEF and the hon. Gentleman both believe that the recovery is over, it is my opinion that they are talking nonsense. Indeed, I do not know whether the EEF has been quoted accurately.

I shall quote an unlikely source, the editor of *The Sunday Times*—*[Interruption.]* Andrew Neil is an old friend of mine, but he and I are hardly in political agreement on a large number of issues. However, he pointed out this week:

"Britain stands on the brink of a new era of growth and prosperity, built on a competitive exchange rate, the supply side reforms of the 1980s and the fact that alone in Europe, managers and workers here have grasped the realities of economic survival of the 1990s and beyond."

Let us examine what reality lies behind that. Unemployment has fallen by almost 140,000 since January. It has fallen in seven of the past nine months. That is not happening anywhere else in Europe. It is happening in Britain only because we have a more flexible labour market than existed before the Government came to power. That is why there is increased employment and falling unemployment so early in the recovery.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my right hon. and learned Friend rejoice in the fact that the latest fall in unemployment, which was much larger than expected, will save the Government £180 million a year in unemployment benefit—not to mention all the tax that those affected will now be paying?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. One of the principal reasons, although not the only reason, why we have such a large borrowing requirement is that recession reduces the take from corporation tax, income tax and other revenue, while putting up expenditure—in particular, on unemployment. One way in which a recovery can be strengthened is that, with the falls in unemployment currently being achieved in Britain, forecast expenditure on unemployment will drop and we shall move into the early stages of what could become a virtuous cycle—if we behave sensibly, which is more than we can expect from the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not mention inflation. In his torrent of words, "inflation" did not cross his lips. Inflation has been below 2 per cent. in each of the past 10 months—something which had not happened since 1960. It has remained below the European average every month since August 1991. This month, headline inflation stands at the spectacularly low figure of 1·4 per cent. There are some good reasons for that. Pay is now under control and whole economy unit wage costs are down 1 per cent. in the year ending the second quarter of 1993. That is the largest fall since records began in 1960. Despite low inflation, however, consumer spending is rising. Retail sales are at record levels, even higher than at the top of the cycle when we last had good times. Car sales in October were up 17 per cent. on a year earlier.

It is absolutely no good the Opposition dismissing all that. They cannot ignore the fact that, if we had taken various items of their advice, it is highly unlikely that the British recovery, which puts us ahead of the field in coming out of recession, would have occurred or been maintained.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the award that he received yesterday. Will he add to the catalogue of reasons why the recovery is getting better the fact that Britain has left the exchange rate mechanism? In the light of remarks that he made—I hope off the cuff—at a news conference at the Confederation of British Industry, will he make it crystal clear that his enthusiasm for European economic and monetary union—and, by implication, the ERM—is not something in which he really believes? If we were to return to the ERM, we would lose all the benefits that he has just described.

Mr. Clarke: With respect to my hon. Friend, the argument that the recovery started because we left the ERM is simply mythology. It is clear that the recovery that we are now enjoying began 18 months ago, a long time before Britain left the ERM. One reason why we are enjoying such a strong recovery and why we have done well both before and after leaving the ERM is our great success in bringing down inflation and lowering interest rates. When we lost the discipline of the ERM, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) wisely replaced it with the discipline and the monetary policy that we are now imposing upon ourselves. Successive reductions in inflation have helped.

What I have just described has preserved our competitive position. The changed climate in this country means that although we have had a devaluation of the currency and reductions in both inflation and interest rates, we have also had good management, successful control of costs and, in particular, unit wage costs being kept down so that Britain has been able to keep its competitive edge. All of that is apparent in a variety of other areas, although listening to the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East we would never know that.

Industry is doing better despite an exceptionally difficult exporting climate in our principal markets within the European Union. Export volumes are well up and our exporters have done especially well in non-European markets. Our manufacturing output and industrial production are up and the productivity record this year is extremely good. Our industrial relations remain good, with industrial disputes at their lowest level since records began.

There is also the monetary position. I have said that I always ignore—although, of course, I listen to it with respect—the advice of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. His main advice, day in and day out, is to reduce interest rates. Day in and day out, he advised each of my predecessors to reduce interest rates. I do not know whether he would ever raise interest rates in any circumstances, but it seems unlikely. Even when inflation was running at 8 per cent. three years ago, he wanted to reduce interest rates. It is his automatic approach to life.

I did not take the hon. Gentleman's advice and, consequently, monetary conditions in Britain have enabled me to reduce interest rates to the lowest level in the European Union. Taking all the available factors into account and paying regard to the monetary policy set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames, which I have followed, I was able to lower interest rates to 5·5 per cent. That was announced by the Governor of the Bank of England on Tuesday. It is the lowest rate of interest since 1977.

When interest rate cuts since October 1990 are passed on, they will reduce the interest bill of companies in the country by almost £12 billion a year and it will reduce the monthly payments of the average mortgage payer by £170 a month. Sound money is worth real money to real people. The effect of what we have been able to do has been to stimulate the recovery to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) referred.

Having listened to two minutes of the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, it is obvious that none of that would have been achieved if we had a reckless, high-spending, spending one's way out of trouble, high-taxation Government in power with Labour politicians who do not even mention the word "inflation" in any dissertation that they give on economic policy.

Mr. Beith: Why does not the Chancellor seize the opportunity to lock in that monetary discipline and make himself the first Chancellor to recognise the merits of an independent central bank while still in office, rather than waiting until he has left it?

Mr. Clarke: My joke the other day may have been misunderstood. There are some financial journalists in front of whom one should never make jokes. I do not wish to break the tradition of my predecessors by pronouncing on that subject while in office. I have made it clear—I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will support me on the point

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—that decisions on interest rates are made on the grounds of monetary policy in conjunction with the Governor of the Bank of England, who now handles the operational end of those activities, precisely on the basis that we have set out.

We considered broad money, narrow money, asset values and exchange rate activity before I decided that we could reduce interest rates by 0·5 per cent. in the past week. I made that announcement nine days before the Budget precisely because I did not wish anyone to think that the judgment of interest rates was affected by my equivalent of the knockabout political rubbish that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. It is a step in the direction taken by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but I warn him that there are much bigger and more serious matters of parliamentary accountability to be addressed before anybody makes a decision one way or another about the independence of a central bank.

I remind the Opposition of our more serious economic achievements, on which everybody in the House should be concentrating on building. We are especially keen in the area of the manufacturing industrial base. At the moment, as we sustain the recovery, our performance in that area is better than any of our major competitors. Over the past year, industrial production fell by nearly 2 per cent. in Italy, by 3 per cent. in France, by 4 per cent. in Japan and by 7 per cent. in Germany, but in the United Kingdom it rose by almost 3 per cent.

Our performance coming out of the recession is based on many things that the Government have done over the past 14 years and it is plainly necessary to keep to the instinctual policies of the Conservative party if we are to keep that good comparative performance. Having listened to today's debate, nobody in their right mind would contemplate the reckless step of putting the Labour party back into any kind of responsible office dealing with such an important and delicate situation as the revival of our industrial economy.

Hon. Members: Try it.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that leaving the exchange rate mechanism has had an effect on the recovery and, if so, has that effect been beneficial or negative? Given the lessons that we have learnt since leaving the ERM and the occurrence of other events in Europe, would my right hon. and learned Friend say how those lessons will affect rejoining the ERM and, if we are to rejoin it, what benefits shall we receive from doing so?

Mr. Clarke: Leaving the ERM has had some beneficial effects, although I do not agree with the proposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford that the recovery somehow started when or because we left it. We were driven out and the whole mechanism was given wider bands 12 months later because of the totally different conditions that prevailed in Germany compared with those in the rest of the Community.

I will concede to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), with whom I have had many interesting debates on the European question, that those differing circumstances in Germany and the wise policies that were being pursued by the Bundesbank to deal with the German domestic conditions were imposing higher interest rates on the United Kingdom, France and other western European countries than our monetary conditions could justify. That began in the summer before we were driven out of the ERM and had a damaging effect on the performance of our economy.

When we left the ERM, it would have been disastrous if our monetary policy were decided by a seat-of-the-pants response, in response to newspaper headlines or if it were in the hands of anybody like the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East who always wants to lower interest rates. That is why finding ourselves outside the ERM, which I have always supported because I thought that it was a discipline for monetary policy in the country that helped us to get inflation and interest rates down, it was right of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) rapidly to put in place a British domestic monetary framework by which we have successfully proceeded.

When I take part in European discussions now, I say that it is wrong to go back to get fresh blueprints for fresh versions of the ERM out of the drawer since those events have taken place. I still believe in exchange rate stability. That is best when pursued by convergence and sensible economic policies that produce similar economic circumstances in the different member states, as we are now doing.

I am surprised that I keep being asked about an aim of economic and monetary union. I made my first speech in the House in favour of it in 1971 or 1972 and have not changed my views. I have always thought, as have the Government, that the timetable for economic and monetary union set out in the Maastricht treaty was nonsense. That is now plain and we should not proceed on any automatic timetable and I do not know when we will ever get back into any process of that kind. *[Interruption.]* There has to be somebody in the House who puts an interesting question.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: With respect. I am delighted to see one of the intellectual heavyweights of the Labour party coming to the fore. I remember the hon. Gentleman putting forward his own shadow budget many years ago—and the last time he was totally out of sympathy with his own Front Bench. Now, the Opposition Front Bench could not possibly put together a shadow budget, so I am delighted to hear the authentic voice of the Labour movement.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Chancellor tell us where is the real economic recovery? In the real world, there are 4 million without jobs. The Government have all but closed down the shipbuilding industry and they are shutting pits every week. People are lying in the streets. Old-age pensioners are dying of hypothermia and yet the Government are proposing to tax them more heavily. A Chancellor of the Exchequer in the real world should be ensuring that the £5·2 billion that has been handed out in tax cuts to the richest 5 per cent. since 1988 should be clawed back and used to build houses for pensioners, to rebuild the welfare state and to put people back to work. That is the real world.

Mr. Clarke: The real world is similar to that to which the hon. Gentleman refers, although he increases the figures. Of course, he is absolutely right to say that we are still facing the problem of there being far too many people

unemployed. I point out the good news that unemployment is now coming down. It is also true that we must achieve a higher industrial production, I point out that it is rising, unlike any other G7 country. I also appreciate that we must ensure that the wealth-creating economy produces wealth so that we can tackle some of the social problems that we face.

We sharply clash, however, on the claim that the Government have done nothing to strengthen the welfare state and the social security system over the past 14 years. I strongly refute that. I am explaining the background against which I shall deliver a constructive Budget next Tuesday that will nurture what I have been describing.

I have not said that there is no problem out there and that everything has recovered. We all meet business men and people working in industry who know that conditions at the moment are very difficult. However, we should not react to that in this country by pretending that there are no first signs of good news and that no recovery is taking place. This country's performance is better than that of our competitors. The circumstances here are more encouraging than those of our competitors. We need a view far more responsible than the view coming from either branch of the Labour movement if we are to move forward from here as we wish.

As I cannot speak about my Budget, I shall continue to speak about the suggestions thrown out to me by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. He could not answer the question about the Rio targets. He said that of course he was against VAT on fuel. He did not bother to listen to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) or to the quotations that my hon. Friend used, which were very pertinent. He asked why, when the Labour party committed itself at the general election to not putting VAT on exempt and zero-rated goods, it did not mention domestic fuel. Did the Labour party have the kind of thoughts that were also contained in Liberal Democrat policy documents?

Labour's environment spokesman spoke about hitting the Rio targets by a combination of tax and other measures. What taxes, pray, did Labour have in mind for hitting those environmental targets, if not taxes on the fuels which cause the emissions? *[Interruption.]* It is not Labour Front-Bench Members who stir there. I debated against a Labour environment spokesman recently. Labour environment spokemen take to the hills when we tax them on such a question and when we approach them about a tax which still has the support of Friends of the Earth, but which does not have the support of environment spokesmen from the great Opposition parties, who plainly hinted at exactly what we are doing.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East criticised my views on the extent of VAT. I have no idea what the views of the Labour party are on the extent of VAT. My views, as slightly misquoted by the hon. Gentleman, sound like the views of Lord Desai, the Labour spokesman in the House of Lords. The poor chap found himself sacked for saying that we should extend the base of VAT. Never mind, Labour did not really know. He was put back on the Front Bench because the official spokesman for the Labour party does not have to have a view on the extension of VAT. We cannot tie down the Labour party on that or on anything else.

When asked about tax, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has one response—loopholes. I hope that he does not try to pay his personal bills with such loopholes. He thinks that loopholes would raise billions of pounds to pay for everything he promises. He tries to break down his loopholes which, he claimed at one time, would raise £10 billion. Every Budget we present keeps up with the tax avoidance industry and tries to close loopholes, year in and year out under every Government. Every Chancellor tries to do that.

Let us look at the £10 billion referred to by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. Some £2 billion of it is what he calls underpayment of corporation tax. What he means is that he intends to put up corporation tax on British business by £2 billion. When one searches the Labour party's policy documents, which are not lying in front of us, one finds that Labour still believes in demand management, although it does not explain how it would operate that. Labour uses phrases such as:

"The public sector must become the engine of growth."

There is no explanation of what that means. Earlier this year, the Opposition spokesmen for education and for employment committed the party to the renationalisation of gas, water and electricity—the great public utilities.

We know that Labour talks about radical changes in the City. One of the novel ideas for the Bank of England, of all institutions—it will never be independent under a Labour Government—is that it should promote industrial investment. It is strange for a Labour Government to channel their intervention through a central bank into direct investment in industry.

Labour is getting close to the Liberal Democrats. I must pardon the Liberal Democrats in some respects, because they gave us their Budget earlier today. We listened to the leader of the Labour party talking to the Trades Union Congress and one could imagine that one was listening to a totally different man from the leader of the Labour party who talked to the Confederation of British Industry. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is back on the cocktail circuit. He talked about his friendship for business, but when he talked earlier to the TUC, he talked about minimum wages, about statutory trade union recognition and about putting the old inflexibilities back into our labour market—the things from which we should now be getting away.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Does the Chancellor accept that, because so many lies were told by the Tory party to get it into power, the habit of telling lies has caught on and the Tory party is now incapable of telling the truth but continues to tell a pack of lies?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) gets very exicted. He did not specify which of my various descriptions did not attach accurately to his party or to his party leader.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will not give way again. I can give the hon. Gentleman chapter and verse for my quotations from the words of the Labour spokesmen for education and for employment. I looked them up before I quoted them. Time does not permit me to go on to explore the previous occasion when it might have been possible to find out what the economic policy of the Labour party was.

The European socialist manifesto, to which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East signed up last week, makes the position clear. It is said that the commitment to a 35-hour week is not in the manifesto—[HON. MEMBERS: "Read it out."] The manifesto is said not

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to have a commitment, although the whole tone of the document favours high spending. The manifesto is committed to the social chapter and to costs on employers. It uses the rather telling phrase that the principle of free trade should not interfere with social standards in Europe. I thought that that was a rather dangerous retreat from previous policy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Read it out."]

All right. I was doing the House a kindness by saying that I did not have time to go into the European manifesto. Opposition Members can stop smiling; I have found the relevant passage. I quote:

"The principles of Free Trade must not be allowed to undermine social standards in Europe."

That is a phrase of which Ross Perot or Mr. Chirac could be proud. Labour has joined the old protectionist tendency in western Europe although the general agreement on tariffs and trade is one of the most vital things affecting our well-being between now and the end of the century.

I do not have time to tax Labour about the European recovery fund, to which it has signed up and to which it keeps referring. That fund is no less than a £77 billion recovery fund—a Euro-megaversion of the Labour party's approach to all such problems.

I have described the present economic situation. As the House knows and as the Opposition knew when they tabled the amendment, that situation must be addressed in next Tuesday's Budget. I am working on my Budget speech and I strongly advise the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East to go away and to work again on his. He cannot give another retread of the speech he has just used.

The principles that we shall adopt—the principles that, in Europe and in this country, will take us back to economic health—are, first, the principles of free trade, of beating the single market in Europe, of getting rid of state aids in Europe, of having a competition policy and of keeping to budget disciplines in our national economies and in Europe as well.

We must aim at conditions of low inflation and at achieving healthy public finances. We must seek to get stable exchange rates based on sensible, national economic policies which produce the right conditions. We must tackle the problem of the competitiveness of our economy, both in the short term and in the long term. That is what the Government will continue to do and part of that will be the Budget measures I shall announce next Tuesday. I shall come back next Tuesday completely untroubled by the prospect of the Opposition having any worthwhile or sensible economic ideas in their head.

5.29 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Chancellor of the Exchequer certainly put on a good turn this afternoon. He is right to pick out the areas in which the economy is showing some long overdue signs of improvement, and to concede that the recovery is very fragile and that serious problems still need to be addressed. I shall argue later why I do not think that the Government have addressed those problems satisfactorily.

I advise the Chancellor that he should give his driver the night off and go home on the London underground—if he can get home on the London underground. He will then experience some of the problems that one of a number of public assets up and down the country are having. Those assets are in a desperate state and in urgent need of new investment and action. The Chancellor will know what happened a couple of days ago when the underground system was almost completely closed down.

Construction work to rebuild our public transport system is clearly required, and is one of the ways in which the Government can accelerate recovery. If the recovery is not accelerated to a higher level than the Government have forecast, we will not deal with the deficit that the Chancellor has described.

The Gracious Speech said that the Government would "bring the Budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term."

That is a cunning rephrasing of what appeared in the Gracious Speech more than 18 months ago at the beginning of the Session that has just ended. The Gracious Speech at that time said:

"They will balance the Budget over the medium term."

Now we are only going to bring it back towards balance—and not very far towards balance, on the Government's own projections.

I do not know what the Government mean by the medium term, but it is not the next three years or five years if growth is at forecast levels of about 2·75 per cent. Growth will have to be significantly above that level—and it certainly ought to be—if we are to get the deficit down.

We have not only a public sector borrowing requirement, a public sector deficit, but a trade deficit on current account. The most recent figures do not offer a clear guide to the seriousness of that problem, but everybody acknowledges that it is a serious problem. It is one that has persisted even in times of recession. There is an extraordinary tendency in Britain to buy large amounts of consumer goods from abroad, even in times of recession.

We also have the investment deficit that I referred to a moment ago—in the London underground system, in many parts of British Rail, such as the west coast main line, in housing, in schools and in hospitals. In all those areas, investment is needed.

Our public sector net worth is steadily declining—public wealth minus public sector debt—and it will be at zero by 1998 from more than 100 per cent. of GDP in the 1980s. An item appeared recently in the Lloyd's Bank review which said:

"the current mix of capital spending and borrowing implies a gradual reduction in the net worth of the public sector, i.e. a declining bequest of net public sector assets to future generations. We are consuming far more public goods than we are paying for in taxes."

I hope that the Chancellor has noted the comments of the chairman of Ford of Europe, who, in addition to giving advice about the cutting of interest rates, said that the British Government should

"spend much, much more on infrastructure and its education and training . . . Britain needs its people educated, motivated and trained to compete at world level."

Indeed it does, but we cannot get those things without paying for them.

I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), because I do not believe that his package of loopholes stands up to examination as a basis for paying for some of the things that he also agrees are necessary for our country.

If we look at his package in detail, we find that the £10 billion is a two-year, not a one-year, figure. As the Chancellor has pointed out, it involves trying to get a lot of corporation tax out of companies that lost significant amounts of money in the recession. At best we might get £1 billion, or a little more, out of it, but certainly not £10

billion in one year. We will not get enough to meet the very important and urgent requirements of the public sector.

Consideration of the Budget has been dominated by the size of the deficit. The Government helped to create that deficit and are now in danger of making it worse by a panic reaction in the Budget. There is no way that the deficit can be reduced to reasonable proportions without economic recovery; there is no way that by trimming a bit of capital spending here and current spending there we can achieve a reduction in the deficit of £50 billion and get it right down towards balance. When we talk about getting the deficit down towards balance, we mean a deficit that can be measured in single figures, or at least not much above £10 billion.

We will not get anywhere near that figure by the Chancellor making the kind of public expenditure cuts that will be publicly acceptable—even within his own party, let alone in the country as a whole. If he makes significant cuts in capital expenditure, he will put more people out of work, increase the money spent on benefit and cut his tax revenues. If he cuts welfare benefits, he will reduce the spending power of the poorest. They are the people most likely to spend every penny that they get because of their desperate need to pay for the basic essentials of life.

We have to put people back to work. In order to do that, it is necessary to invest money in the renewal of the public assets which have been so badly neglected. Now is the best time to do that. We will currently get the best deal and best prices possible from the construction industry—an industry which, as the Chancellor has admitted, is still not feeling the effects of the recovery.

One of the classic things that we do in this country is wait until we have boom conditions, and then say that we can now afford to improve our schools and hospitals, and to invest in the public sector. We do that when to do so is to worsen the problems of scarcity, to pile on inflation and to push up wage pressure in these crucial industries. We should do that when the industry needs the work, the country needs the assets and the prices are at their most favourable. The best time to do that is in a recession or when we are trying to get out of a recession, which is what we are currently doing.

I urge the Government not to cut capital expenditure in the Budget but to increase expenditure on the public transport system and on those parts of the road programme that are environmentally sensible. That programme could be brought forward and started now. That would help industry to get its goods to markets. It is ludicrous that, at a time when access to markets is crucial to our industries, we are so far behind in getting direct access to the channel tunnel.

We should release council house receipts for house building and housing renovation. That would deal with the desperate problems of housing that the private sector is not able to meet. We should increase rather than cut the grants to housing associations that are engaged in this very important social housing.

Another way, which does not cost money—on the contrary, it brings in money—by which the Government could give a significant boost to the housing market is to learn from the mistake of the former right hon. Member for Blaby, the noble Lord Lawson. Among many other mistakes that he made at the same time, he announced a change in mortgage interest tax relief, which encouraged people to rush out and take on mortgages at the height of the housing market. That pushed the housing market further forward and generated some of the boom conditions that have led to the depth of the current recession.

The current circumstances, with the housing market in serious difficulty, are the right circumstances in which to announce a change in mortgage tax relief at some date in the future, which I suggest should be 1 January 1995. It would not be a change that affected existing borrowers. The sort of change that the Government propose to make will mean that from 1 April existing borrowers will pay more because their tax relief will be reduced to the 20 per cent. level. The change that we suggest would provide that new mortgages after that date would not attract tax relief, but mortgages previously taken out would; otherwise, people would be locked into their properties. They will have to be able to carry their tax relief if they buy another house.

I do not think there is any logical defence in principle for taking money from the not very well-off taxpayers and giving it to far better-off taxpayers, who are able to use the maximum relief and have the income with which to do it.

The only defence for keeping that system is that it is difficult to get right the process of change and to ensure that people who made commitments on the basis of what they could afford when they took out a mortgage do not suffer. Such people have suffered a great deal during the period of rising interest rates.

It must be done in a way which does not create problems in the housing market. The change I suggest would actually help the housing market by stimulating it at a time when it needs to be stimulated. It is a measure which, over the longer term, would reduce deficits. It would not bring in significant revenue initially, but as the years go by it would, and to a very considerable extent.

As I said earlier, it is impossible to achieve some of what I believe is necessary without paying for it. I believe that tax increases are needed to finance extremely important measures. At the time of the general election, we said that we would be prepared to put a penny on the standard rate of income tax to fund drastic improvements in education. We stand by that commitment, and we would fulfil it if we were presenting our Budget now. We would also increase the higher rate, although we would also raise the threshold, so that those on the highest incomes made a greater contribution to the handling of society's problems.

Incidentally, that suggestion has been backed by a number of Conservative Back Benchers. They have said that, in the current circumstances, those who have benefited most—the top earners—should surely be willing, as I think many are, to contribute more to extricating the country from its present difficulties. I expected to hear that view from Labour Members as well, but I have not heard it in the debate so far; it has been expressed mainly by Conservative Back Benchers and members of my party.

We believe that everyone who pays taxes should contribute to our education commitments through the penny on income tax, but that only those earning over £27,200 a year should finance other changes through the increase in the higher rate. We think that such measures are necessary—and they can be backed by measures to tackle waste, of which there is plenty. The separate administration of income tax and national insurance is extremely wasteful,

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particularly for Government but also for business. The two systems could be brought together: although complicated further measures would be needed, the end result would be a much more economical arrangement.

As the National Audit Office has demonstrated, there is a tremendous amount of waste in the social security system. People are overpaid, and very large sums are involved. There are enormously wasteful Government-funded advertising campaigns. Huge departmental entertainment expenditures have come to light in recent months. Then there are policy reversals such as the poll tax mess, as well as unclaimed support from European funds for measures that we could be introducing in this country and many other examples of waste. I do not think, however, that measures to deal with waste would solve all the problems. We must tell people honestly that some things need to be done, and that they must be paid for.

I believe that we must give at least some interim help to pensioners, who have fared very badly in the past few years. We would cost into our programme an immediate £2 increase over and above the price-related increase, and entirely separate from compensation for the imposition of VAT on fuel. In fact, we would not proceed with that; we consider it a particularly harsh measure, which, moreover, is not tailored to bring about changes in the amount of fuel that is used. It is not backed by measures to enable people to insulate their homes, which would have offset the cost of the tax.

The Chancellor should not forget charities or the overseas aid budget, which is now under pressure as a result of the desperate situation in sub-Saharan Africa. It would be possible to provide at least a small measure of help, even within the current constraints.

I told the Chancellor in an earlier intervention that I thought the time had come to lock in the monetary discipline against which any expansionary measures such as these need to be set. He may wish to claim some credit for having managed monetary policy cautiously over a relatively short period, but I do not share his confidence in all the members of his own party—let alone members of the official Opposition—in regard to the way in which other Chancellors might conduct monetary policy. I certainly do not believe that the market is entirely free of the belief that even he might, in some circumstances, press for or pursue an interest-rate decision whose timing was related to powerful political pressures, rather than to the longer-term objective of price stability.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The right hon. Gentleman said that he did not believe that the imposition of VAT on energy had had the impact that it should have had. The Liberal Democrats' document "Costing the Earth" states clearly:

"The impact on consumers of energy taxes must also be recognised."

In its 1992 election manifesto, the party said equally clearly that it would

"support a Community-wide energy tax on all energy sources."

Why is that?

Mr. Beith: That was and is our policy. The hon. Gentleman must have missed several earlier debates in which his hon. Friends have read exactly the same passage to me, and have secured exactly the same answer.

What is so crazy is the imposition of VAT, which does not cover the whole area of energy at the generation end, but applies directly to consumers, on such a scale and with so little regard for their circumstances that there is no reasonable way in which they can adjust to it. Indeed, some of the biggest adjustments that could be made to reduce energy emissions would be made not in the domestic sector, but in the transport sector. Those least able to adjust are pensioners confronted with a rate of first 8 per cent. and then 17·5 per cent., who do not even own their houses and have not the means to insulate those houses effectively.

An energy tax should not be a revenue-raising measure, as the Government's VAT is; it should be a behaviour-changing measure, preceded by provisions enabling people to insulate their houses, thus reducing rather than increasing their net gas and electricity bills. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) has heard that argument several times before. If he cannot understand it now, I think that he is being a little slow.

The Government must also consider smaller business. It is clear that the business expansion scheme, and the various other measures that have been tried, have not yet solved the problem of conveying venture capital effectively to small firms. Even the capital allowances that came to an end a month ago had a disappointing effect on investment. The Government should not give up the search for measures to help match venture capital, on sensible terms, with the businesses that can make use of it.

By "sensible terms", I mean a greater dependence on long-term interest rates, rather than the short-term rates that have bedevilled small businesses and driven so many of them to the wall during the recession. At present many exist on overdrafts and other forms of finance that are peculiarly vulnerable to interest-rate changes. Nevertheless, I hope that a longer-term policy of consistently lower rates will be possible.

I am arguing for a Budget for recovery. I do not believe that the Gracious Speech gives us any hope that the recovery will be the basis of the Chancellor's Budget; I fear that the Government will be panicked by the size of the deficit into introducing measures that will not help to lower that deficit, and may even make it worse. I want expansion that we know can feed back in tax paid by people who are back in work, benefits that those people no longer require and assets that will equip industry to compete more successfully in the future. I ask the Government to engage in longer-term investment in education, which I believe is essential.

The Budget will be viewed against the background of a Gracious Speech that is in large part devoted to undoing the Government's past mistakes in regard to the economy and law and order. I am told that they have introduced more than 60 pieces of law-and-order legislation, but they have found it necessary to devote a quarter or a third of the legislative programme to law and order because they have got so much wrong in the past.

This is a speech presented by a Government dedicated to the centralisation of power, desperate to centralise control of the police and magistrates courts; a Government who have opened up a whole system of appointed bodies —quangos to whom they appoint their friends to control more and more of people's everyday life; a Government hopelessly divided on the fundamental question of Britain's future in Europe.

Earlier, the Chancellor rightly remarked on the diffrence between the flavour of what the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said to the TUC conference and what he told the CBI. There was an equally marked difference between the tone of Ministers' speeches to the Conservative party conference and their speeches to the CBI conference. One would hardly think that they came from the same Government —in some instances, indeed, the same Ministers were involved. The tone was entirely different, because the Government are deeply divided on an issue that is fundamental to our future.

We certainly do not wish to give our support to such a Gracious Speech. We invite the House to support our amendment, by which means we seek to express our belief that the country could be run very much better.

5.49 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Today's debate gives us a rare opportunity to take a broad view and to give our own views of which direction the Government should take. I hope, therefore, that the House will forgive me if I do not confine myself to speaking solely about economic matters.

The Queen's Speech is addressed to Parliament assembled of the United Kingdom and ends with the words:

"I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels."

That neatly encapsulates in a few words what a Conservative Government are elected to defend—the traditions of monarchy, the supremacy of Parliament, the unity of the realm, including Northern Ireland, and the moral authority of the churches. All four are under threat as never before, despite, or perhaps because of, unprecedented prosperity and materialism. However, all four need to be defended by Tories, even, sometimes, from themselves.

It is up to us to defend the monarchy as a sacerdotal symbol of national unity and shared history and tradition. It is up to us to ensure that the supremacy of Parliament, so hard won by the Bill of Rights and civil war, cannot be the plaything of diplomacy or party management; it is probably our greatest gift to world civilisation. It is the nearest thing to an absolute in politics.

We must retain a Union based on consent. Two truths are self-evident in the argument on the Union. Only the people of Northern Ireland can decide, and only they should be allowed to run their own affairs. That logic can produce only one result—a free Parliament or assembly for Northern Ireland. A deal cannot be brokered in Dublin or London—only in Derry and Belfast. Self-government will bring responsibility; with responsibility will come compromise; with compromise will come settlement.

We must maintain the moral authority of the Christian churches not by preaching ethics as politicians—that is for the Churches—but by creating a social environment where Christian concepts of care for others by ourselves and our families, not by others and certainly not by the state, are the norm and where the material gains of capitalism are always balanced by the spiritual rewards of service. Capitalism is not enough. Left to itself, it can degenerate into destructive materialism.

Such institutions are not swept aside in a moment. They are worn away by neglect. Can we, therefore, promise the House and our electorate that we shall never sleep on our watch?

The debate is an opportunity to reflect on the guiding lights for Conservatives that shine through the defence of the institutions I have mentioned. They are, first, the maintenance of national sovereignty that flows directly from the defence of the historical privileges of Parliament; secondly, the defence of the nation or its interests from external aggression and the preservation at home of freedom, under the law, from lawlessness; and, thirdly, the maintenance of sound finances—a balanced budget without increases in direct taxation.

Any Conservative Government or legislative programme of a Conservative Government is judged by those three yardsticks. The first reminds us that power does not derive from some supranational institution, treaty or solemn constitution, but from the consent of the people at general and local elections. Thus, the essential building block is the local community and not the European Community.

This year, we need to use the opportunity of the Boundaries Commission to break down the structures of government, remove distant layers in health care and local government and create unitary authorities based on whatever town, suburb, area or even large village that people relate to; we need enabling and not providing bodies, efficiently contracting out work on competitive tenders. As far as possible, they should be given such powers as they can finance from their own resources.

We need to reinvigorate the Government as a vehicle for furthering consumer and local choice at the expense of impersonal bureaucracies or even ideologies. For instance, it is fashionable to argue that the march towards a liberal market world trading system is unstoppable and that, inevitably, more and more power will be diverted from local communities and national Parliaments into the boardrooms of multinational companies and the councils of international trade negotiators. I disagree.

The people themselves will rise up against politicians who distance themselves from their needs. A parish council in Lincolnshire trying to achieve more control of its planning from a distant, bureaucratic council; a Nottingham miner operating a so-called uneconomic pit: further afield, a Neapolitan voter sickened by Mafia or city boss corruption; a farmer in the Auvergne trying to preserve his rural culture and employment; a steel worker in Pittsburgh threatened by cheap Mexican imports; or a fisherman in British Columbia rebelling against giving into to the distant Quebecois—they are all small and unfashionable people who are derided by the great and the cynical in their political and industrial elites, but their power is enormous. It is being heard with increasing force. It is a distant rumble, but it moves ever closer.

Before then, the grandiloquent posturings of world-weary statesmen in their council chambers will be seen as the mutterings of emperors without clothes. A new force is arising in Europe and the world. It is spurred by mass unemployment and it is protectionist and nationalistic.

Our duty is to acknowledge that force and to harness it into positive and creative channels—into a patriotism that is not fearful to fight for national self-interest, yet promotes free trade where it is fair, which is proud but does not dominate; that provides essential public services, but ensures that they are efficiently privately and competitively delivered to meet the needs of consumers and not the desires of producers.

If we become so concerned with cutting sophisticated deals in the conference chamber of NATO, the UN, the EC or GATT that we lose touch with our electorate, their pride

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and their prejudices, we will be swept away like the Canadian Conservatives or the French socialists. We have to remember and acknowledge that warning.

Nowhere is the gap between the leaders and the led diverging so widely as in the development of European co-operation. We must gain support by saying that the drive towards European unity of purpose is essentially a process of equal peoples, from time to time co-operating on certain issues, but always preserving the power to act unilaterally and to take back control over a certain issue.

Power and authority must flow up, not down. The essence of nationhood and Parliament is that, in theory, it is supreme under God. That is its magic and its imperative.

We can and must gain support by saying that the drive towards greater free trade which is sensible cannot be seen as an end in itself or an inflexible ideology, but as a sensible device by sovereign nations reducing for a time barriers to the creation of wealth where essential self-interest and strategic industries are not threatened.

It is absurd for us to argue that the small, traditional Japanese rice farmer should be destroyed by cheap American rice imports from California so that Detroit car workers are put out of work by imported Japanese cars. We can take the drive towards world free trade to ridiculous lengths.

The first guiding light is that nations should seek not to dominate but to co-operate, not to pool sovereign power and thereby surrender it, but temporarily to accommodate themselves to others.

It is permissible for Great Britain, as it has done for 400 years, to involve itself in continental politics and to preserve the balance of continental power—whether threatened by Philip II, Louis XIV or the Commission—and to promote trade. It is not permissible for one generation of parliamentarians to bind their successors or irrevocably reduce the sovereign power of a successor Parliament.

Against the institutional bedrocks of Conservatism, the monarchy, Parliament and the Church, the guiding light of the defence of the nation is complementary; is, indeed, essential.

The second guiding light is the defence of the citizen from external aggression and internal lawlessness. Yet in pursuit of cost cutting in the first, or liberal nostrums in the second, it is easy to lose sight of this essential light on the horizon to aim for.

The Queen's Speech recognises that, and that is to the good, but the public will view with well-founded cynicism anything that smacks of gimmickry in any Queen's Speech. That should remind us that consistency and action —even, sadly and inevitably, sometimes the wrong consistency and the wrong action—are better than inconsistency and inaction.

The jury is out on whether prison reforms or destroys, although it certainly deters and removes from society. It may be that the only sort of action that would really impress the public on law and order would be automatic custodial sentences for theft from private dwelling houses and violence against the individual.

Equally, we should not be defensive about law and order. Perhaps we should have more of a can-do attitude in crime prevention, whether by installing deadlocks or tracking devices in cars or greater security in the home. Such measures could make a dramatic difference.

Once we are sure of our institutional support and the guiding lights are clear, we should ask ourselves why we want to be in office and what we want to achieve. Physical works are invariably a greater monument than a wealth of legislation. That is a lesson that we should have learnt during the past 15 years.

One example is transport. We should be completing now, not in the next century, a new international railway station, preferably in east London, connected on a fast line to Dover. What a pity that we are consigning hundreds of thousands of people to dispiriting unemployment, dependent on benefits. Should we not be giving them proper training and community work in return for those benefits?

People do not expect simply speeches, treaties or slogans from their Government. Oppositions must content themselves with that. People want action, and Governments who fail to provide it invariably become Oppositions. Action this day should not mean action until some Back Bencher threatens to vote against it. It is better to fail honourably in the Division Lobby than to languish as a weathercock of newspaper editorials.

That sort of tough action applies to balancing the budget over the lifetime of this Parliament. We must do it and it must be done through cutting non-wealth-creating public spending. A Government who balance their budget exude confidence, responsibility and ability.

But that cannot be done by raising direct taxation. Quite apart from its effects on consumer confidence, it knocks away the very bridge that connects us straight to the hearts of our supporters which, sadly, in this real world, a bad world perhaps, follow closely on from their wallets. From now until eternity every Tory Chancellor should read George Bush's lips and remember.

That leaves the Chancellor between a rock and a hard place, and cutting public demand not directly linked to wealth creation is a hard place indeed, as my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary knows all too well. The only real opportunity lies in social security. That brings us up against our Christian conscience. Should the under-privileged, the weak, the poor, the disabled, the unemployed suffer because we have allowed expenditure to outstrip earnings? Of course they should not.

But our aim in this Government, this year, in this Queen's Speech, in this House, must be to convince people that we are not just looking for cuts, because that will not get anywhere with the general public; we must convince them that we have a philosophy, a positive and creative one, to help people to help themselves.

As Conservatives, we need the courage to argue our case for self-reliance and for family support. It is no kindness to substitute impersonal state support for our own personal responsibility. The very generosity of the state gradually erodes the traditional role of the extended family in providing for its most needy members. Where the state can intervene is to set people on the road to self-reliance, not trap them in terrible dependency which leads them to a state of despair.

There is a role for the state in providing training and community work for people who cannot find it under their own resources. We do not need to attack any class or people, whether it is one-parent families or anyone else. We must nurture and not destroy the human spirit.

Government must be seen not as a struggle for daily survival but as a crusade for regeneration. If we remain true to the guiding lights of national sovereignty that I have mentioned, of freedom under the law and self-responsibility, we may suffer some short-term unpopularity, particularly if we seek to balance the budget, but in the long term we shall not founder; we shall prosper, and ultimately we shall win through.

6.4 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The astonishing thing about the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech was that it did not deal with the central economic issue facing us today, and that is the balance of payments. The balance of payments deficit is £17·5 billion and it was not referred to once. I find that astonishing.

We have a depression unequalled in our history. We cannot export enough and we continue to import. That is a fundamental change from previous depressions and crises in our history, not just after the second world war but before that.

The automatic way to restore the balance of payments was to depress the economy. That was harsh medicine, sometimes wrongly attributed, sometimes wrongly phased, but it was medicine that everyone knew. That is the medicine that has been followed, but this time it has not resulted in any success.

What has happened is that 14 years ago we had a reduction in capacity in our industry and that has not been put right. I can hardly ever contribute to an economic debate without mentioning that in my constituency we lost 30 per cent. of our manufacturing industry between 1979 and 1981—good firms, firms that every country has, medium-tech firms, one or two hi-tech firms, firms that had everything to gain, but they could not exist with a 17 per cent. bank rate, the highest rate ever, and a pound worth $2·40. They lost out.

Now we have another recession. I notice that the Chancellor believes that it started to end 18 months ago. He had better get round the country pretty fast if he thinks that the recession started to end 18 months ago. Some would say that it has not ended yet. There are some signs of that, but to say that it ended 18 months ago is something of which the Chancellor would have a great deal of difficulty convincing anyone.

For one calculation I can join my constituency with the area next to it—Tameside and Stockport. I join them together because a branch of the Amalgamated Engineering Union used to be based on Ashton-under-Lyne, but we have lost the Tameside branch and it is now joined with Stockport.

The Amalgamated Engineering Union used to have just over 20,000 members, highly skilled, the sort of people for whom the country is crying out. In the same area today, there were 5,000 when I investigated the matter a few months ago and I suspect that there are now fewer than 5,000. That reflects the level of skill that has been lost. We must remember that they were trained, highly skilled people, happy to give their work and achieve the kind of rewards that skilled people have traditionally always had.

Manufacturing industry is important. I was pleased that, in some of the questioning that is even now being put, the Chancellor has accepted that. Manufacturing industry sells things. By all means, let us sell other things. Let us sell services and insurance abroad. I am all in favour of that, but the economies that are succeeding at the moment are those that continue to sell the products of manufacturing industry.

Therefore, we need investment. It will not bring quick returns, but we need investment in our manufacturing industry. I hope that the Chancellor will say something about investment incentives. They are crucial. I would go beyond 40, to 60 or 70 per cent. What is important is the use of new machinery and equipment that can make goods and produce skills. New machinery gives rise to the skills that are commensurate with it. Of course, I also want a competitive pound which would help us to sell abroad and to stop imports.

Production is required, not just because jobs are produced—that aspect can be overstated—but because goods are produced, and that affects our balance of payments. That is enormously important. More jobs will be produced over a period, but I accept that the number of jobs in manufacturing industry will decline as the industry becomes more efficient. People design machines so that fewer people are employed but the wealth which those people create will spread to other areas of the economy. However, goods must be produced. The failure to deal with the balance of payments deficit will occupy the Chancellor's mind and he will not be able to leave it alone when he comes to the Budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) rightly mentioned the £50 billion budget deficit. The Government talk of dealing with that deficit by cuts in the welfare state. The deficit is not due to the welfare state. Why are the Government talking now about cuts?

I refer to pensioners. People of pensionable age were born in the 1920s and 1930s, and there was no baby boom at that time to bring about large numbers of pensioners. There has been an increase in life expectancy, but that is not remarkable, and there has not been a sudden surge in the number of pensioners during the past two or three years.

The Government are doing quite well out of pensioners because they have not increased pensions in line with earnings, but instead have increased them in line with prices. As the economy grows, pensions will form a relatively smaller part of the cost of running Government. That is an enormous advantage for the Government. Although people will live longer, the benefit that the Government will get from linking the pension to prices is more than will be obtained from the greater expectancy of life.

Where did the £50 billion deficit come from, and where is it going? As my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East rightly mentioned, the deficit comes from unemployment. My hon. Friend made a good speech, but I am afraid that the Chancellor's answer was a bit of knockabout stuff. I cannot blame the Chancellor, as it must be rather difficult for him with the Budget five days away. Nevertheless, the serious points raised by my hon. Friend will remain serious next week, whereas the knockabout stuff will be forgotten long before then.

The deficit comes from unemployment, added to which we have council tax subsidies, a recession and incompetence. Those are the elements of the horrifying budget deficit. However, we must not be mesmerised by that figure, because we can still borrow for investment. We can do so even with the £50 billion deficit, but the

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investment must be genuine. Anyone can go to his bank manager with cash flow problems as long as he has a good case to argue.

There are some good investment opportunities available which will produce genuine returns. One example is repairs of council houses which are rotting away. The Government could borrow against those houses, and would save money in the end. Those houses cannot be demolished and they have long years of life ahead of them.

The Public Accounts Committee has produced report after report showing how disgraceful the country's roads are. The Government's failure to keep the roads in good repair has led to roads having to be reconstructed at enormous cost. The worst thing is that they do not know which roads have to be reconstructed. Such work on roads is a sensible investment which can produce a return in a few years; the railway system is a similar example. Training people is a good investment, while education is a longer-term investment for which a good case can be made. Even with the £50 billion deficit, certain forms of expenditure can be undertaken which can produce returns.

I will talk now about VAT, and the ending of the zero rating. It fell to me to take the chair during consideration of the sixth directive in May 1977 during this country's presidency of Europe. The directive went well, and a deal was done with the Dutch Finance Minister, as a result of which we kept virtually everything that we had. Few people realised that anything had changed in this country regarding VAT, although things had changed in other countries.

I made the point strongly at that time—I have believed it ever since—that VAT is an important tax because it is broadly neutral. It is not a progressive tax—it never was—but it is not regressive either. The danger now is that by abolishing the zero rating, the Government are turning a broadly neutral tax into a regressive tax, which means that those with the least pay will suffer the most. If the Government start to move in that direction, they could make virtually all taxes regressive, such as taxes on petrol, tobacco, and alcohol, and vehicle excise duty. There are taxes the same for everybody, whatever their income may be. The poor will be taxed at the same level as the rich.

All this country's taxes will be regressive, except one—income tax. That will remain as the only progressive tax, and it is the one tax which the Government are determined to reduce. Everybody knows that income tax is fair, although the rate can be changed. It can be argued that the rate is too high at some stages, and too low at others, but it is the one progressive tax.

I will now say something about the proper conduct of public business, a matter which has been causing both me and the Public Accounts Committee concern. Today we have seen the Committee's report on the West Midlands regional health authority. It is right that concern should be expressed in the House about the serious shortcomings in that case.

One official in the authority who was new to the NHS made a bonfire of all kinds of controls, while the chairman and the board seriously neglected public accountability. A total of £2·5 million was spent on consultants without the authority being notified, despite there being rules that any expenditure of more than £50,000 had to be the subject of a special statement made to the board. However, £2·5 million was spent without that authorisation.

The Carver committee, which was set up to inquire into the matters, said that a "new culture" had been brought into the organisation. That worries me greatly. Many public bodies, such as hospitals and schools, have people coming in to them who do not have the disciplines, do not have the "culture", of the civil service.

I believe that those people can give certain advantages, but they did not give them to the Welsh Development Agency. The WDA was culpable, and it made a laughing stock of the rules by which public money ought to be handled. The agency had the disgrace of recruiting into a civil service post a conman who had served three prison sentences in the United States. That man came to Wales and took responsibility for publicity. He was spending money wrongly, with one example being that he interviewed a number of model girls in his hotel room on a Sunday afternoon. All that was paid for by the taxpayer. That is a scandal.

I have expressed concern at a number of other cases that the Committee has looked at recently. People from the private sector can bring valuable skills to public office—there is no doubt about that. However, they do not seem in all cases to have regard to public accountability, of which I am aware every day in my room in the House.

I have a splendidly stern Victorian room, and I always think that Gladstone knew something about the room when he set up the Public Accounts Committee more than 130 years ago. There is a sign at the top of the room which I see every day, which says "assiduity"—a splendid Victorian word. Some of us try to retain the concept of assiduity in our work.

I used to say that the eradication of fraud and corruption was more important than anything else that I did, although it was a minor element of my work; much the most important element of my work was the securing of value for money. I cannot say that now. One hundred and forty years ago, Northcote Trevelyan highlighted the need for integrity and competence in public service and laid down the foundations on which we have been governed since. The standards in our civil service have not come easily. They have had to be fought and worked for and they have been adhered to. However, a number of dangers now face us.

I see a danger in fixed-term appointments in the civil service. Who will the civil servant be most anxious to please when the time comes for reappointment or when he or she has to seek a job outside the civil service? Those who are perceptive have already seen signs of people being more anxious to impress than to achieve. Performance-related pay is also a problem. Who is to say what is the value of a civil servant who pleases only his or her political masters?

Twice this week, I have spoken to delegations of visitors from overseas who are worried about the levels of fraud and corruption in their countries. I am used to that and meet such delegations frequently. They come here to see how we have managed to remain relatively fraud-free. How many countries have standards of probity which would satisfy the House? If one starts counting, does one reach a dozen, or 15, of 180 countries? We are rather special in terms of the standards that we have maintained, and we take risks with them at our peril.

The trouble with corruption in administration is not only a moral issue, which, as I know from our visitors, is serious; one aspect that should concern us is that corrupt administration is inefficient administration. Today, people who are not accountable take decisions involving public money. There are more than 1,000 public bodies and we are not able to discover what goes on in all of them, but we must retain the ethos that we have created and which we have so maintained successfully.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) mentioned Manchester airport yesterday. I was on the fringes of the argument when it was first actively discussed whether Manchester should have its own airport. The risks were enormous: Manchester would have been the only city to have control of such expenditure and the responsibility for creating its own airport.

It was remembered that Manchester had created the Manchester ship canal which, in its own way, was an even greater venture in the early years of this century. Those involved were determined to prove that the imagination, strength and conviction of their predecessors could be matched. Over the years, the airport has turned into a magnificent international airport which arouses the envy of everyone in the country. What are the Government going to do? They are going to sell it, and those who have taken the responsibility and still bear it so well will be denied that satisfaction. It is a thousand pities that that is to be allowed to happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East said that there were no new purposes in the Government. Sadly, it is true. I can predict the way in which the Government will handle the Budget and our economic affairs in the months and years ahead—it will be a sad time for this country if their policies are not changed.

6.23 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The Gracious Speech from the Throne contained a paragraph on Northern Ireland. It read:

"In Northern Ireland My Government will continue their efforts to defeat terrorism through impartial and resolute enforcement of the law, to uphold the democratic wishes of its people and seek political progress by broadly based agreement, to strengthen economic progress and to create equality of opportunity for all sections of the community. They will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland."

The gravity of the situation in Northern Ireland dare not be underestimated at this time. Those who would do so are deliberately blinding themselves to the truth. The darkest of facts stare us all in the face.

We are facing a campaign that arrogates to itself the sign of peace in the name of two persons, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and the leader of the IRA-Sinn Fein movement, Gerry Adams. Those who long and sigh for peace are told that the proposals are a recipe for peace in a week and peace's best chance for 25 years. The cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church has given his blessing and approval; Mr. Mandela has been given the details of the so-called peace plan; the Kennedy lobby in the United States has been made privy to it, as have the Dublin Government; and the army council of the IRA is aware of the details. But the people of Northern Ireland, whose safety, well-being and destiny are at stake, are not to be given the details. Rather, if they do not support wholeheartedly that which they do not know about, they will be, and have been, castigated for throwing away the best chance of peace since the IRA commenced its hostilities.

True peace cannot come through concealment, a hidden agenda or the buy-off of the men of blood. If anyone else tried a con trick such as the Hume-Adams proposal on the public, he would be laughed out of court. Those whose destiny is at stake have a right to know what their planned destiny is to be, especially when its authors are both dedicated to the utter destruction of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. IRA-Sinn Fein is dedicated to the genocide of the Protestant population of Northern Ireland.

The proposal is that, as soon as the IRA announces the end of violence, it will immediately have the right to the conference table to help decide the future of our part of the United Kingdom. Such a proposal is anathema to the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland. Those with blood on their hands and the guilt of years of devilish carnage have no right to be at that negotiating table, no matter what their religion may be or what votes have been cast for them at any ballot box. The conference table is for ever blocked to those murderous murderers.

In his embassy in London at the weekend, Albert Reynold's cry that there could be no settlement without the IRA is in reality a plea to strengthen his hand by having his allies with him in the negotiations. Anything to weaken the Unionist position—even bloodthirsty murderers—is welcomed by Mr. Reynolds in his campaign for the destruction of the Union.

There are two matters of which every hon. Member should be aware, and I draw the House's attention to them. The first is the recent visit to Washington of the Dublin Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr. Dick Spring, and the important speech that he made during that visit. I hear people on all sides saying what a gracious, understanding, conciliatory man he is, fully sympathetic to the Unionist position and most anxious to be helpful. He certainly did not have even a tiny vestige of those characteristics in Washington. He must have jettisoned them in the ocean on the way over there because, in that speech, he appeared in his true colours.

I look in vain through the speech for any condemnation of the Irish Republican Army and its activities. Instead I find an indictment of the Unionist population. "No democracy" is Mr. Spring's thrust when he talks about Northern Ireland. He told his American audience:

"an internal approach to Northern Ireland is unlikely to work",

and warned the Unionists that their future depended on what he called

"the growing nationalist community".

In other words, "We are breeding faster than you, so you had better cut your losses before we take you over. You had better make a deal now."

Mr. Spring went on to claim that his country was

"a country in transition",

moving towards

"perspectives of a modern, self-confident and pluralist society".

However, that self-confident pluralist society is encumbered with notions of political and territorial expansion, because it seeks to annex part of the island which does not belong to it, never has belonged to it and never will. Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution rob all the people of the island of Ireland of any notion of plurality, or even of accommodation.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Bearing in mind the society that Mr. Spring was addressing, he told his audience that he was dedicated to preserving their "cultural heritage"—that is, of course, the Gaelic Roman Catholic ethos. Mr. Spring went on to claim that the problem of Northern Ireland was about

"the unresolved legacy of Anglo-Irish history".

To Mr. Spring, the territorial question is unresolved. I have heard that idea continually from the hon. Member for Foyle. They both conveniently forget the truth of the matter. In the 1920s, the Irish leaders resolved the territorial question by signing the 1921 treaty and later the 1925 tripartite accord, which accepted the recognised boundaries and had them ratified in the three Parliaments —the Dail Eireann, the Stormont Parliament and the United Kingdom Parliament. The document was then registered at the League of Nations as a record of international boundaries. Nothing could be clearer than that.

The South, under the leadership of Mr. De Valera, then plummeted into a bitter civil war. We often hear in the House about the treatment meted out to Irish people by people from this part of the United Kingdom, but we are apt to forget that the bloodiest deeds ever carried out in Ireland took place when Irishman fought Irishman in the civil war, led by De Valera. De Valera was defeated, and the settlement was established and stood.

However, when De Valera won power in the Irish Republic, he tore up the agreement and introduced the 1937 constitution, as a result of which we have the problem of the territorial claim in articles 2 and 3—the claim that Dublin, rather than the United Kingdom, was really the possessor of Northern Ireland, and that even the laws of the Republic had power over that part of the territory, which it neither owned nor controlled.

Mr. Spring forgets all that. He went on to say that the nationalist community had

"little sense of ownership of the structures set over them".

That is an amazing statement. Unionists must rightly ask what those structures are. There are no Northern Ireland political institutions over the community in Northern Ireland, whether Protestant, Unionist, Roman Catholic or nationalist. Of course, the structures are joint Anglo-Irish structures, not only owned by the nationalists but controlled by Dublin. Yet Mr. Spring told his American audience that all those evil people in Northern Ireland set over his people institutions that they did not own. He said of the nationalists:

"there is no prospect that they will ever redefine themselves as British to conform with the official doctrine of their state."

So much for the nationalists. But what about the majority, the Unionists? Are they to be forced into a position with which they will not conform? Mr. Spring's answer to that question is yes. He even indicts the Unionist people as being responsible for the Irish civil war.

That is the man who is supposed to be conciliatory, the man with such a great understanding of the Unionist position. He then declared that our Union flag, our symbol of identity, must be changed—the cross of St. Patrick and all. In all Mr. Spring's speech, there is no indictment of the Irish Republican Army, no catalogue of the dreadful crimes that it has committed. But he did say this:

"violence is not a problem which can be solved by security means".

Are we to take it from that that he considers concessions to the men of violence to be the only way forward?

So much for Mr. Spring, who, I am told, held out his hand in the Senate of the South today and said that he wanted friendship with the Unionist people. That is not what he said when he was in Washington a few days ago.

The second matter of which the House should be aware concerns the confidential document leaked in the Irish press. There was a furore in Dublin when it was leaked, and great denials. But in the Dail Eireann yesterday, the truth came out in the wash. Mr. Reynolds admitted that the document was absolutely authentic, and had set negotiations back by being leaked in that terrible manner. If he could find out who had leaked it, heads would roll, he said. At first the document was denied but now, on the floor of the Dail, it is admitted to be authentic.

The document is amazing. Anybody who expected any Unionist who believed in Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom—whether that person were a Roman Catholic or a Protestant—to find anything acceptable in the document would be out of his senses. The document tells us that British and Irish officials were instructed at the Anglo-Irish intergovermental conference on 10 September to use their best endeavours to draft the paper, and it says that the liaison group met and had discussions.

Who is in that? I learned from the Secretary of State in Downing street yesterday that the liaison group consists of a number of civil servants from the Foreign Office, from the Dublin Government and from the Northern Ireland Office. The document was born out of those discussions and represents a hidden agenda—which is why the people of Northern Ireland are so angry about it. It states:

"It is accepted on both sides"—

that is, by the British and Irish Governments—

"that this joint paper and the discussions related to it will not be the subject of discussion, still less negotiation, with the Northern Ireland parties unless both governments agree beforehand whether and how this should be done."

That means that what is being planned for the people that I represent in the House will not be known without the consent and support of Dublin. That alone damns the document for ever in the minds of all right-thinking people in Northern Ireland. What do they take the long-suffering, law-abiding people of our Province for? They have suffered carnage for years, and have given their young men to fight against the terrorists and buried them in their graveyards. To think that those people should be disfranchised because the Dublin Government say so. Every right hon. and hon. Member should read that document and ask how there can be any settlement on such a basis.

The intergovernmental conference on the Anglo-Irish Agreement will serve as the embryo of a united Ireland Parliament that could interfere in any other structures that might be established in Northern Ireland. It will have supreme authority to interfere in those matters.

It is common knowledge that my colleagues and I visited Downing street yesterday and had a long discussion with the Prime Minister about those matters, which cause us great concern. When we raised the question of the paper, I noted the Prime Minister's remarks. I asked the right hon. Gentleman's permission to use that record, and he said that I certainly could—so I am not breaking any confidence. He said:

"If this paper had been presented to me, I would have booted it out over the roof tops."

That statement leaves many questions unanswered. Who were the officials that discussed and agreed to that paper? How often does the liaison committee meet? Who agreed that the paper should state that no one in Northern Ireland should hear anything about it until the Dublin Government or the British Government mutually consented to that? The people of Northern Ireland are asking themselves those questions tonight.

I welcome the Prime Minister's comments, but this is not the last of the papers. Another will soon appear from the same source, and it will have the same thrust—and that will be repeated over and over again. Unless the Government have the guts and the resolution to stand up to the Irish authorities on articles 2 and 3—which they are fighting desperately to save and for which they are making all sorts of apologies—and have them removed, there will be no solid basis for peace.

Meanwhile—as was said by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), who is the leader of the Official Unionists—deep concern is running right into the gut of the whole of the Northern Ireland people. Anyone from Northern Ireland who saw on television last night the array of seized armaments could do nothing but shiver, with every gun a potential murder weapon. One thinks also of the array of armaments already in the hands of the IRA. When no security spokesman can say whether that seized consignment was the first, or put a number to the number of consignments that have got through, the House will understand how people feel at this time.

I say to the Government and to the House that the sooner that situation is dealt with, the better for us all. There is only one way, which is to establish that the Union is not negotiable, that no all-Ireland body can have any say in Northern Ireland's internal arrangements, and that there can be no advance by the Dublin Government towards achieving the objective of articles 2 and 3—which is a constitutional imperative laid on every Irish Minister according to the Supreme Court in Dublin. Until those matters are laid to rest, the troubles, sorrows and bloodshed will continue.

6.46 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): In normal circumstances, I would have preferred at this stage of the debate on the Loyal Address to speak on the effects of value added tax on fuel costs in Northern Ireland, particularly because of the unique situation that exists there. The cost of fuel in Northern Ireland is 32 per cent. higher than in England, Scotland and Wales, so when VAT is imposed, it will cause a substantial increase. That will be added to by the higher overall costs in Northern Ireland imposed by the necessity to import so many consumer items, which will have a particularly harmful effect on elderly people.

I would have liked the opportunity also to speak not just about peace at any price—a phrase that is becoming increasingly clichéd—but the price of no peace, which is worth considerable scrutiny. A recent article in *The Economist* tried to analyse the net cost of the North of Ireland to the British Exchequer during the past year, and arrived at a figure of £6 billion. That figure is not verifiable, because many factors in the security budget are not made public. I would like the cost of no peace to be carefully analysed.

I listened with great interest to the version of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) of history and of current affairs. It depressed me almost as much as the account of current affairs given by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) when he spoke two nights ago. We heard the selective quotations given by the hon. Member for Antrim, North from a speech given by the Tanaiste in the United States. We heard also a garbled version of what is not an Irish Government document, and the conclusions drawn by the hon. Gentleman, with his usual sense of the dramatic.

When the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley referred to the talks between the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, I hope that it was with a supreme sense of irony that he said that the sovereign Government in Dublin were no more than a conduit for the IRA. He said that about a Government who are spending more per capita in the fight against terrorism than the British Government are spending within Northern Ireland—£1 million a day. He said that about a Government who have had to contend with IRA violence and what it has done to the good name of Ireland for so many years. He said that about a Government who have entered into discussions with this Government at the highest possible level and with the Prime Minister to try to ensure that there is a lasting peace.

I was also struck by the concern of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley at what he termed the state of the "professional and middle classes." He said:

"they are now in such a state of anxiety that they disbelieve any assurance, and suspect betrayal in every sentence they hear or read . . . something must be done to reduce the fever".—[*Official Report*, 23 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 362.]

I am aware of the professional and middle classes in the Unionist and nationalist communities in the North of Ireland. I would never accuse them of fever in relation to anything that did not affect their economic and financial positions. However, if the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley knows something that the rest of us do not know, I should like him to explain it to us. He sees betrayal, disbelief and anxiety in everything that is said.

Let us test that against some of what has been said about the present controversies. In a notable speech in the Guildhall on 15 November, the Prime Minister said:

"there may be now a better opportunity for peace in Northern Ireland than for many years. There is a burning desire on each side of the community for peace. This strength of feeling is far more intense than we have ever seen before."

I wonder how the Prime Minister has got it wrong. He sees not the anxiety or the sense of betrayal but an expectancy and deep feeling for peace. Are the Prime Minister's words causing a sense of anxiety and betrayal? Are they being doubted by those to whom the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley refers?

On 2 November the Irish Prime Minister said:

"I want them"—

the Unionists—

"to join us. I want the two communities to join us, in rejecting violence and in the search for peace."

Betrayal? Anxiety? Disbelief? How can that be interpreted as anything but what it is—a genuine and sincere reaching out from the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic to the Unionist community in the North of Ireland?

The hon. Member for Antrim, North quoted Mr. Spring at length. In the six principles that he enunciated, he stated, restated and defined as a principle the words:

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

"No agreement can be reached in respect of any change in the present status of Northern Ireland without the freely expressed consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland free from coercion or violence."

Betrayal? Anxiety? Are those the words that are causing the anxiety and fever that has engulfed the professional and middle classes in the North of Ireland?

Let us go further. The hon. Member for Antrim, North was at great pains to labour the position in relation to articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution. The six principles enunciated in the Irish Parliament contain the words:

"If we believe in consent as an integral part of any democratic approach to peace, we must be prepared at the right time and in the right circumstances to express our commitment to that consent in our fundamental law".

The fundamental law is the written constitution of the Republic of Ireland. It is a written commitment given solemnly within the Parliament of the Irish Republic. Is that causing the anxiety and sense of betrayal? Is it something much more potent? Is it the fear or apprehension that there just might be peace? Is that frightening people?

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I will give way later.

I see nothing in the statement or actions of the Prime Minister, the Irish Prime Minister or the Irish Foreign Minister that could in any way be interpreted as creating a sense of anxiety, betrayal and fever that is engulfing the professional and middle classes.

What about the other people—the vast majority of people in the North of Ireland who are not professional or middle class? They have suffered most during the past 25 years. Perhaps they are not worthy of consideration. I shall give them that consideration in my speech.

Mr. Maginnis: The hon. Gentleman asks many questions, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to some of them. If one argues from the wrong premise, it does not matter about the logic of one's argument. Therein lies the feeling of possible betrayal. The whole idea of peace seems to emanate from some fallacious assumption that Mr. Adams, Sinn Fein and the provisional IRA want peace. We have not seen a single shred of evidence that that peace is on offer. Hence we do not want decisions made on the wrong premise.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his observation. Neither would I. I do not care who delivers peace, as long as it is created, and more power to the people who try to bring it about. I will give them every support and all the help I can. I will do that at all times, because I am not particular about who is the hero. I am concerned about peace for the people in the North of Ireland and the whole of the island.

What is the recipe that we have heard from the leaders of the two Unionist parties for the ending of violence and the creation of peace? We have a document from the party represented by the hon. Member for Antrim, North called "Breaking the Logjam." Anyone who bothers to read it will see that it says, in effect, that one sets up a little body in Belfast, gives it some type of name and it will have friendly relationships with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. Where is the solution? How will this solve the problem or end the violence? How will it create permanent peace on the island of Ireland?

Much more subtly, in his speech two nights ago, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley repeated almost word for word what we had read in "Breaking the Logjam". He seemed to be saying in a more sophisticated way, "Let us set up a county council structure in the North of Ireland and then enjoy a neighbourly relationship with the Republic, and then everything in the garden will be rosy." It will not: peace will not come that way. It will have to be created. Peace will involve all of us making concessions and biting our lips, politically speaking, because it will not be easy.

This is why there is a sense of anxiety—it is where the fever derives from. There are those in our community who cannot accommodate the idea of compromise or of thinking themselves into a new peaceful century. They prefer the stagnation of the status quo with which we have lived for so long. That is the cause of the fervour; not the Irish Prime Minister or Foreign Affairs Minister, or the leader of the SDLP, who has made honest and valiant attempts to bring about an end to the violence.

There is a fear that, if peace comes, the central basis of Unionism will be weakened. So it will: as will the basis of my party, and the basis of the British and Irish constitutional positions, as Mr. Spring showed in the six principles. The price of peace is the ability to compromise and to be imaginative, instead of sticking in the morass in which we have been stuck for so long.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman has just referred to modifications in the constitutional positions of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. What is his response to the proposition that future constitutional structures relating to Northern Ireland are a matter for the people of Northern Ireland to decide, and for no one else?

Mr. Mallon: I have already answered that comprehensively. The first article of the Anglo-Irish Agreement answers the hon. Gentleman's point, restated by Mr. Spring in his six principles:

"No agreement can be reached in respect of any change in the present status of Northern Ireland without the freely expressed consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland free from coercion or violence."

Mr. Trimble *rose*——

Mr. Mallon: I will not give way. If the hon. Gentleman wants a constitutional debate on this issue, let him visit the people who have invited him to have one—the Irish Government—and hold his academic debate with them. He should be listening to this political message, but he is afraid to listen to anything positive, just as he is afraid of the notion of peace.

Mr. Trimble: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I will not, because I have answered the hon. Gentleman's point.

Ever since I entered the House, I have consistently asked the Prime Ministers and Governments of the two countries to take upon themselves the task of solving the problem of Northern Ireland. It is the duty and business of Governments to do that. I have criticised them in the past for not doing so, but this was a guiding principle on which the Anglo-Irish Agreement was based.

That principle underlies every intergovernmental meeting between the Irish and British. It underlies the joint statement issued by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in Brussels. I hold to that principle, because only the two

Governments have the power and authority to effect the changes that will create peace and build new political structures. If the Governments undertake the task, I will give them my full support. I offer them the full support of our party to try to solve this intractable problem. In the Brussels statement, they said that only the two Governments can produce the necessary initiatives to solve these problems.

I give the two Governments credit, at a time when they are not getting any credit. We have seen the Unionist reaction to the Prime Minister's attempts, even though they have a close relationship with him. We have also seen the reaction of the other form of Unionism, which is even more loyal than the official kind. The Unionists have beaten a path to the Prime Minister's door—it is even rumoured that there is now a Molyneaux room and a Paisley room at No. 10.

What are they doing if they are not listening to the Prime Minister? Are they agreeing with him that only the two Governments acting together can solve the problem, or are they talking about fervour and the sort of potted histories that we heard today from the hon. Member for Antrim, North? Are they giving the Prime Minister the version of current affairs that we have heard from both the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley and the hon. Member for Antrim, North?

In their attempt to create peace, the two Prime Ministers have the full support both of my party and of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, be they professional or middle-class people, or Catholics or Protestants. People are watching closely, believing what the Prime Ministers said in Brussels—that it was their business to get on with solving the problem.

This is an urgent matter. If we needed proof of that urgency, we had only to look at the television footage from yesterday showing the interception of the arms haul. There is more proof of the urgency when we recall how quickly peace initiatives and momentum towards change can turn sour. There will be people in both communities who do not want peace, and who try everything they know to ensure that violence continues.

I ask the Government to respond to this urgency. If they do, history will judge them as people of courage and imagination who took us into the next century without the stain of blood on everything to do with Northern Ireland. If they run away from the problem—to use the vernacular, if they funk it—history will judge them harshly, as will the long-suffering people of the North of Ireland, Protestant and Catholic.

Will there be a way back if a mistake is made now? Another such chance may not come for 25 years. Those are the stakes that we are playing for; that is why it is so important to move forward.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I have met no one, in Northern Ireland or elsewhere, who is not totally committed to peace, but I wonder whether the hon. Member will tell the House what price of peace—his price, the price for the SDLP—is to be exacted before there is full commitment to the security forces, to the RUC, to bring an end to terror?

Mr. Mallon: That is a valid question, and I will answer it honestly. We have paid part of our price. We take no satisfaction in entering into discussions with those who publicly support violence. We will talk to anyone in our community if we believe that we can stop violence. We recommend to representatives within the Unionist community as well that they talk to loyalist paramilitary groupings.

When we get that type of peaceful basis, we can all start to negotiate in the proper way of negotiating—not through this type of intervention. We do not know what the outcome will be, any more than the hon. Gentleman does, but the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has a certitude at bottom which is so frightening in terms of that absoluteness which blinkers him on many occasions. That is the type of thing that should be broken down.

We have heard of the Unionist position—the Prime Minister must be sick of hearing about the Unionist position. The Unionist position is discussed almost daily in the Irish Parliament, and discussed at great length. May I remind people that there are two communities living there? I have the honour to represent the other part of the Northern Ireland community.

I represent a nationalist position. That is a legitimate position, and the aspirations of the nationalist community are legitimate. Let not the way in which the IRA have devalued and debased nationalism be reflected in Government thinking or thinking in the House. Let it be said—and be seen—that the aspiration to create a united Ireland, to create unity of the Irish people, is a legitimate aspiration, pursued by peaceful, democratic means without violence and without coercion, and is a crucial factor in what is happening now.

Do the Government believe that? Or are the Government now so frightened of some of the ancillary factors in what has been happening during the past months that they will not recognise that basic point? I repeat it: will they state that the desire to create, and the aspiration to create, Irish unity through peaceful means is a legitimate political process? I believe that it is. I believe that the Government believe that it is. I believe that that is part of long-term Government thinking. Let me tell hon. Members why.

I refer hon. Members to a statement that was made by the Foreign Secretary in the House:

> "I do not agree that partition can be the basis for a settlement. My hon. Friend's underlying thought is perfectly right—there are two communities on the island and they must be given rights as two communities—but if there is to be a lasting settlement, it must be within the sovereignty of one Cypriot Government." —[*Official Report*, 28 October 1992; Vol. 212, c. 1006.]

May I refer that statement of the Foreign Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the entire Government. I ask him to apply the principle that is involved in that statement of that senior member of the Government when dealing with the problems that we are dealing with at present, conditioned only by that one single factor which I have already quoted twice—that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the agreement of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland without coercion and force.

Is that not something that the Government must honestly answer for themselves? Is not that the type of thinking that will ultimately solve the problem? Or will the Government, like so many other Governments down through the decades and the centuries, be caused to deviate from making the fundamental decisions for peace and development by the type of bluster that we have heard from the Conservative Benches and the type of attitudes that we have heard from the Opposition Benches? Time will tell whether the Government and the Prime Minister are up to it.

7.14 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): I shall confine my remarks this evening to the economy.

I begin by recalling events that took place earlier in the day and the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). Once again it has been a sad day for the Labour Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman was unable to put forward any coherent alternative economic policy. One tries to detect an alternative economic policy from the mists which surround him. If one can detect anything, it is that he is in favour of a bigger Budget deficit. A Budget deficit of about 7 per cent. of GDP does not seem to be big enough for the hon. Gentleman. Running higher Budget deficits, as he will learn one day, leads to higher long-term interest rates. If Governments borrow more money, they must finance that in international markets and pay the appropriate rate. A higher Budget deficit, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East advocated, would be harmful to the wealth-creating sector of the country and harmful to the manufacturing sector which he claims to support.

The big idea of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East seems to be loopholes; loopholes will provide the answer. I have here Butterworth's yellow tax handbook. I am not sure if the hon. Gentleman is familiar with that tax handbook. It runs to 2,142 pages.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): What is the orange one?

Mr. Legg: Thank you very much. The yellow book is a small book compared with the orange book—the orange handbook runs to no fewer than 3,822 pages. We therefore have nearly 6,000 pages of tax legislation and the hon. Gentleman says that the answer is the loopholes in that legislation. Again, I urge the hon. Gentleman to examine the detail of that legislation. If he thumbs his way through the 6,000 pages he will find page after page of anti-avoidance legislation. His answer seems to be, if it is not working, regulate it, regulate it again and regulate it some more—more regulation, more tax legislation, more anti-avoidance legislation.

All Conservative Members know that that is not the answer. There is a vacuum at the heart of Labour's economic policies. There is not only a vacuum; Labour Members have also become disoriented because the economy is not performing in the way in which they thought it would and it is not performing in the way in which they wanted it to perform.

First, Labour Members were hoping that unemployment would carry on increasing throughout this year. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East had his speeches on his word processor to back up what he thought would be months of increasing unemployment. Instead unemployment has come down steadily. That has been a disappointment for him. Last month's unemployment figures were the best for many years, with the non-seasonally-adjusted figures decreasing by 100,000 and the seasonally-adjusted figures decreasing by 49,000. There has, therefore, been good progress on unemployment.

Secondly, there has been good progress on inflation. Inflation is much lower than the Treasury or any independent economic forecaster foresaw about six to seven months ago. It is running at 1·4 per cent. The figures last month were the best for October for 30 years.

The current account has shown a marked improvement. At the time of the Budget the Treasury was forecasting that the current account deficit for the current year would be about £17·5 billion. That is running at about £1·5 billion a month. Recent figures show the current account deficit running at the much lower level of £0·5 billion per month. Worst of all for the Opposition, growth is performing much more strongly than commentators thought it would a few months ago. Only six or seven months ago, the consensus was that the economy would grow by just under 1 per cent. However, it is now likely to grow by some 2 per cent. in the current year.

What do all those improved indicators tell us about the performance of the British economy? It is that the supply side is performing much better than anyone had anticipated. All the reforms and all the legislation put through this House in the 1980s is bearing fruit. All the legislation that was opposed by the Labour Members is bearing fruit. The deregulation of the labour market and the reform of the trade union movement, which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East fought tooth and nail, are now bearing fruit.

The supply side is strong. The devaluation last year has not produced the inflation that some commentators predicted. That is because we are living in a competitive economy and are following sound domestic monetary policies. Inflation cannot be imported. The idea that the prices of imports will rise in these circumstances is not valid while we follow sound domestic monetary policies. Importers cannot sell goods at a price higher than the markets will accept.

I want to refer to the output gap. Growth is coming through more strongly than anticipated because there is a significant output gap in the economy. Some commentators estimate it at about 5 per cent., others at 10 per cent. If we have a blend of policies designed to help industry and commerce in the coming months, that output gap should mean that the economy grows at above its trend level.

In some ways, we are being modest in the economic strategy laid down in the Queen's Speech. First, it expresses the hope that recovery will be based on permanently low inflation. That is too modest an objective. Price stability is now within our grasp. We have been through a great deal of pain and difficulty to reduce inflation—initially at 25 per cent. under Labour, but even in recent years at 10 per cent.—to 1 per cent.

Now our objective should be price stability, which would be good for the British economy. It would allow business men to plan against a background of stable prices. It would mean that businesses did not need to be so concerned about asset price inflation. During recent years, all too many business men have been more concerned about the value of their assets than about the long-term success of their businesses. Stable prices would be of great benefit to them. Therefore, I believe that further consideration should be given to the independence of the Bank of England.

Secondly, the Queen's Speech stated the aim of continued economic growth. Again, the objective is somewhat modest—we can do better than that. As I have said, the output gap is at a significant level, so the British economy should be growing at an above-trend level.

A number of years ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said that he spotted green shoots. Since then, Ministers have been cautious in their comments about the prospects for the

economy—but unduly so. Certainly it was difficult to maintain green shoots during our membership of the ERM, but now that we are outside it and can set domestic monetary conditions consistent with what the domestic economy needs we can be a great deal more optimistic and realistic about our economic prospects. It would be good if we were to publicise more forcefully our confidence in the growing recovery of our domestic economy.

Thirdly, the Queen's Speech states that the budget deficit should be brought back towards balance over the coming term. Those words are somewhat vague. We seem to have drifted away from the objective of balancing the budget over the cycle, which is something that a sound, back-to-basics Conservative Chancellor should have at the forefront of his economic policies.

The budget deficit for the current year is thought to be about £50 billion. The control level for spending targets next year is to increase from £241 billion to £251 billion —an increase in cash terms of 4 per cent. In control terms, increasing our level of spending by 4 per cent. when inflation may be running at 1 or 2 per cent. next year shows that there is further leeway for controlling public spending.

My right hon. and learned Friend has rightly said that he does not want public sector pay bills to grow this year, which means that that significant portion of public expenditure will be kept under control. However, much firmer control needs to be placed upon the balance. If the spending totals are too generous, there is no doubt that the Department responsible will spend those sums.

Running large budget deficits is not sustainable. As I said in the Budget debate earlier this year, delayed tax increases are a mistake. I think that my right hon. and learned Friend agrees with that. Announcing tax increases for future fiscal years adds to certainty in the economy. It is an economic mistake to delay them and it is undoubtedly a political mistake to do so.

We have further work to do on reducing the budget deficit. Not only are we planning to increase the control totals by £10 billion next year, but there will be an additional £4 billion debt clocking up from the extra borrowings needed to finance that deficit. The cost of our debt, in real terms, is currently about 5 per cent., while the growth rate is about 2·1 or 2 per cent. That means that our debt interest is running at a much higher rate than the rate at which the real economy is growing. That position is not sustainable.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): If the picture is as good as the hon. Gentleman paints and there is to be a reduction in unemployment, will not that reduction negate the necessity for an increase in tax, especially through VAT as the Government suggest it should be?

Mr. Legg: Unemployment will continue to fall over the coming months. That will provide some improvement in our public finances, but not a marked improvement. It may improve the figures for next year's deficit from, say, £44 billion to £40 billion, but it will not produce a significant reduction in the budget deficit. Therefore, further measures must still be taken because the level of deficit, whether it is £50 billion or £40 billion, is not sustainable.

Prospects for the United Kingdom economy are good. The supply side is performing well. We need sound Conservative policies that work with markets not against them. We need policies that work with labour markets, to make them flexible, and we need policies that recognise the power of currency markets and do not seek to defy those markets. Sterling needs to be allowed to continue to float, and we should not consider rejoining the exchange rate mechanism.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said earlier, in a speech which displayed both his idealism and his pragmatism, which we all admire, that it should be no surprise that he supports economic and monetary union, as he has been doing so since 1971. That is all well and good, but the world has changed significantly since 1971. Markets are now much more powerful and exchange controls that existed even in the 1980s have disappeared.

I do not believe that, in the modern world, it is possible to have a fixed exchange rate system without exchange controls. I believe that Conservative Members are beginning to accept those facts of life, but I suspect that Opposition Members have not yet done so.

Prospects are good and a significant recovery is within our grasp. If we stick to sound Conservative policies, bring forward a balance of economic measures, reduce public spending, and reduce the Budget deficit, and if we have the monetary policies that are needed for the British economy, success will be achieved. That success can deliver above-trend growth, higher employment, stable prices and a balanced budget. That is the agenda that we should be setting for the rest of the life of this Parliament. That agenda will generate economic success and it will make the comments and so-called policies of Opposition Members even more ineffective, hypocritical and irrelevant.

7.32 pm

Dr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): One of the most striking features of speeches by Conservative Members, which were reflected in the comments of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is that any good economic news is the Government's responsibility and the result of sound economic management, while any bad economic news is the fault of someone else.

For example, we are supposed to give the Government credit for—in the words of the Chancellor—the faltering recovery, but not the blame for the recession that necessitated the subsequent recovery. We are urged to congratulate the Government on reducing interest rates, but not to criticise their policies that produced the high interest rates in the first place. Every month that the number of unemployed claimants is reduced is seen as a triumph for Government economic policy. However, an increase in unemployment is the fault of perhaps the world recession or even Labour Members who have been "talking Britain down".

I was especially interested in the speech of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Mr. Legg), who, I suspect, is rather more Milton than Keynes. I apologise for that joke, but representing that constituency, giving such a dry speech on the economy and receiving a response from a neo-Keynesian, he must expect that kind of crack. The hon. Gentleman let it out of the bag on a number of occasions when he said that the unemployment figures just announced are "the best for many years". There are 2·85 million claimants and it is the best figure for many years. Who has been in office over that period?

The second feature of the Government's approach—I am learning quickly because I have been here for only a year and a half—to economic matters, as it is to so many

[Dr. Roger Berry]

other issues, is the way in which they break promise after promise without the slightest evidence of shame. We heard the Chancellor of the Exchequer do so again today, so I do not apologise for repeating the point. At the end of January 1992, a few weeks before the general election, the Prime Minister said:

"I have no plans to raise the level of national insurance contributions".

On 27 March 1992, a few days before the election, the Prime Minister said:

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT".

On 31 March 1992, even closer to the election, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"We will not have to increase taxes".

I know that the Government want to go back to basics and if that means a bit more honesty and integrity, I say amen to that. It does not reflect a desire to return to those traditional values repeatedly to break promises. Anyone who now realises that they cannot trust the Government on taxation any more than they can trust them on anything else will not give credibility to that "back to basics" position. The tax hikes announced by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer will impose an extra tax burden of £8·50 a week on the typical family. Not only was that not promised before the general election: it was explicitly promised that it would not be done.

Perhaps the most important area in which to go back to basics is on the Government's economic record. Recently, I have noticed a tendency to assume that the Government acquired office some time between six and 12 months ago. We ask questions and are answered by reference to an economic indicator that is slightly better now than it was six or 12 months ago. It is reasonable when the Government have been in office for 14 years to judge their performance over that period. It is long enough to judge the performance of any Government, and they cannot blame anyone else for their records of economic stewardship.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I have been reading with great interest the memoirs of the noble Baroness Thatcher. In case there is surprise among Labour Members, I hasten to add that I have not bought a copy. I go into a book shop, read a chapter and pop out again. In that way, I have worked my way through her memoirs. I am reminded that, in 1979, unemployment stood at 1·2 million and was falling.

The Conservative party was so convinced in 1979 that unemployment was too high and that the Government were responsible, that it made unemployment the central issue of the election campaign and promised to do something about it. Since then, as Lady Thatcher's memoirs remind us, we have experienced an economic miracle and, as a result of that miracle, in no single year since 1979 has unemployment fallen below 1·2 million, despite more than 30 adjustments to those figures that just happen, in all cases but one, to have brought down that official figure.

Unemployment today stands at almost 3 million, using the current method of enumeration, and almost 4 million using the method that the Government inherited in 1979 —all despite the enormous, unprecedented benefit of £110 billion of North sea oil revenue.

Mr. Pike: Is not the point that the difference between the 1979 figure and the present figure accounts for the biggest section of the £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement about which the Government are so worried?

Dr. Berry: It is the case that unemployment at 3 million is costing the Exchequer about £30 billion a year, which is the bulk of the public sector borrowing requirement. An economy in recession necessarily incurs a higher level of public sector borrowing. Even the Government have appreciated that, albeit to their embarrassment. The party that was once—I notice that it tends not to do so that often these days—anxious to proclaim itself the party of sound economic management has given us unemployment on the scale of the 1930s, affecting not only my constituents in Kingswood, but millions of people throughout the country.

However, the Government's appalling economic record does not end there. Fourteen years of Conservative rule have given us the worst rate of growth of any post-war Government. The Government will not tell us that at Question Time because they stopped measuring growth about six months ago. The Conservatives have also given us the two worst recessions since the war, and they have given us a record trade deficit in the midst of that recession.

Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster questioned in the Chamber the assertion that the recession from which we were staging a modest recovery was especially severe. When I tabled a question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the matter, he kindly referred me to last December's edition of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publication "Economic Outlook." I read it with great interest although, I confess, I had read it before I tabled the question. I read it again and saw that the OECD statistics—perhaps the most authoritative in the area—confirmed that this country had just been through the worst recession, as normally measured, of any major economy in 25 years. That is the OECD's view, which reveals the wretched state of the economy last year, the year before and the year before that.

So appalling has the Government's record been that I occasionally lapse and wonder whether it might be better if the Government had no economic policy at all and if they simply left things to free market forces. It is difficult to imagine a record worse than the one that we have experienced. I note that there have been no Conservative interventions up to this point. Yet in debate after debate, the Government tell us that we have had an economic miracle. The Chancellor told us that again this afternoon. Even now, we are told that it is Government policy that is dragging us out of recession.

Mr. Milligan: The hon. Gentleman has suggested that this country's record is worse than that of any other country. How many countries in western Europe have a high growth rate, falling unemployment and inflation at 1·4 per cent?

Dr. Berry: The remarkable thing about that question is that, first, the hon. Gentleman attributes to me a statement that I did not make. I did not compare this country with any other; I compared the present Government's record with the record of all other Governments since the war. Secondly, I note that the hon. Gentleman confirms my previous proposition that Conservatives mainly want to look at the recent record rather than at the record of the whole period of Conservative Government. The hon. Gentleman appears to be so embarrassed by the record of the past 14 years that he wants us to debate the snapshot position today.

I am not at all surprised, as I have said, that, having come out of the worst recession in any major economy in

25 years, there is some evidence of improvement in growth and in other economic indicators. It would be astonishing if that were not the case and I shall deal with the reason why it is the case.

It has been said that the improvement reflects the success of Government economic policy. All right, let us forget the previous 13 years and look at the past 12 months. Let us say that that reflects the success of Government economic policy. Being a bit of a reconstructed Keynesian, I have to say that, if one devalues the pound by 15 per cent., if one halves nominal interest rates and if one allows the public sector borrowing requirement to rise from a predicted £27 billion last year to £50 billion this year, it would be astonishing if there were not some signs of the economy being turned around.

The Chancellor may wish to say that the Government do not engage in demand management. When one gives such a boost to the economy, what is remarkable is not the existence of some recovery, but the fragility of that recovery, given such a massive economic stimulus.

What is truly astonishing is the Chancellor's assertion that all that reflects the success of Government economic policy. That does not reflect the honesty of a back to basics approach; it simply beggars belief. Until last September, the Government's policy was perfectly clear. Sterling would be set at 2·95 deutschmarks. Indeed, according to the Prime Minister, the aim was to replace the deutschmark as the strongest currency in Europe.

The Government imposed record interest rates to prop up the overvalued pound, inflicting, as we all know, enormous damage on industry and on home buyers, and putting another 1·2 million people on the dole. If that was not bad enough, the ex-Chancellor, presumably regretting nothing, said in the House after the fiasco of September last year that, if holding the base rate at 15 per cent. on that day had worked and had kept sterling in the exchange rate mechanism at 2·95 deutschmarks, we should still be there.

It is astonishing to reflect on the lunacy of that economic policy. Thank goodness that somebody, whether the men in red braces or someone else, prevented us from having a 15 per cent. base rate and a pound valued at 2·95 deutschmarks inflicted on our economy. I suspect that Conservative Members would not be saying today that there was a recovery if their policy had been successful last year.

Devaluation and low interest rates were forced on the Government by sterling's ejection from the ERM. That was something to which the Government were totally opposed. We were told that all sorts of dire consequences would follow—that there would be inflation and high interest rates, which would be a betrayal of our country and goodness knows what else.

A staggering indictment of the Government's policy 12 months ago and of economic orthodoxy in this country is that one cannot now find anyone who, 12 or 15 months ago, was defending that policy arguing now that, heigh ho, we should go back to 2·95 deutschmarks, even if that meant interest rates of 15 per cent. Nobody now will defend that position. It is thanks to the total collapse of Government economic policy and not to its success that we are now staggering out of recession.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): My hon. Friend has, with some ability, exposed the way in which we have come out of the cycle and the weaknesses in the Government's policy and their refusal to defend their policy over 14 years. Some of us fear that we shall merely go round the cycle again and that no fundamental problem will be solved. We fear that the recovery will be short-lived and that our economic base will not be put right. We shall wind up in two or three years' time with the problems that we have had repeatedly under this Government. Is that not the case and is that not the scenario for which we are all heading?

Dr. Berry: My hon. Friend is right, as I shall try briefly to explain by turning to some of the back to basics of the Government's economic arguments. First, the Government repeatedly assert that, if we simply eliminate inflation, we shall get economic growth and recovery. They say that eliminating inflation is all that is necessary to bring about higher growth and employment. It is a pretty hard-line monetarist position for the Government to be concerned merely with price stability and to do nothing to create employment or to have the economy operating at a high level of activity. It is, of course, true that high inflation has costs, but in seeking price stability—or zero inflation—the Government's strategy has been, both in the recession through which we have just come and in previous recessions, to achieve low inflation by pushing the economy into recession.

Any idiots can achieve price stability if they are prepared to put enough people on the dole and throw away enough billions of pounds in lost output and national income. It is surprising that there are still some people who believe that zero or near zero inflation will automatically give rise to higher growth. We heard that from the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West.

Mr. Legg: I pointed out the merits of price stability for businesses and for the financing of businesses. I also said that we needed appropriate monetary conditions to reflect the domestic economy. Currently, those appropriate monetary conditions involve short-term interest rates and underfunding the deficit.

Dr. Berry: I hear what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I will come back to that in a moment.

The point about low inflation is that there is no argument in economic theory—and certainly no evidence—that countries that achieve very low rates of inflation automatically subsequently achieve higher rates of growth.

A recent exhaustive study was published in the *Cambridge Journal of Economics* that confirms the previous evidence in innumerable articles in the *Financial Times* over the years—that those who argue that low inflation automatically solves the problem of economic recovery and full employment are deluding themselves. There is no basis for that position in either theory or fact.

The longer that resources are left idle in our economy, the more likely it is that when demand increases, inflationary pressures will be stored up. Ask any construction company or enterprise in this country of the problems that they fear they will have to face because they have had to lay off workers and operate plants at very low levels of capacity utilisation. It would be a disservice to the people of this country if anyone ever again trotted out the proposition that low inflation guarantees that everything else in the economic world will come good. That is not true.

The Government appear, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said earlier, to be unconcerned about the record current account

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deficit. The Government also appear unconcerned about the need for a massive increase in manufacturing investment, in order to generate sufficient net exports to sustain a high level of employment.

On 4 November I asked the Chief Secretary the following question:

"Is the Chief Secretary aware that we have never before had such a large trade deficit at this point in the business cycle, and that, for the first time ever, we have had a record trade deficit in the midst of a recession? Who does he believe is responsible for this?"—[*Official Report*, 4 November 1993; Vol. 231, c. 506.]

It is hardly surprising that the Chief Secretary ignored the question of responsibility; he said that he would prefer the deficit to be less, but that there was no problem because the trade deficit is fundable. Of course it is fundable; if it were not, we would be in very dire straits. That failed to address the real issue, which is that the rates of growth that are necessary to significantly reduce unemployment will worsen the current account and create an unsustainable balance of payments position unless something is done.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, in its green budget, said at page 20:

"it would be very optimistic of the government to conclude that the current account deficit will not prove to be a problem if the UK achieves a satisfactory rate of GDP growth over the medium term. The overwhelming likelihood is that it will prove to be a constraint on recovery in a way which did not apply in the 1981-88 period, simply because the starting position for the current account deficit was so much stronger in 1981 than it was in 1992."

In terms of a strategy for full employment, manufacturing matters—not because it will directly provide all the jobs that we need, but because it is the major determinant of our performance on current account, net exports. Without a dramatic improvement in net exports of manufactures, we will not be able to sustain a credible balance of payments position at anything approaching full employment. That is why the current account matters, and that is why the supply side measures to boost manufacturing investment mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) are important.

As hon. Members have mentioned, the Queen's Speech talks about setting fiscal policy

"to bring the budget deficit back towards balance over the medium term."

That is sufficiently bland, and so far away from earlier Government policy, that even I agree with it. Over the medium term, that is a reasonable thing to aim for.

The issue for the Chancellor in his Budget next week is whether it is sensible at the present time to have a fetish about the PSBR and either cut public expenditure or increase taxation, or both. That would not be an appropriate response. The Government are concerned about public sector borrowing—after all, they are doing a lot of it. It was always suggested that sound Conservative economic management does not have to rely on it, so I understand why the Government are embarrassed. A £50 billion PSBR is a fair distance away from the £27 billion they promised at the general election a year or so ago.

The point that needs to be stressed is that it is not the size of the PSBR that matters but how it is spent. We are in the absurd position where the Government prefer to borrow to finance high levels of unemployment rather than borrow to finance economic recovery and jobs.

At the same time, the Government are desperate to encourage private sector borrowing and for consumers to shoot out into the high street, with their plastic cards, and spend more money to get the economy going. The Government believe that for the public sector to engage in additional expenditure funded that way is wrong.

Even if we were to get a consumer boom—which is unlikely—that would have a significant effect on imports. If we had public sector borrowing to finance investment, it would not only improve the supply side position and the competitiveness of our economy, but it would have no harmful effects on the balance of payments.

If we wish to reduce the PSBR in the future, we must get unemployment down. One way of doing that reasonably quickly is to borrow to fund investment in the short term. I hope that next week—although I fear it will not happen—that we might see a programme for economic expansion, for investment, for recovery and for jobs. Such a programme is not shown in the Queen's Speech, and I fear that we will not see it. At some stage, we will have a Government that will aim for full employment. It can be achieved, and for the sake of our country it must be achieved.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, may I suggest that there is no expansion of speeches because there are a number of people who still wish to contribute to the debate.

7.58 pm

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): We have just heard a litany of gloom from the hon. Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry), which was characteristic of most of the speeches that the Opposition have made. They have not mentioned the fact that recent figures show that our exports, particularly exports outside the Community, are at record levels. They have not mentioned that the trade deficit is coming down. They have not mentioned that we are the one country in Europe where unemployment is falling. We have the highest growth rate in Europe and, as the *Sunday Times* pointed out this week, the economic outlook for this country is better than it has been for many years. It is characteristic of the speeches from the Opposition today—party politics and point scoring, but no practical suggestions.

The issue that most people in this country are concerned about is unemployment. I agree with one point made by the hon. Member for Kingswood (Dr. Berry): 2·8 million unemployed is 2·8 million too many. That figure is far too high—although the hon. Gentleman did not go on to say that virtually every country in the developed world faces the problem of high unemployment.

In this country, millions of people who clock in each day face a nightmare. They do not know that they will still have a job by the time they clock out. Besides the 2·8 million who are unemployed, there are the millions of family members who depend on the people who are out of work and the millions who worry about retaining their jobs. The need to reduce unemployment is a central issue.

People fear those euphemistic phrases "You are surplus to requirements" and "We are going to have to let you go". Unemployment may not be accompanied by the same level of poverty that was seen in the 1930s, but it means waste, deprivation and all the other social consequences. It

certainly contributes to the current high level of crime. Reducing unemployment must continue to be a central objective of the Government's economic strategy.

There are practical ways in which the Government could reduce unemployment further. Let me start, however, by noting that it has fallen by more than 140,000 while in other European countries it is rising sharply. Today, the Prime Minister is talking to Chancellor Kohl. I think that Chancellor Kohl could learn something from this country. German unemployment is rising fast: a *Financial Times* survey showed that a third of all German companies are thinking of leaving the country.

What can this country do to deal with unemployment? Most people would suggest that we adopt Keynesian techniques, as we did in the 1930s—that we spend more than we raise in tax revenues. That is exactly what the Government have been doing for the past two years. When the Opposition parties criticise the high level of the public sector borrowing requirement, they should ask themselves what would have happened if the Government had cut spending far more, or raised taxes by far more, in the last couple of years. The answer is that unemployment would have been far higher—perhaps 4 million or 5 million. I believe that the Government were right to engage in a period of high public borrowing.

That policy, however, cannot be continued indefinitely. Although it brings short-term benefit—it certainly saves jobs in the short run—high public borrowing, if continued for a long period, is bound to push up long-term interest rates and crowd out the capital available for private investment. In the long run, it is bound to destroy jobs. That is why I hope and believe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will introduce measures to reduce borrowing.

I do not think that there is an easy way of borrowing more—although the Liberal Democrats produce absurd policies in the belief that even higher borrowing is possible. I think that even those on the Opposition Front Bench acknowledge, in their heart of hearts, that that is not the right way in which to deal with unemployment.

What is the appropriate wage level to maximise employment? According to those on the Opposition Front Bench, we do not want to be a sweatshop economy; we want to be a high-wage economy. We all share that objective, but how are we to achieve a high-wage economy? Do we achieve it by passing resolutions at the Labour party conference, by signing declarations in Brussels, or by earning it?

If high wages are earned through higher productivity and good quality, they are justified, and it is economic to pay them; but the only result of paying them in a low-productivity economy is to increase unemployment. The policy of a minimum wage which the Opposition Front Bench recommends is a policy for minimum employment.

Many companies in my constituency do not pay high wages—for instance, a company that provides home helps for elderly people. If a minimum wage were introduced that company would be bust, jobs would be lost and the help for those elderly people would end. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Front Benchers laugh scornfully; let me remind them of what their colleague the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said to Brian Walden on 24 May 1992.

When asked what the consequence of a minimum wage would be, the hon. Gentleman said that of course there would be some shake-out; any silly fool knew that. Any silly fool, that is, except some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues, who apparently do not realise what the consequence of a minimum wage would be.

One Labour Member, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), has presented a number of radical and brave ideas for dealing with unemployment. He is one of the few members of the Labour party who think seriously about the issue.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: That is why he is not on the Front Bench.

Mr. Milligan: Indeed.

The hon. Gentleman has put forward some interesting ideas, and has recognised that lower wages may be a way of maximising employment. Wage cuts would clearly not be a good idea; they deflated the economy further in the 1930s. We need wage rises that are appropriate to the productivity of our economy. I believe that we are getting those now; pay rises in British industry are at a 30-year low, which makes it economic to employ more people. That may be one reason why unemployment is falling and employment is rising.

Job sharing has become very fashionable in Europe. Only today, Volkswagen put most of its workers on a four-day week and introduced pay cuts. Reducing the level of pay and the number of hours worked makes it possible to increase the number of employees; the trouble is that most people, quite naturally, want to maintain their current pay levels if their hours are reduced, which means that unit wage costs often increase. That is the way in which to reduce competitiveness and destroy jobs. I think it pretty unlikely that job-sharing policies will do much for employment.

If shorter working hours and longer holidays lead to an increase in jobs, why is there far more unemployment in Europe than in America and Japan? In Europe, people work, on average, 10 per cent. fewer hours than are worked in America, and 20 per cent. fewer than are worked in Japan. Holidays in Europe tend to be long, and working hours tend to be short.

What about incentives? Last year, measures were introduced to encourage companies to take on people who had been unemployed for more than a year. That is an interesting idea, and it will be interesting to see the result of the limited experiment that has been carried out; however, there are dangers. Pursuing the policy too far will simply encourage employers to shed labour, and then take on people who have been unemployed for a long time. That would not result in a net creation of jobs.

Better training—the provision of better opportunities—is an essential component of any policy to reduce unemployment. Recent studies have shown an increasing demand for those with high skills or university education; there are fewer job opportunities for those with manual skills, or no skills at all.

I was interested to learn the views of the chairman of a company in my constituency—Vosper Thornycroft, the shipbuilding firm, which has been outstandingly successful in winning new orders. It now has a record order book, and is creating 200 jobs. Incidentally, the company was privatised 10 years ago, and has been an outstanding success in my constituency.

The chairman is concerned about a serious problem. If people are trained, companies that do not invest in such

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training may have an incentive to poach the people who have been trained. We should consider introducing measures to discourage such poaching and to make it worth while for companies to train.

What about helping particular kinds of firm, especially small firms? A couple of academics at Newcastle university carried out an interesting study of job creation between 1987 and 1989—a period when there was a large expansion in the number of jobs. They discovered that no fewer than 98 per cent. of all net new jobs in that period were created by companies employing fewer than 20 people.

Only last week, my constituency produced exceptionally good unemployment figures: unemployment has fallen more in Eastleigh than in any other Hampshire constituency. In the local travel-to-work area, it is down to only 4·9 per cent.; the total figure has fallen by 1,000 since January. That is an excellent result. That is partly because Eastleigh is an excellent place to build a business—it has very good transport links, an airport and motorways. It is partly because it has an extremely good jobcentre, but it is also because small businesses thrive there.

The local jobcentre tells me that most of the new jobs are coming from small companies—two, three or four jobs here and there—yet, in the past few months, 60 companies have been recruiting which had not recruited staff in the previous six months.

It is important to encourage small businesses. Obviously, because of the financial situation, there is no scope for large tax breaks, but small companies could be helped in other ways, such as the forthcoming deregulation Bill. The reduction of paperwork is extremely important for small companies. A number of business men in small companies have written to me to complain about certain forms, particularly about the census form, which was ridiculously long.

I was pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor agreed to consider imposing a penalty for those who do not pay debts on time. The late payment of debts is a huge problem for small businesses. The average period for the payment of debts is now 75 days. That is absurd. Although the Government have already taken some measures, we could do more to help small businesses to deal with late debts.

The central issue is the flexibility of markets, particularly the labour market. There is a paradox, because flexibility is part of the disease, but it is also part of the cure. Let me explain what I mean by that. For many of my constituents, flexibility means they do not know whether they will keep their jobs. It is not attractive to be told that one's job is flexible and could disappear, but that flexibility could make it easier for companies to hire people. They are more likely to take risks, because if things go wrong they will have the flexibility to alter their employment level.

On the borders of my constituency, Ford produces Transit vans. In the past couple of years, the factory has shed a number of jobs, all by voluntary redundancies, but in that period the factory has reduced the number of man hours it takes to produce a Transit van from 79 in 1991 to 62 today. As a result, the gap between productivity at the Ford Transit plant in Southampton and that in the equivalent factory in Belgium has been halved. The reduction in the value of the pound since we left the ERM means that it is cheaper to produce Transit vans in Southampton than in Belgium. As a result, the jobs of those who remain working there are far more secure and Ford can invest in that plant. It is easier to fire in Southampton than in Belgium, but the flexibility may make the jobs in Southampton and the future of the plant more secure.

The most striking statistics are found in considering Europe as a whole. Why has Europe created one third as many jobs as America in relative terms, and far fewer than Japan in the past 20 years? Why is the percentage of work force in employment lower in Europe than in America?

I put it to the House that the reason is that Europe has become inflexible, that it still suffers from Eurosclerosis —too many regulations and too high burdens of social security. I am disappointed to hear that Mr. Delors, in the paper that he is producing for the next summit, does not seem to have reached a proper analysis of the problem. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), who nods his approval on the Back Benches, was also hoping that Mr. Delors might have had a change of heart and realised that over-regulation and high social costs have been destroying jobs in Europe.

The differences between European and American records of employment are striking. In Britain, we have been moving closer to the American pattern; we have been trying to remove regulation. We have made it more difficult for trade unions to hold the country to ransom, we have given managers more freedom, and we have tried to strip away unnecessary regulations. That may be one explanation of why unemployment has started to fall at a much earlier stage in the economic cycle than most economists would expect.

No one has a complete reason why unemployment is falling, but the new flexibility of Britain's labour market seems to be the best explanation. The pattern of British employment is different from that in Europe, in a variety of ways. There are far more people working longer hours than in Europe. About 16 per cent. of people are now working more than 48 hours a week—far more than in France and Germany—and, at the other end of the spectrum, there are more people working shorter hours and doing part-time work, which is frowned on by European regulation but provides a necessary income for many people, particularly for working wives.

The success of women in finding employment and the fact that unemployment rates among women are far lower than those for men suggest that flexibility is the key. In general, women are more willing to work flexible hours and to adapt their skills. Men have to learn a lesson from women. In order to get and create jobs today, it is essential to match oneself to the needs of employers. The flexibility of our labour market is in stark contrast to what happens on the continent.

We heard a long speech from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). It was full of fury, but did not contain a single idea or suggestion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] It was rubbish; that is a very good description of it. It scored points, but most people are fed up with political point scoring. They want action to reduce unemployment, and that may require radical measures.

The facts that there are more people in employment in the country than in most European countries and that unemployment is faling, although the recovery so far has been relatively fragile, suggest that the Government are on the right track. They could take additional measures, such as providing more help for training, and more help for

small firms which could do more to create jobs. However, the evidence is that our approach is the right way to create more jobs and that the approach of those on the Opposition Front Bench is antediluvian.

I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingswood, which echoed those of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, that the way to economic recovery is to cut unemployment. That blinding insight is rather as though the medical profession had suggested that the way to reduce measles was to cut down on spots or the way to reduce colds was to cut down on sneezing.

Change is necessary to reduce unemployment; a policy to reduce unemployment is no policy at all. For those reasons, the Government are moving in the right direction, but I hope that they will keep the objective of reducing unemployment central to their economic policy.

8.17 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The Chancellor asked why Labour Members were debating the economy a few days before the Budget. The answer is that we want to draw attention to the number of pledges that the Government have broken in relation to VAT on fuel and other items.

It is incredible that the Chancellor stood at the Dispatch Box and denied that the Government had broken any pledges, especially when we are about to have VAT on oil and gas and we are contemplating VAT on books, newspapers, food and children's clothing. VAT is a tax which affects the least well-off in our society and the £50 billion public sector deficit that the Government have created will have to be paid for by people who can ill afford it.

The Gracious Speech mentioned measures to bring the budget into balance and I shall concentrate on one or two measures that have been canvassed today. One example is the proposal to harass single mothers, who are to be taken out of benefit although the Government's evidence shows that single parents did not jump housing queues or get pregnant on purpose and that they are not responsible for the ever-increasing levels of crime in the country.

The Government intend to save money by harassing people on invalidity benefit. We are to have a review of eligibility for benefits simply as a way for the Government to save money.

The Child Support Agency was set up to find absent parents. It was revealed only recently that that agency has been set targets which it is seeking to meet by finding parents who already make regular payments to their former partners. They will now have to pay sometimes as much as three times their previous contribution, not to the child of the former relationship but to the Treasury coffers. The children will not receive any of that extra money because the parent with responsibility for the child is usually in receipt of income support.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Illsley: No, I shall not give way. Some Conservative Members have spoken for as long as 25 minutes and I shall not waste time by giving way to the hon. Gentleman who I do not think has been in the Chamber all that long.

Court settlements where one parent gave up the right to a property are being ignored and the parent is being required to pay additional money to the agency. In my constituency, new relationships are being torn apart when one partner to a relationship has to make such payments to the agency.

The Queen's Speech mentions the sale of British Coal. How much that will raise is debatable, bearing in mind the current rate of pit closures. It is ridiculous to contemplate the sale of British Coal at a time when all will agree that the market for coal is deteriorating rapidly. Only a handful of collieries, if any, are likely to be left by this time next year.

All Britain's coal requirements can be met by imported coal and opencast mining, so we no longer need collieries. It is sad that collieries are being closed when even National Power is talking about coal gasifiers being put on new gas-fired generators within 20 to 30 years. We shall need to turn coal into gas to put through the new combined-cycle stations. That is a disgrace. It is a crying shame that the President of the Board of Trade did not take action with regard to the French interconnector, licences for new gas-fired stations and the nuclear subsidy in order to assist the British coal industry.

British Coal's unwillingness to allow collieries to go out to licence or to be bought, its lack of any sensible rationale, shows its desire to slim down the industry in advance of a management buy-out—a small industry sold off to the chairman and his fellow directors at some time in the future. So far, the Government have issued no consultation documents on any of the residual liabilities after privatisation. Those include concessionary coal, responsibility for subsidence and for the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation, a major owner of land and buildings throughout Britain.

The Gracious Speech refers to the further contracting out of local authority services, despite continued evidence of poorer services from the private sector and the fact that we are awaiting the government's review of standard spending assessments.

My local authority has some 70 per cent. less finance than other metropolitan authorities for standard services. No one in government can explain why the SSA methodology allows such a difference between Manchester and Barnsley. Why has my local authority been starved of finance so that it will be forced once again to put services out to tender, which will mean a restriction of those services in the future?

Sunday trading was also mentioned in the Gracious Speech. Most hon. Members have been lobbied to death on the issue, so I do not intend to spend long on it, but it would be nice if the Government would bring forward an option giving employees security, making work on Sunday voluntary and providing premium payments for such work. At present, the big supermarket chains are leading the way towards total deregulation. I have been lobbied by local shopkeepers, whose small businesses are likely to suffer from such deregulation. Already, companies such as Rumbelows and Sainsbury are making it clear that Sunday will be part of the existing working week. The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) shakes his head, but he will know that Rumbelow's has now altered all its shopworkers' contracts, making Sunday part of their working week. Again, there will be no chance of premium payments for people who work on Sundays.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) said that deregulation would reduce industry's costs. I am extremely concerned about some aspects of the deregulation Bill. I

[Mr. Illsley]

mentioned yesterday that the deregulation task forces have no local authority involvement. Trading standards officers throughout Britain, the people best placed to determine which regulations are redundant and which need enforcing, were excluded from the consultation.

One idea to be canvassed is that flame resistant fabric coatings will no longer be a requirement, with the result that children's nightclothes will no longer have to be flame resistant—an incredible deregulation exercise. A company in my constituency has increased employment during the past year or so by about 150 employees. It manufactures chemical coatings for foam furniture. That company will have a bleak future if we deregulate safety regulations for such flame-resistant coatings. That could lead to a loss of jobs in my constituency—not decreased costs, but the closure of the factory and the loss of all the jobs, quite apart from the fact that we are increasing the danger to the average consumer by allowing furniture and clothing which is not flame resistant.

Another area of concern is the deregulation of market franchise rights at the whim of a member of a deregulation task force who may be involved in private markets. The market in my home town was granted a royal charter in the 13th century. It is one of the biggest markets in the north of England. Yet the Government will seek to deregulate it, despite the fact that regulation enables a balanced provision of market trading within the area. Having a regulated market means that we avoid unscrupulous market owners and the type of weekly car boot sales that give no protection against buying faulty or stolen goods.

Market traders are happy with the current market franchise rights. They are protected from private markets where rents are undercut and where they lose business. If the market in my home town loses its royal charter, trade there will fall off. We are doing all we can to encourage trade to come into my constituency rather than lose it to the large shopping malls springing up nearby, but deregulation will make a complete mockery of that. Before introducing a Bill, the Government should have sought a consensus with Opposition parties as to which regulations could be easily done away with.

The Government have backed down on the Sheehy report, but they still intend to go ahead with the removal of local accountability for police forces throughout Britain. There is also the threat of the amalgamation of forces which may mean that my force in South Yorkshire will extend as far as Lincolnshire and the east coast. That is opposed by most people within the area and by the police authorities and it is a measure that the Government should withdraw.

The Gracious Speech contains no measures to reduce unemployment or to try to rescue the economy. We have already heard how fragile the current recovery is—if, indeed, there is any recovery at all. The measures included in the speech are a ragbag of deregulation and a decrease in health and safety provision which pander to the self-interest of the business community. All in all, it is a poor programme for the forthcoming year.

8.29 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I will refer briefly to the comments of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). I thought his speech contained the most disgraceful scaremongering which will put fear into householders who buy the furniture that is produced in his constituency. The company's employees will also now fear for their jobs. The hon. Gentleman might bear in mind that the safety regulations were brought in by this Government.

In respect of deregulation, Ministers have said clearly that they will not put health and safety requirements presently in regulations in jeopardy. The hon. Gentleman's speech was a remarkable piece of scaremongering, and I hope that employees of the firm in question note what the hon. Gentleman said in the House and not just what is released to the Barnsley newspapers.

Today's debate takes place against a new background in the economy which contrasts considerably with the background of a year ago. Inflation has been below 2 per cent. for the longest period since the 1960s, and is at its lowest for 30 years. Interest rates are at the lowest level that we have enjoyed for many years. It is worth noting that that has lifted £11 billion from industrial costs, and has saved the average mortgage payer £160 per month.

Unemployment has been dropping steadily for months. In my constituency, 300 fewer people are unemployed than was the case at the peak last April. Notable improvements have been made in our balance of trade, and it is interesting to note that exports of our manufactures are up by 15 per cent. in volume terms on a year ago. The United Kingdom has the highest growth in the European Community.

The scene is now set for a long period of growth and stability. We have great scope for growth, and a pool of talent among the unemployed. That is not least due to training programmes which have been instituted by the Government. However, that potential could be impeded by a blot on the landscape, and that is the scale of the current budget deficit which looms large at £50 billion. That subject was ignored almost entirely by Opposition Members.

It is worth remembering that the budget deficit needs to be financed. Week in, week out, the Treasury must go to the City with its cap in its hand to get each extra billion pounds. That just cannot go on. Eventually the Treasury will be met with a higher price demand, which will mean higher interest rates. That would be disastrous for our industry and our home owners. If we end up with the City saying no, our only recourse will be to go to the International Monetary Fund. That may have been good enough for the Labour Government in 1976, but it is not an option for the present Government. We are not a banana republic, but a major economy. The Labour party may allow us to go to the IMF, but we should not, and that is why we must take steps to close the deficit.

We must ask ourselves why we can finance the deficit. First, Conservative Governments have had a long-standing reputation for sound finance. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) announced in his last Budget a package of tax increases which was worth £10 billion and which will take effect in April 1994. That shows the City and the financial community that we are in earnest. Secondly, during the recession the call for investment funds in the City has been depressed, leaving much more scope for the Treasury to raise the necessary funds.

We must realise that, as recovery progresses, the taking up of funds by private industry will increase. That will limit the ability of the Treasury to pick up funds, and would

create extra pressures for higher interest rates. If we are to sustain the recovery, we must cut the deficit to clear the way for private investment.

We heard nothing from the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) about genuine ways to cut the deficit. As a starting point, the hon. Gentleman would have to tackle that £50 billion, to which he could add a further £37 billion which, of course, was the cost of the promises the Labour party made at the general election. The Opposition said that it was not in the business of cutting promises, so let us add that figure to bring the total to £87 billion. Let us further extend it. The hon. Gentleman's opposition to the widening of the VAT net and the extension of national insurance contributions would cost another £10 billion. Therefore, a Labour Chancellor would have to finance a deficit of £97 billion.

The hon. Gentleman's colleagues such as the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spray promises of vast spending left, right, and centre, so the hon. Gentleman would be in the business of trying to raise £100 billion. He did not address the present £50 billion, and certainly did not address £100 billion.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Not long before the general election, I had a conversation in a bar in this place with a junior Minister. He said to me that he was fast getting to the stage—and, in fact, had reached it—that he would rather "see you and Smith trusted with the nation's finances rather than that bunch we have in charge." Listening to the hon. Gentleman's arithmetic, I know just what he meant.

Mr. Arnold: I was not in the bar with the right hon. Lady. All I say is that if she were to tot up the figures, she might realise the scale of the problem.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East did not try to tackle the deficit either at current levels or at the level the Labour party's policies would take us to. It is worth recalling that the deficit would have been wider still if this Government had not taken some sound decisions during the past 14 years.

Take the nationalised industries, for example. In the last year of the Labour Government the nationalised industries took £6·5 billion at today's prices in grants and borrowing alone. British Steel alone took £1·8 billion in that year, and the National Coal Board took £1·6 billion. Today most of those industries are privatised and are no longer a weight on the Exchequer. Indeed, they are profitable and contribute many billions of pounds to the Exchequer through taxes.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): The hon. Gentleman refers to the costs of some of the public utilities. Will he take into consideration the fact that the poll tax cost this country £17·5 billion? Will the hon. Gentleman address that point?

Mr. Arnold: I was not going to address it, but I will. That £17·5 billion went into spending by local government on education, social services, and the rest of the services. The figure which the hon. Gentleman dredges up is the total amount which was put into local government finance, the overwhelming majority of which went into services —even under Labour councils.

While on the subject of public utilities, it is worth noting the impact of privatisation on prices to consumers. Since British Telecom was privatised in December 1984, the price of calls in real terms has fallen by 14·9 per cent. Since the privatisation of British Gas in December 1986, the real price to consumers had dropped by a startling 20·2 per cent. Even in the short time since the regional electricity companies were privatised in December 1990, prices to consumers have dropped in real terms by 1·4 per cent.

Those facts should also be considered in the context of VAT on energy. The purpose of VAT on energy is twofold: for tax-raising reasons to which I have alluded, and for meeting the Rio earth summit commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10 million tonnes. VAT on fuel will make a significant contribution to achieving that. All hon. Members know that, but I was somewhat surprised by the cynical reaction and the opportunism that has been shown.

Before the previous Budget, when VAT on fuel was announced, the Labour spokesman on the environment told *Green Magazine* that Labour was thinking of a number of other "small but effective" tax measures which included increasing VAT on "environmentally unfriendly products." Of course, that was said before the Budget and the public reaction to it. Post-Budget, of course, political cynicism and opportunism have been all the rage among the Opposition. That was best summed up by the Leader of the Opposition on Radio 4 in October.

> "We wouldn't go back to zero-rating, it's as simple as that . . . but the Labour Party will be voting against VAT on domestic fuel".

In other words, the Opposition will vote against it to obtain votes but they would hang on to it for dear life because they know that it is the right and necessary thing to do.

The Liberal Democrats, whose Members, of course, are not here, are no better. This afternoon, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) attempted to rush past the matter, but he cannot overlook the fact that in his party's 1992 election manifesto the Liberal Democrats were absolutely clear about their policy, which is somewhat unusual for them. They said:

> "We will support a Community-wide energy tax on all energy sources".

Then, however, the Newbury and Christchurch by-elections occurred and, needless to say, the Liberal Democrat candidates were against the very energy tax that their party had supported.

What is the Liberal Democrats' position today? They have published a very glossy new document called "Facing up to the Future". I went to the Library to acquire a copy. The section entitled "The Environmental Challenge" contains some lovely apocalyptic quotations. It states:

> "Human-made emissions of greenhouse gases are now causing climate change at ten times the rate of any other period in the planet's recent history. Melting of the polar ice caps, thermal expansion of the oceans, rising of sea levels and disruption of weather patterns are expected as a consequence . . . Depletion of the ozone layer, originally detected over Antarctica, now occurs over Europe in the spring and summer. Increases in skin cancer and in damage to animal and plant species will result."

I read further to find what the Liberal Democrats would do. They would do nothing. They have no proposals: they refer to the issue in apocalyptic terms but then duck it. That is always the way with the Liberals, I suppose.

What of the other environmental organisations that are usually so vociferous—for example, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace? They could be described as the dogs that did not bark in the night. For many years, they have

[Mr. Arnold]

complained about emissions from the burning of sulphurous coal, but when the reduction in the burning of such coal was announced in the past year or so, where were those two environmental organisations? They were conspicuous by their silence; and the same is true in relation to VAT on fuel.

I searched hard for statements on VAT on fuel by Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace but the best that I could do, with the help of the Library, was a joint letter from the two groups to *The Independent* on 13 July. It is noticeable that the letter, signed by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and a number of other organisations, mentions organisations

"some of which are against the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel and some of which are in favour of the measure."

It does not specify which are in favour. The groups are right to express concern about the impact on poorer pensioners and the less well-off, but the letter does not mention the environmental advantages to be gained. I should expect organisations such as Age Concern, the Child Poverty Action Group and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation to worry about pensioners and the less well-off, but the environmental organisations did not offer strong support.

In a joint letter to *The Times* on 27 March, in which the organisations are semi-submerged, they state:

"The decision to impose VAT on domestic fuel has led to considerable public debate and concern regarding fuel poverty. Along with increased transport fuel costs, higher energy costs will be an essential component of an integrated strategy aimed at paying a truer price for energy use (for example due to pollution damage) and encouraging greater energy efficiency and conservation."

Having said that, it was rather churlish to continue:

"The Budget measures barely scratch the surface of this issue".

Are the organisations in favour of taking steps or not? They cannot welcome even those which they claim barely scratch the survace.

Those organisations are right to express concern about the elderly and the less well-off, and all hon. Members share that concern, but we well remember what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said last month:

"No sensible person should condemn the tax before they have even seen our package of help for those least able to pay".

The Government have also made it absolutely clear that extra help will be given—through income-related benefits—to poorer pensioners and other people on low incomes to pay higher fuel bills as soon as they arrive. This help will be additional to the automatic increase in pensions to reflect the impact of an increase in fuel bills on the RPI. We shall look forward to hearing the details shortly after the Budget.

I enjoyed the Chancellor's speech this afternoon. As it continued, I saw something that I had also observed in my early days in the House in the mid-1980s when the economy was growing strongly: members of the Opposition Front Bench fell silent. They were gobsmacked by the nasty feeling that the political situation was slipping away. After only a few months, our right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has shown that he is master of his new brief, whereas the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does not have a brief, let alone a shadow Budget, to parade in this debate on a subject chosen by the Opposition.

I found my right hon. and learned Friend's candour about the events of last autumn, and since, in relation to the exchange rate mechanism and economic and monetary union most refreshing. Yes, in an ideal world, there certainly should be convergence of the European economies. That would be good, but economic policy should be set for Britain's interest and, to that end, we need to retain a sound British currency and a sound British economic policy. To achieve those, we need a central bank—the Bank of England—under the control of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is a cop-out to hand monetary policy to uncontrolled bankers, although, were we to have a Labour Government, it would be an improvement. However, Britain expects a Conservative Government to run a sound monetary policy in conjunction with responsible fiscal and other economic policies. We cannot have the luxury of passing the buck.

I should like to make a Budget plea on the issue of late payment, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan). Like other hon. Members, I have companies in my constituency which have carried out their contracts properly, largely in the construction and contracting business, only to have payment delayed to the point where they have collapsed. It is an outrageous state of affairs, and it is high time something was done to ensure that such companies are paid on time and without prevarication by smart alec treasurers in major companies.

I have been encouraged by today's debate, and I look forward to the recovery broadening and strengthening.

8.47 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I am sure that the House has listened with considerable interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold). Like other hon. Members, I should like to venture after him into the subject of value added tax on domestic fuel. It is a large topic and we have not yet discussed the insulation of existing dwellings and why and how we should upgrade the standard of those dwellings and those yet to be built. That is where the real savings in fuel and improvements in efficiency can be made but no one has yet thought it worth while to mention that aspect of the problem. However, it is too large an issue for what remains of this debate.

The debate was supposed to centre on economic conditions and I shall, in the main, speak about them, although I confess that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has also sparked other thoughts in my mind, and I shall return to them if I have time.

The Gracious Speech informed us that the intention in the coming year is to reduce public expenditure as a percentage of GDP, an interesting observation as it is currently down to what it was 14 or 15 years ago, to move back towards a balanced budget—there is certainly some moving to be done there—to keep permanently low inflation, and to increase tax on income.

The Budget will no doubt start those processes next week, and I believe that the road towards their realisation will be financially painful for the taxpayer; it cannot be otherwise. The exact means by which the revenue-expenditure gap, now so large, will be closed is still a matter for conjecture, and will remain so until the Chancellor of the Exchequer finishes his speech next week.

First, I shall glance quickly at the consequences of the change in timing caused by the amalgamation of the autumn statement with the Budget. That matter was explored and widely welcomed on both sides of the House when it was first announced, and in the spring Budget

debate. However, as always, time and experience have brought to light consequences not foreseen by politicians. Those consequences may have been foreseen by Treasury officials, who perhaps do not think about political implications, but politicians—not least those on the Front Bench—should think about them. I must assume that politicians did not foresee the political implications, because nobody thought it worth while to mention them.

First, it has been put to me that the general unwillingness of the population to go out and spend money in the high street over the past two or three months is partially due to the change in timing. People looking forward to a Budget in fairly stringent financial times have in their hearts and minds a fear of the unknown. Such fear is a powerful factor influencing human behaviour. People wonder what they will have left when the tax increases are announced.

Until that unknown is resolved, which cannot happen until next week, people are unwilling to spend their money. They have held tight to it, and high street spending over the past month or two has slowed down and even dropped. Whether cash will be released when the Chancellor has finished his Budget speech has yet to be decided. I believe that, however good or bad folk may consider the Budget to be, they will still spend a certain amount of money for Christmas, so traders may yet get all the money back; it may simply have been dammed up.

The second and more serious consequence for any Prime Minister, whatever party may form the Government of the day, is that in future we shall be locked into having general elections in spring or early summer. I have already referred to the reason for that—the fear of the unknown. The impending Budget will make it difficult for any Prime Minister to choose an autumn election unless circumstances are extremely favourable, which rarely happens. The Government would be open to attack on every side. The Opposition would attack, and scaremongering and fears would be fed by comments from every side. No sensible Prime Minister would be willing to go for an election in October, which in the past has been one of the favourite times.

The election could not be held after the Budget, either. Who wants a snowman's election? We had one many years ago in Northern Ireland, and we do not especially want to be out electioneering in December, January or February again. In future, elections will take place in March, April and May; that will be the sensible time. However, it will also be far enough away from the Budget for any good to have been dissipated, and close enough to the next one to allow the scaremongering to start again. So, politically, the decision on timing may not have been the happiest.

During the coming year, we shall see the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions. In effect, that is a 1 per cent. increase in income tax, and it is only a forerunner of what will have to be done to national insurance contributions over the next few years. The aged population is steadily increasing, and that trend will continue for many years. The change in the balance of the population between age cohorts—between those who are working and those who have stopped working—will have profound consequences which it will not be easy to resolve.

One sees all sorts of straws in the wind in the financial press about changes in the funding of pensions. Any such development will require a great change in the way in which people prepare for their old age, and that will have to be a generational change; it cannot come about quickly or easily. There is no quick fix, and the sooner the facts are faced and the necessary effort made to educate the public, the better it will be for all of us. The problem will not go away.

The finance required to support the number of people older than the normal working age will represent a large element of our national income in future. I put it in those terms because I do not think that it matters much whether the necessary sums are provided through a system of state pensions or through private schemes. In the end, that money will have to be provided by the working population at the time. Unlike the Japanese, we have not managed to play an immense part in industry overseas to help pay for our pensions.

That is only one obstacle which has to be overcome if the Government are really to reduce public expenditure as a percentage of GDP, not to mention their commitment to return to a balanced budget. Given the present £50 billion deficit, cuts in the growth of public expenditure are certain. I must say in passing that it seems better to me for a Government to find their expenditure overshooting than to be accused of having a cut a year or two down the road, but whether they would be prepared to put up with the temporary problems created by an overshoot is another matter.

Tax increases next week are certain. Even if we do the best that can be done both now and in the longer term, the best hope of meeting the Government's present commitments and those that will face any future Government must lie in faster economic growth and increasing employment. As has been said time and again, that is the best way of getting rid of a large part of social expenditure.

This week's cut in interest rates was belated and, I believe, too small—perhaps the Chancellor is saving something for next week. Much more is needed—at least another 1 per cent., to bring the real interest rate down to continental levels, will be necessary at the beginning of next week. When I read that the Chancellor was saying that he now meant to leave such decisions to be made by the Bank of England, I was horrified. I was certain that he had painted himself into a corner, and that he would soon find himself not so much painted into that corner as entombed in it. However, sure enough, the paint has dried a little and today I noted the Chancellor tip-toeing gently away from Bank decisions and asserting once more that he was the one making the decision. That was not quite what we read in the press, and no doubt it will be made clear to us later which account was correct.

The reality is that the Chancellor and the Government are elected to a position to take decisions by themselves in the best interests of the country, as they perceive them at any particular time. Whenever the buck arrives on their desk, they should deal with it. Given the Chancellor's behaviour in his previous incarnations, I always believed that he was a man who was prepared to stand up and take it on the chin, and to make the necessary decisions.

It troubles me that if the remarks attributed to him earlier this week are correct, the only thing that can be downstream is a European central bank—which would find much less favour on this Bench than on most, not least because the Chancellor's words earlier today indicated that German decisions in respect of the exchange rate mechanism reflected Germany's interests rather than those

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of any other country. That is evident to those of us who take a sceptical view of a European central bank in any event.

The Government must create the conditions that will spawn a high-income, high-productivity economy, which in turn implies a considerable increase in our manufacturing capacity. We have not replaced the capacity lost in the early 1980s, and priority must be given to investment in restoring that capacity and to exports—not least those outside the EC, where we seem to be doing rather better than with exports within it. We should build on that success and not become too dependent on Europe, but look to the wider world and make full use of the sea lanes that are open to us.

The Government might make a start by considering the hundreds, perhaps thousands of aging ships around the world and reviewing the recommendations for building new ships made by those in the shipping industry, for that would spawn an enormous amount of engineering work far beyond the confines of any individual shipyard. That would be of tremendous help to the whole of the United Kingdom.

Construction also offers potential, but unfortunately too many of the products used in that industry are made in France, Germany or elsewhere and imported into this country—products that we used to make ourselves, and which could be made here again, given some encouragement in the proper places.

Others will have their own ideas, and the Government should be generous enough to acknowledge that right hon. and hon. Members on this side of the House also want a prosperous and happy United Kingdom as we rush towards the end of this turbulent century.

That returns me to my earlier remarks about the speech of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, who took considerable credit for his party's willingness to talk to Sinn Fein—which as far as anyone on these Benches is concerned is to talk to the IRA: if there is a thread between them, it is well nigh an invisible thread.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say that we on this Bench should talk to the Protestant paramilitaries. It is not all that long since spokesmen for the hon. Gentleman's party were wrongly accusing us—both in the House and outside it—of talking to the Protestant paramilitaries, and condemning us for doing so. The hon. Gentleman's party is now only too willing to urge us down a road that it once condemned because its members have talked to a group of the most murderous thugs in the western world. The House would do well to keep in mind the underlying reason for the urgings of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh.

The hon. Gentleman also drew attention to the situation in Cyprus, and said that a British Minister stated recently that there should be one Government for Cyprus. The hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that so long as this nation was the protective power in Cyprus the situation which now prevails in that country did not exist. It was only when those who wanted union with Greece murdered our soldiers and fought us tooth and nail, so that the Greeks could take over the whole island, that the present situation was spawned and bore its evil fruit. That is an exact analogy of the situation in Ulster. That lesson should be learnt not only here but farther afield.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh condemned my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) for his remarks the other day, when he drew attention to the unease that has spread to what might be described as the middle class in Northern Ireland. He did not seem to think that the middle class was affected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley may have been wrong, but my experience suggests that his remarks were accurate.

After yesterday, we can say one thing with certainty: there are people in Northern Ireland who are uneasy. Their attempt to import a large cargo of firearms is a direct reflection of that. It should concern us all. It concerns me and those whom I represent that such a thing should have happened. As the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, it was a preparation for war. Why would people take such action if they were not afraid of their long-term position in this nation?

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said that he was speaking from a nationalist position. I and those who sit with me also speak from a nationalist position. We speak from the position of the British nation resident in Ulster. We are intensely proud of our membership of that nation. We are not prepared to give it up or to have it undermined. We are not prepared to accept a system of governance for our Province that will be used to undermine our place in this nation and take us into a nation and a society that we and our fathers have detested and in which we will have no part. That view should be made clearly and bluntly in case anyone thinks that our resolution is weakening.

We are British and we intend to remain so. That is the position of the Unionist People. They have shown what they believe over many years and will go on showing it. They will continue to elect Members such as myself and those who sit with me to represent their views in this House.

9.7 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The Government's programme, as embodied in the Queen's Speech, was rightly described by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition as thin. Tonight, after six days of debate, we know clearly why. The real debate on the real agenda is taking place elsewhere, behind closed doors, away from the public gaze. That debate is about whether to get rid of state pensions, how to tax us even further by stealth and how to break up the national health service.

The purpose of the Queen's Speech is to give the Government an opportunity to address the state of the country, to set goals and put forward proposals on the role that Government can play in meeting those goals. The purpose of this Queen's Speech has been to conceal those goals and to fob us off with rhetoric, sound bites and scapegoats.

Instead, the nation awaits, with some trepidation, the real Conservative programme that may begin to emerge in next week's Budget. It will be set, of course, against the background of the ticking time bomb left by the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). That time bomb is made up of the biggest tax hike in British history and is brought to us by a Government who fought an election promising no new taxes, no tax increases, no extension of VAT, no increase

in national insurance and no change to mortgage tax relief. We were promised cuts in income tax "year on year", to quote the Prime Minister, and no cuts in public expenditure.

The Government have been more economical with the truth than they have been with our public finances. Furthermore, they fiddle the figures. The figure that they gave for public borrowing before the general election was £20 billion adrift of the post-election reality, a reality of which they must have been aware.

That borrowing—£50 billion of it—is not to fund investment in Britain's future; it is to pay off the cost of the Government's incompetence. Over and over again, Opposition Members warned the country of just these dangers.

But what about Conservative Members? How many of them voted for tax cuts before the last election; how many of them will vote for tax increases now? How many of them warned of VAT on energy before the election? How many will vote for VAT on energy now? How many of them warned of increases in national insurance before the election; how many will vote for such increases now? How many Conservatives warned of cuts in mortgage interest relief?

I am waiting for volunteers from the Conservative Benches—I will give way readily to any Conservative who wants to intervene. *[Interruption.]* Here comes a volunteer now. Does the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) want to tell us that he warned his constituents of cuts in mortgage interest relief before the election? But will he vote for cuts in it now?

Did any Conservative Member warn of tax increases through freezing allowances—because they will all vote for that today? How many of them, if any, warned the British people that they would be stung to the tune of £8·50 a week if they voted Tory? How many of them will vote for tax increases of £8·50 a week?

Earlier today, the Chancellor accused my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) of searching for material in what he called the most unlikely places, by which he meant the election addresses of Conservative party candidates—a remark more candid than flattering. Every Conservative Member won his seat on a false prospectus, and they know it—and so do the British people.

To give him his due, the Foreign Secretary seems a little shamefaced about this false prospectus. In the debate on Friday he said:

"Words come back to haunt us if we cannot live up to the promise that they contain. We must be able to deliver what we undertake and not to undertake what we cannot deliver."—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 114.]

I cannot believe that the right hon. Gentleman said that. I can believe that it is what he really thinks, but if so, why is he still in the Government?

By contrast, a far more authentic note is struck by the Chancellor's cheerful shamelessness. His reaction to the charge that the Government were elected on a false prospectus is as different from the Foreign Secretary's as it is revealing. Today, the Chancellor said that the Government gave no commitment whatsoever not to increase taxation. I could barely believe that he said that, and if I had not heard it with my own ears I would find it extremely difficult to believe.

I remind the Chancellor of what the Government said:

"We will not have to increase taxes. I cannot see any circumstances in which that will be necessary".

That was the Chancellor's predecessor. The manifesto said:

"We will maintain mortgage tax relief"—

not cut it,

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT."

That was the Prime Minister.

"I have no plans to raise the top rate of tax or the level of national insurance contributions."

That, too, was the Prime Ministser.

The thesis that the Chancellor is advancing is plain: no one should take too seriously what Conservatives say during an election campaign—and no one will again. It is clear that the Chancellor has a cavalier way with words, but, more worryingly for a Chancellor, he seems to have an equally cavalier way with figures. This afternoon, he claimed that in Labour's shadow Budget someone earning £25,000 would have had to pay £2,050 more in tax. That is just not true. I have here a copy of Labour's shadow Budget, with which I doubt the Chancellor bothered himself. No doubt such details of fact are beneath him.

In Labour's shadow Budget, some people on earnings of £25,000 a year would have been better off and, in the worst case, a childless single earner would have paid no more than £250 to £270 more a year. What will they be paying next April under the Government? I will tell the Chancellor: at least £300 and possibly up to £500 more, nearly twice as much, because that is the scale of the Government's failure.

The Chancellor went on to speak about the decrease in the numbers of people who are registered as unemployed. That fall is welcome on both sides of the House if it is true. On 20 May this year it was reported, however, that

"managers from about 800 benefit offices are receiving performance-related pay, directly linked to reductions in the unemployment register."

That may, of course, have no bearing on the fact that during that period the figures of people who are registered as unemployed—not by any means the same thing as those seeking work—have decreased, but it is interesting that it is hard to reconcile those figures with the figures for people who are in jobs, because the figures for people who are in work decreased, in the year leading up to July, by 500,000 in full.

Those are the facts on which the Chancellor touched so lightly and so inaccurately. Two Tory Chancellors now hold the record for the highest tax increases in any one Budget: the first, the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames and the second, Lord Howe—two Tory Chancellors, who top the league table for taxation hikes.

The question is: is there more to come? That is clearly the belief of the *Daily Mail*, which told us this week to prepare for "Mr. Clarke's stiletto". That is its description. I must admit, I had always seen the Chancellor more as a club and axe man myself—the man who took the truncheon to the police force, the man who took the cane to the teachers and the man who took the surgeon's saw to the national health service. The *Daily Mail*, however, with its intimate acquaintance with Tory thinking, clearly sees him rather differently, as the man with the stiletto, "a fine Italian dagger", which the newspaper says that he will use to

"put the knife in subtly, apparently painlessly but with dangerous long-term effects."

I am sure that the *Daily Mail* is right, because we see around us everywhere the dangerous long-term effects of the Government's policies—not just the damage that they

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

have done to the nation's budget and, as a result, to the budget of every British family. Far more serious, far more undermining, is the damage that they have done to the confidence and security of every British family.

In Britain today, most people are worried about the state of our country. They feel nervous. They feel insecure. They are worried about rising crime, about their jobs and about their future and that of their children. They see around them rotting buildings, and those buildings are the local hospital and the local school. They see so much that they have taken for granted, at risk and under threat. They fear that they are being cast adrift in a hostile world and, in that concern and fear, they turn to the Government, in whom they placed their trust 18 months ago, for guidance, for reassurance and for leadership. What a waste of time it is to look for leadership from the Government. What do they get? Scapegoats and slogans.

One reason for the scapegoating rhetoric of the recent "back to basics" campaign is that the Government know that many people, whether they live in leafy suburbs, country towns or major cities, live in the fear of crime that today touches every family in the country. And especially—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am seeking to listen to the hon. Lady. I do not expect to have to compete against a lot of Back-Bench mutterings.

Mrs. Beckett: I think that my hon. Friends are objecting to the unusual use of the officials' box to pass suggestions to Back Benchers.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I did not see that; I was looking at the other side of the Chamber. However, I take the point.

Mrs. Beckett: The problem faced by many families in Britain is that they live in fear of crime that touches us all. In particular, they live in fear of the apparently random, almost casual, attack which appears increasingly to be drugs-related. "Back to basics" is a slogan which acknowledges that things in Britain are falling apart.

The Conservatives, turning and turning in the widening spiral of Government detachment and deregulation, now need to put together that which for 14 years they have torn asunder. They call for community spirit when no Government in modern times have done more to kill it. They have grown bloated, complacent and insolent in office. They have grown so insolent that they reject all advice from business, large and small, that Britain needs a Government who will frame a partnership with industry, not a Government who wash their hands of industry's problems.

The Government are so insolent that they plan to dodge their obligations for sick pay and instead dump them on small businesses. While doing so, they defend tax loopholes for rich contributors to the Tory party, at home or abroad.

That is not the only example of their insolent disregard for standards, whether in business or in public life. The proposed reorganisation of local government in Scotland and Wales to the diktat of the Ministers responsible is one of the most shameless pieces of gerrymandering that this House has ever witnessed.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): The hon. Lady alleges that the plan for local government reorganisation in Wales is shameless gerrymandering. In that case, can she explain why the changes in my constituency involve putting five wards that all contain Labour councillors into my seat?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman should direct that question to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, who clearly knows more about the matter than I do. If the hon. Gentleman doubts my claim about gerrymandering, I draw to his attention the observations of *The Scotsman* that the proposals for Scotland represent

"a map drawn to no higher democratic principle, no deeper logic, than the electoral advancement of the Conservative Party in Scotland."—*[Official Report,* 22 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 210.]

The hon. Gentleman will find relevant examples in Monday's *Hansard* showing how ridiculous many of the proposals are.

The extraordinary thing is that the proposals would not have been acceptable to any previous Government of any political shade. It is an example of how this Government have grown swollen with insolence in office. With each Queen's Speech, they relinquish more and more responsibility for the nation's affairs by the privatisation of assets that most people believe the Government have a duty to manage—for example, British Rail; but also the Post Office, the Royal Mint and the Inland Revenue. Who in this country wants his taxes handled by a private company? It is certainly not the British people or Members of Parliament. I am right, am I not, in saying that it will not apply to Ministers or Members of Parliament?

The proposals are unsought, they will be unpopular, they are unworkable and they are one more example of the Government's insolence and folly. Yet the Government are so insolent that they utterly refuse to listen to others and demand blanket support for this year's criminal justice and police Bills, when the 64 pieces of legislation that went before those Bills have failed to stem the rising tide of lawlessness that so troubles the British people.

Meanwhile, the Government are cutting programmes such as those for drug education, for better street lighting and for video surveillance—programmes that work to help to tackle rising crime. Of course, the reason for such action is that we have a Government for whom catching criminals takes second place to catching headlines. As the chairman of the Police Federation, Richard Coyles, pointed out, the Government are

"conducting a war against lawlessness by press release and good intent".

He continued to cast even more light on the validity of the Government's claims in that regard by saying:

"If you add up all the extra thousands of bobbies that the last seven Home Secretaries claim to have put back on the beat there would be no room for pedestrians on the pavement."

The Government, who preach responsibility in others, shirk all responsibility themselves. That abdication of responsibility comes from the very top. When he was asked about the state of the economy, the Prime Minister said in *The Independent* on 4 March:

"I think you have to consider firstly the inheritance I had when I became Prime Minister: we had 15 per cent interest rates, inflation just under 11 per cent".

That inheritance was from himself as Chancellor. When the Prime Minister was asked about rising crime, he

blamed it on Labour local authorities in the inner cities. In fact, crime was rising faster in Tory rural areas, which, as a consequence, are Tory no more.

When concern is rising about standards of education for children, every one of whom has had their education under this Government, the Prime Minister blames it on parents. The Home Secretary blames it on grandparents.

What should be in the Queen's Speech is an industrial policy to promote investment and expansion in British industry. There should be an industrial policy that has as its aim the promotion of long-term sustainable recovery that will bring the stability that British industry so badly needs.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): That is not good enough. We need more detail.

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman does not know of what an industrial policy consists—I can well understand it, if he has been following the Government for many years—he needs only to turn to bodies such as the Engineering Employers Federation or the CBI. All have been giving the Government advice about the need for an industry policy for many years and not one piece of that advice has been heeded.

What should also be in the Queen's Speech is an employment policy to offer hope and purpose, especially to the young. A balanced programme for investment in our infrastructure is greatly needed, as the million people who could neither get to work nor get home in London yesterday will testify. We need a programme for the environment that does not leave all the consequences and all the responsibility with the private sector. The British people pay a heavy price daily for a Government who shirk their proper responsibilities.

The Queen's Speech betrays once more the Government's poverty of ambition for the British people, who are rightly ambitious for themselves and for their families—people seeking hope, purpose, and self-confidence and looking to their Government to provide the framework in which that hope can be realised and that purpose expressed; people whose hope for improvement depends on deliverance from this Government.

The Queen's Speech fails utterly to address in any respect the condition of this country. For that reason, we shall vote tonight not for the speech, but for our amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before the Leader of the House starts his speech, may I make one point very clear. As the House knows, I did not see a certain incident that took place, but may I, for the record, make it clear that notes of guidance for a Minister coming from the civil servants' Box are for the use of that Minister only, and under no circumstances must they be handed to any other hon. Member.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I understand it, you have just rebuked an hon. Member. Instead of taking that rebuke, the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) sits there laughing and joking. You should make clear, Madam Deputy Speaker, what action you will take unless some apology is forthcoming from the hon. Member concerned.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologised to you and I thought that the Leader of the Opposition heard that apology as well. I certainly apologised, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you will confirm and I am happy to apologise to the whole House for an exercise in excessive enthusiasm.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). The incident is now closed.

9.31 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): We have had what can properly be described as a long and, at times, lively debate, inaugurated some considerable time ago, on this day last week. It was started with considerable wit and style by my hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). Once again, I congratulate them on their speeches in immediate reply to the Gracious Speech.

In the intervening week, we have had a number of interesting moments. There may be some that even the participants might rather forget, including the venture of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) in seeking to prevent the Secretary of State for Wales from speaking at all or from putting his points in the debate.

There have been others that have undoubtedly given considerable pleasure to all hon. Members, including, certainly—I was not able to be present—the speech yesterday by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and, undoubtedly, the exchanges today between my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

To seek to sum up after such a debate is rather a large task. Before I begin to do that, I should acknowledge and, to a degree, respond to the convention that on these occasions, the Leader of the House says something about one or two House of Commons issues which have featured in the debate. On this occasion, it would have been difficult to avoid doing so given the forthright comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) on the opening day of the debate.

The whole House is well aware of the way in which my right hon. Friend has put immense effort into and has subsequently pursued with vigour the issue of the reform of the sittings of the House, which is the subject of the report that is most frequently referred to by his name. The whole House takes the view that it owes him considerable gratitude for that effort.

The point that my right hon. Friend has always emphasised and which I must emphasise again tonight, as he did in his speech last Thursday, is that the proposals hang together as a balanced package which recognises, on the one hand, the interests of the Government and, on the other hand, the interests of the Opposition and of Back Benchers. To cherry-pick from the package and, above all, to ignore the recommendations made about automatic timetabling would rapidly destroy that balance. He has rightly pressed me to take this matter forward, and he knows, and the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) certainly knows, that I have attempted to do so in concert with her. It is proving more difficult than I had hoped—and possibly more difficult than the right hon. Lady had hoped—and, as my right hon. Friend understands, I am currently looking for further ways in which we might make progress.

[Mr. Tony Newton]

It remains my hope that we will be able to achieve agreement on a balanced package of measures that can be brought before the House, but, after the long period in which I have sought to reach an agreement, it would be wrong of me to underestimate the difficulty that there appears to be in doing so. That is not to say that I shall not continue with every effort to do so, but had it been easy I would have brought proposals to the House at a much earlier stage.

As to the current Session and the period immediately ahead of us, I assure the House that I will continue to do everything that I can, within our existing arrangements and procedures, to ensure that the business of the House is arranged for the maximum convenience of hon. Members. Obviously the Government must progress their business, but in doing so we will seek to be as helpful as possible to the House, and take into account all of its interests and the interests of hon. Members.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Leader of the House aware that there is grave dissatisfaction about changes in procedure which occasionally lead to the sort of unwelcome move that puts the Christmas Adjournment debate on a Friday morning, which is unheard of in the House? Will he give an undertaking that we will return to a situation in which Back Benchers' rights are protected as zealously by the Leader of the House as by Back Benchers themselves?

Mr. Newton: This subject was raised at Business Question Time today, and I commented on it then. I very much respect the hon. Lady, even though I do not always agree with her, and I am sorry that she feels the way she does. To repeat the points that I made at Business Question Time, far from attenuating or reducing the rights of Back Benchers, the time for the Christmas Adjournment debate is not in private Members' time but on a Friday which would normally have been a Government Friday. That has enhanced and increased the opportunities for Back Bench Members to take part in discussions about matters that they value.

There is one related issue in the context of the procedures and the Jopling report, to which hon. Members attach particular importance, and that is to have as much notice as possible of the dates of forthcoming recesses. I am always anxious to announce recesses as early as possible, and I was pleased this afternoon—this relates to the matter to which the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred—to be able to let the House know that, subject to the progress of business, it is planned that the House should rise on 17 December for the Christmas recess, resuming on 11 January.

Looking further ahead, I will make every effort to give the House as early an indication as I can about the recesses for the rest of the Session, although there will be greater difficulty about the dates of the summer recess for some time ahead. I appreciate that this is very helpful and enables Members to plan ahead, and I will try to give as much notice as possible.

Before turning to the wider issues of the debate, I will deal with the House of Commons front. I know that disappointment is felt in some quarters, not least by my right hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), although he is not able to be here, about the caution with which the Government have approached the Procedure Committee report on the handling of the new Budget arrangements. As always, my right hon. Friend and his Committee have done a thorough job of examining the implication of the new arrangements. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and his Committee, they deserve the thanks of the House for all their work.

None the less, I think it wise to proceed on the basis of gaining experience of how things go with the new unified Budget arrangements before seeking to make large changes in our procedures. I undertake, however, that, in the light of this year's experience, we will be prepared to reconsider —indeed, we will expect the Select Committee to play a leading part—to establish whether there are lessons to be learnt and changes to be made in advance of the second unified Budget in 1994.

To return to the debate on the Gracious Speech, which has ranged widely over the proposals since we began it a week ago, my right hon. Friends have set out fully and clearly the main ingredients of the Government's programme. At the outset, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister identified the theme of our programme for the session—and, indeed, for a longer period—as "back to basics". The measures that we will present to the House in the coming months undoubtedly support that theme. There will be a criminal justice Bill to shift the balance in favour of the victim and away from the criminal, to clamp down on the abuse of bail and to deal with persistent juvenile offenders. There will also be a deregulation Bill to lighten the burden of regulation for businesses.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): If the Prime Minister was indicating an intention on the part of the Government to clamp down on crime, can the Leader of the House explain why, instead of the 1,000 extra police officers for this year promised in the Conservative party manifesto, there has been a drop of more than 200?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman should read the proposals presented by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Those proposals, in various ways, will enhance the number of policemen still further—not least the number who can take part in policing on the streets, rather than dealing with paperwork inside police stations.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman—in line, no doubt, with the wishes of his Front Bench—wishes to divert attention from a Bill to lighten the burden of regulation for businesses. As far as I can judge, such a measure is anathema to the Opposition: nothing that they say shows an inkling of understanding about the need for this Bill, which will enable our businesses to compete even more successfully in the world economy.

We shall also present an education Bill—widely welcomed, I believe—to provide new and more practically based teacher training programmes to enhance the teaching of children in our schools. That is very much in line with what the Government have done—and, indeed, advanced further in the past few weeks—to provide more information to enable parents and others to judge what is happening in schools, and to take action where necessary to raise standards. That concerns parents throughout the country.

Some of these issues—and, indeed, the very phrase "back to basics"—have provoked comment, even criticism, from Opposition Members. We have heard some

of that this afternoon. I have no doubt, however, that these are among the issues that remain of prime concern to the people of this country, and to many hon. Members. Time and again, the debate has returned to the subject of crime as a central concern; it is, I think, widely agreed that we should give it the high priority that it has been given in our debate and in the Gracious Speech.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary set out his proposals very clearly, in spite of some signs that Opposition Members—not least the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair)—were prepared to recognise the existence of a solution, but were unwilling to co-operate in almost any measure that might show any sign of contributing to such a solution. Indeed, over the past few years the Labour party has seemed persistently unwilling to co-operate in that way.

I shall refer only briefly to one or two other points in the Gracious Speech, including the other Bills which will certainly be widely welcomed in the House including the Intelligence Services Bill, putting many of our security services on to a statutory basis and providing a new basis for their oversight and the Sunday Trading Bill which will not be without its controversies and difficulties, but which everyone hopes will resolve the uncertainty that currently surrounds trading on Sundays.

Looking beyond the domestic scene, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave an impressive summary of the difficult issues faced in many parts of the world. His report of the forthcoming Russian elections must give us all a great deal of encouragement and on behalf of the House I would wish my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) well in their roles as leaders of the team of British observers in those elections next month.

One point I should mention, particularly in view of the number of Northern Ireland Members who have spoken during the debate, is the importance rightly attached to the way in which the Prime Minister emphasised this issue, not only in a speech at the Guildhall 10 days ago, but also in his speech at the outset of the debate on the Address. He made clear right at the outset of that speech the importance he is attaching to the search for peace in Northern Ireland. I was glad that the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) clearly endorsed those efforts, which would be echoed by the whole House.

I recognise that there have been some concerns expressed most recently by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). I hope that it can be taken that all hon. Members will want to respond to my right hon. Friend's invitation

"to all citizens of the British Islands to set their hands to the task of laying solid foundations for a real and enduring peace".

All I would wish to do is to reiterate the Government commitment and once again draw the House's attention to the guarantee given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the opening day of the debate, when he said:

"The future constitutional position of Northern Ireland is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland to determine and for no one else to determine." [*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 29.]

I hope that continues to reassure the hon. Gentlemen who made those points during the debate.

No less important than the legislative content of the Gracious Speech and my right hon. Friend's efforts in regard to Northern Ireland is the specific subject that has been the main focus of our debate today—the economy and the background to the Budget that my right hon. and learned Friend is to present next week. That background is encouraging; it is one of clear and growing evidence of recovery and, perhaps even more important, of a sound basis for that recovery to continue.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I appreciate that my right hon. Friend's duties in the House this evening will have prevented him from seeing a witty, but grossly misleading and economically illiterate, party political broadcast by the Labour party starring Stephen Fry as a tax consultant. Apparently, the major loophole the Opposition wish to close is a £32 billion windfall profit made by Britain's most successful companies. What consequences does my right hon. Friend think an arbitrary tax on legitimate and hard-earned profits of Britain's most successful companies will have on investment and employment in those firms?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is quite right to think that my preoccupations inside the House have spared me the pleasure of watching the Labour party political broadcast tonight, but if I have an opportunity later I will make some comment about the magic wand solution of the so-called tax loopholes by means of which the hon. Gentleman for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) evades every straight question about how he would balance Labour's public expenditure commitments, which mount by the minute with what he says about taxation. The answer is that he cannot, and loopholes are the cop-out that tries to square the circle.

I was referring to the clear and growing evidence of recovery and what I believe to be, and what is increasingly widely accepted to be, the evidence that there is a sound basis for that recovery to continue. Two days before the Gracious Speech we had figures that showed that the rate of inflation had fallen to its lowest for about a quarter of a century. One day before the Gracious Speech, we had unemployment figures that showed us with a substantial decline in unemployment and now below the European Community average. During the debate, we have had the further reduction in interest rates, which gives us the lowest interest rates for more than 15 years.

At least as important as those figures showing what has happened in Britain in the past week or two, and the further progress that we can see being made, is the wider comparison on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer spent some little time this afternoon between what is happening in Britain and what is happening almost everywhere else. The latest forecast from a variety of international sources shows that the United Kingdom will have the fastest growth among major EC countries this year and next.

The latest industrial production figures—I make no apology for repeating these striking figures which my right hon. and learned Friend gave this afternoon—show that, on a year-on-year basis, industrial production in Japan has fallen by more than 3 per cent., in Germany by 7 per cent., in France by more than 3 per cent. and in Italy by more than 3 per cent., while in Britain it has risen by nearly 3 per cent. Much the same is true of some of the retail sales figures.

Dr. Berry: The Leader of the House talks as though the Government have been in office for only the last 12 months. Would he care to give those figures for the period from 1979 to the present?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures for the 1980s he will find that, in contrast with all those

[Mr. Newton]

league tables that Opposition Members have used so freely, it was far and way the most successful decade that Britain has had since the war.

To pursue the comparisons for a moment or two more, we now have the lowest headline inflation in the G7 countries and below the average in the European Community where it has been below the average each month since August 1991. We have the lowest interest rates in the EC and our unemployment rate is below the EC average. Our total output, the gross domestic product, is up nearly 2 per cent. on a year earlier and has now risen for six consecutive quarters.

Dr. Berry: Would the Leader of the House care to explain why it is that under the present Government we have had the worst growth record of any Government since the war?

Mr. Newton: We are talking about a situation in which there has been a widespread international recession from which the whole western world has been suffering and which Britain is now leading the way out of as a result of the Government's policies, a fact that I have clearly demonstrated by the figures that I have given in the last few minutes.

I am not a bit surprised that the hon. Gentleman should seek to intervene in the way that he has. It reveals clearly precisely what the Opposition's reaction has been to this and almost every other piece of good news. They prefer to ignore it. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor pointed out, against the background of our success in restraining inflation, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East could not even bring himself to utter the word "inflation" today. I am not even sure, against a background of our success in reducing interest rates, that the hon. Gentleman even mentioned interest rates. That must be some kind of record for his speeches.

The hon. Gentleman certainly made no mention of what the Leader of the Opposition said during the debate on the previous Budget:

> "We shall see in the November Budget whether this Budget has brought down unemployment. If Conservative Members want that to be a test, we shall make it a test for the Government." —[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 199.]

Well, manifestly the Budget has brought down unemployment by 137,000 this year. The Government have clearly passed that test.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Leader of the House tell me what to say tomorrow when I go to Frickley pit at South Elmsall, where 800 miners are to be put out of work tomorrow? How do I tell them that the Government have said it is all bright and breezy? Is that not a disgrace?

Mr. Newton: Although it is clearly a matter for the hon. Gentleman, I would suggest that he says three things. First, as has been pointed out today, he can say no Government can completely insulate an industry for whose products there is not sufficient demand following the effects of adjustment. Secondly, he could point to the improving prospects which I have outlined in the past few minutes. Thirdly, he could point to what has happened at one former colliery site in the Barnsley area. A firm in a modern industry, Tunstall Electronics, is to use the site for a factory which will provide 600 jobs in an expanding industry. We should be seeking to encourage that, and that is the objective of the Government's policies.

One of the things which is clear—I do not think that it was altered by the speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) half an hour ago—is the absence of any clear idea of what the policies of the Labour party are, despite their criticism of the Government. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East's contribution to environmental policy appears to be the recycling of his old speeches, and he appears dedicated to creating what can only be described as a policy-free zone.

The Leader of the Opposition has spotted that, and attempted to fill the vacuum by putting his signature to the European socialist manifesto for the European elections. There was some dispute about that subject earlier, so I have obtained a copy of the document to better inform the House —lengthy and wordy as it is. In outlining the measures that they think sensible in the circumstances, the manifesto suggests a substantial cut in the working time to ensure "a better division of the available work. Several approaches are possible: a working week of 35 hours or 4 days, leave for training, voluntary part-time work etc."

Sharing out the available work—what a negative, defeatist, and ultimately self-destructive approach.

An impressive article in *The Economist* states that if shorter working hours and longer holidays reduced joblessness, Europe would now enjoy the world's lowest unemployment. Yet the unemployment rate in the European Community is 11 per cent., in America it is 7 per cent., and in Japan it is less than 3 per cent. There is the answer to the thinking of the Labour party.

The Labour party has nothing to say about how to increase jobs, competitiveness, output, and wealth. The social chapter is against those, as is the national minimum wage, the increasing costs of part-time work, and their proposals on tax loopholes. The Labour party's proposals would not so much close loopholes as close good businesses.

We reject that approach. The policies which we have been pursuing lead in a different and productive direction —the results of which are beginning to be seen—as does our programme that is set out in the Queen's speech, as will my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget next week, and as will the House by its vote to reject the Opposition amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 317.

Division No. 3] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Bell, Stuart
Adams, Mrs Irene	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Ainger, Nick	Benton, Joe
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Bermingham, Gerald
Allen, Graham	Berry, Dr. Roger
Alton, David	Betts, Clive
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*	Blunkett, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Boateng, Paul
Armstrong, Hilary	Boyce, Jimmy
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Boyes, Roland
Ashton, Joe	Bradley, Keith
Austin-Walker, John	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Barnes, Harry	Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Barron, Kevin	Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Battle, John	Byers, Stephen
Bayley, Hugh	Cabom, Richard
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret	Callaghan, Jim
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*

Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltanham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen

Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech fails to provide for the increased investment and reforms in education that are essential for improving the country's economic competitiveness and expanding individual opportunity; lacks a coherent economic programme to increase public and private investment, including policies to promote competition and encourage small businesses and legislation to establish the operational independence of the Bank of England; makes no provision for promoting sustainable development policies; fails to advance a clear strategy to secure for the people of the United Kingdom the full benefits of participation in the European Community; contains no policy by which the Government will seek to work within strong supranational institutions to preserve peace, protect the environment and combat poverty; does not foreshadow a comprehensive review of the nation's defence needs; and contains no measures to improve the public's confidence in the institutions of Government.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No.32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), That the amendment by made:—

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 324.

Division No. 6] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Dafis, Cynog
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Harvey, Nick
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Rendel, David
Salmond, Alex

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Don Foster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcl)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*

Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, there have been some major disruptions to the underground system today. As you also know, there is an arrangement whereby staff of the House of Commons are provided with transport if the Adjournment debate starts after half-past 10. I wonder whether I could have your assurance that, in view of the disruption to the underground, transport can be provided tonight irrespective of when the Adjournment debate starts, even if it starts before half-past 10, as it might well do, because staff of the House can be travelling for up to two hours and departing from here at 11 o'clock means that it can be well after midnight before they arrive home. It seems to me that, with the additional disruption on the tube, it could be a tardy, dangerous and long journey for many people, including women who do not deserve to be put in that position.

Madam Speaker: Is there another point of order?

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a further point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that my hon. Friend has got it wrong? He has made one of his rare mistakes because I think I am correct in saying that the question of the presentation of petitions must be dealt with.

Madam Speaker: I was just about to remind the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I quite understand his real concern about those matters. As the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) has brought to my attention, we now have petitions to deal with, so the House still has business to conduct. Therefore, I call Mr. John Denham to move his petition.

PETITIONS

Value Added Tax

10.29 pm

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): I wish to present two petitions, both of which oppose the extension of VAT to important goods and services.

The first petition is signed by 187 parents and staff of the Ludlow First school in Southampton, and it opposes the imposition of VAT on books and reading materials. They, like me, believe that it is better to promote reading skills than to tax them.

The petition reads:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will take care to reject any moves to impose VAT on books and reading materials.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Denham: The second petition has been signed by more than 500 passengers of Hampshire Bus. I believe that they speak for all bus passengers in Hampshire. I share their belief that the imposition of VAT on bus and coach fares would be wrong on financial, transport planning and environmental grounds.

The petition reads:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will take care to reject any moves to impose VAT on bus and coach fares and to ensure the maintenance of zero rating of public transport.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government (Scotland)

10.31 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the residents of Westhill, in my constituency, who object strongly to the Government's proposal that their community should be moved into the city of Aberdeen. Westhill is not a suburb of Aberdeen but a distinct community with strong links with its rural hinterland. So strongly do the people of that community feel that 4,785 of an electorate of 4,862—more than 98 per cent.—have signed the petition. It also has the support of the hon. Members for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), who I am pleased to see in his place.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The petition of the residents of Westhill sheweth that the Government White Paper Shaping the Future—The New Councils proposes that the community of Westhill be incorporated into the City of Aberdeen. Whereas both at public meetings and through their local representatives the overwhelming majority of the residents of Westhill have expressed their total opposition to the Government's proposals we the undersigned petitioners therefore pray that the Honourable Members of the House of Commons and the Secretary of State for Scotland will incorporate the community of Westhill in the new council of Aberdeenshire and not the City of Aberdeen.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will every pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

M62 Relief Road

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10.32 pm

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): We are constantly told that we live in a new environmentally aware era. But you, Madam Speaker, would have to be far more persuasive than me to convince many of my constituents in Whitefield and Prestwich that that is so.

A six-lane motorway, the M62, presently cuts through the middle of my constituency. That is currently being widened to make it an eight-lane motorway. On 7 September this year, my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic announced proposals to construct an additional six-lane motorway, to be known as the M62 relief road, to run parallel with the soon-to-be-eight-lane. M62. It is thus envisaged that, at some time in the next century, a 14-lane highway should run through the Whitefield and Prestwich parts of my constituency.

That relief road would have no exits or entrances to my constituency and would not service the people who live there, but would simply be used by those who are passing through on their way across the Pennines. To construct the 14-lane highway, the Department of Transport proposes to demolish 370 good, sound houses and to create what will be widespread and devastating planning and housing blight in the surrounding area.

The announcement of the proposals in September was greeted by my constituents with shock, with anger and with incredulity. It was greeted with shock because no indication had been given to them that such a plan was ever in prospect. Indeed, some three years ago a promise had been made to them by a Department of Transport official at a public meeting in my constituency that there were no plans to widen or to extend the existing M62.

The announcement has been greeted with incredulity because it seems to me and to my constituents that it is unacceptable, at a time when some people are homeless, when the housing market is struggling for recovery and when local business is working on a knife edge, literally to devastate one of the most densely populated parts of my constituency. The announcement was greeted with anger because, for years, this part of my constituency has had to live with the environmental pollution, and housing and planning blight caused by the existing M62. That has to be seen and the noise has to be heard to be believed.

The case against the proposals is overwhelming. Time does not permit me to set out that case as fully as I would wish. There are three main arguments which should convince my hon. Friend the Minister to withdraw the proposals. The first is that there is a growing realisation throughout the whole community, a realisation shared by many Conservative Members and by many in the Conservative party as a whole, that continuous road building is not the solution to the problems of traffic congestion. Indeed, it could be argued that such road building achieves exactly the opposite effect, simply encouraging more traffic to fill the increased space, while diverting attention from other solutions to the problems.

I have never seen the arguments about alternative methods of dealing with traffic congestion, such as the argument between road and rail, as a battle between the public and the private sector. The road programme is part of the public sector and is costing the taxpayer a great deal of money. Indeed, if anybody doubts that, the recent report of the National Audit Office shows a massive increase in the cost of the road-building programme to the staggering sum of £6 billion. I do not think that the taxpayer is getting value for that money. There is an urgent need for Governments of all political parties and for society as a whole to consider in a national, non-dogmatic, non-partisan way how best we can provide for the transport needs of our nation into the next century without constructing a concrete jungle of noise, pollution and blight.

The second argument against the proposals is that the need for them has not been proved. There is, indeed, traffic congestion now on the M62 motorway, but no one knows for certain how that will be reduced once the motorway has been increased from six lanes to eight lanes. No one knows how that congestion will be affected once the existing M66 motorway is completed and joins the motorway network surrounding Greater Manchester. We have been waiting for years for that to occur; it has still not been completed. There is a strong body of opinion that believes that it will make a significant impact on the problems of congestion on the M62.

The third reason for the rejection of the proposals, assuming, of course, that a motorway as such is the answer to the problems, is that the relief road is not the only potential new motorway route across the Pennines. The BBC has recently revealed that a number of Labour local authorities, Lancashire county council and North Yorkshire county council among them, are proposing a scheme to extend the M65 from the M61 motorway near Preston across the Pennines to Leeds. Those councils have apparently asked the Department of Transport to undertake further studies. They are concerned that, if the M62 relief road is built, their plans would have little or no chance of coming to fruition.

I do not wish to become embroiled in the argument over that motorway proposal, but I think it unacceptable for the Department of Transport to go around blighting vast areas of the country—whether or not that is done in conjunction with local authorities—when it should be sitting down to examine and evaluate the real transport needs of our people on a national basis.

The proposals must be withdrawn. They have already had a devastating effect on the lives of the people whom I represent. It is true that, regardless of whether the proposals ever take effect—regardless of whether the road is ever built—the Department has already offered to purchase, at more than market value, the private houses along the proposed route. That offer, incidentally, does not extend to the council house tenants on the route, who are asked to accept the derisory sum of £1,500 as compensation for being thrown out of their homes.

A number of those home owners have already accepted the Department's offer. That is a matter for them, but the Minister should take no comfort from it. It cannot be a surprise to anyone that, after putting up with such tormenting noise and pollution from the existing M62 for years, and being unable to rely on any commitment or promise from the Department about the future, local residents should now seize the opportunity to escape.

But what about those who are not on the line of route? What about those who are trapped in their homes and cannot escape? They are not currently entitled to require the Department of Transport to purchase their homes; they must wait until the relief road is built. If the M66 extension

[Mr. David Sumberg]

is anything to go by, that could be well into the next century. In the meantime, those people cannot sell their homes—or, if they can, they must do so at vastly reduced prices.

Why is the Department of Transport so mean and short-sighted on this issue? If it genuinely believes that I —along with others—have exaggerated the extent of the blight in the surrounding areas, let the Department now offer to purchase the houses affected, at full market value. Then, if it wished, it could recoup some of the cost by reselling to others who might wish to take the chance of the motorway never being built—as we hope it will not. In the context of the enormous sums spent on the roads programme—I have already mentioned them—I do not think it unreasonable to urge a change of thinking from the restricted and narrow lines currently pursued by the Department.

I have not by any means covered all the points with which I wished to deal. For example, I have not mentioned in any detail the great concern that homes now being purchased by the Department will be allowed to fall into disrepair during the interim period, or will be let to people who will not be as anxious to maintain the areas to the desired standards as those who live there now. I have not mentioned the fears of many local businesses, such as newsagents and tobacconists, who feel that their enterprises are now unsaleable and who face the bleakest of futures. I hope that there will be other chances for me to do so.

Suffice it to say that I have never known the community I represent to be more united than it is in its opposition to these plans. That opposition includes not only people who live in the area, but people living outside it. It is sustained by three motorway action groups; it includes the local council in Bury, and all three political parties represented on it.

As evidence of that united approach, Madam Deputy Speaker, you will note that the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), whose constituency is also adversely affected by the proposals, is in his place. He and I disagree a great deal politically, but we are united in our present campaign. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will catch your eye, so that he can make his views clear.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be clearly aware that my constituents and I will not accept the environmental squalor that the scheme would cause—the destruction of property, the devastation of lives and the ending of hopes. I hope that, sooner rather than later, he will lift the threat that hangs over so much of my constituency.

10.44 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): May I first congratulate the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) on his luck in the raffle. He is making a habit of it these days, given the number of times he has appeared at Prime Minister's Questions, but I am grateful to him for allowing me two or three minutes tonight to raise one or two points that affect my constituency.

Like the hon. Member, I do not want to go into too many details of the argument with the Department of Transport over the next weeks and months before we reach a position where we may be able to change the Minister's mind.

The Residents Against the Motorway group has been in existence for four years. Four year ago, I extrapolated from the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" the fact that a brand new motorway was likely to go through my constituency. I was accused of scaremongering: if only I had known how devastating the proposals would be.

Worsley in my constituency is, was and has been for many hundreds of years a very picturesque village. It has already been devastated by the M62 with continual widening, broadening and extensions. The M62 is now part of the major motorway network, when it was designed in the 1960s merely as a bypass for Eccles. We are now faced with the possibility of another 14-lane motorway cheek by jowl with our schools. We know the problems of youngsters who suffer asthmatic diseases near motorways. It would be devastating for them.

I am straying into details, but I would like to use a couple of minutes to remind the Minister of the exchanges we have already had, and to confirm for the record some of the agreements that we have already reached.

I am grateful that the Minister readily saw me in his office some weeks ago when I first complained to him bitterly about the way in which the Department had told 116 residents in my constituency that their homes were in the way of the proposed motorway. I re-emphasise tonight that that bitterness lingers on, as the Minister must know.

I should also like him to confirm tonight that, contrary to the opinion given by his officers in the north-west, he will accept comments written on the Department of Transport proforma, whether or not the people who put the proforma in were able to go to the presentation. The Minister has now agreed to a second presentation. I acknowledge the letter he sent me a day or two ago and the fact that he will also consider seriously any comments on the proforma produced by RAM.

We have always known the new road as the Greater Manchester relief road. It has now changed into the M62 relief road. I do not want Ministers at the Department to say that they cannot accept complaints because they are about the wrong road. I would like the Minister to confirm that tonight.

Finally, the Minister has agreed to meet a deputation from RAM on 7 December. Our loins are girded, and we look forward to seeing the Minister then.

10.48 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) on his good fortune in acquiring this Adjournment debate. I also pay tribute to him for the tireless way in which he has represented the interests of his constituents in this most difficult of issues. There is nothing like any roads issue to raise passions in any constituency.

My hon. Friend has represented his constituents' interests with great dignity and success. He has made it clear that he has a strong position on this, and that he will not be swayed by any partisan influences, for which I respect him, as I am sure do his constituents.

I acknowledge the way in which the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) has approached the matter. I have met him and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South.

I confirm that I shall see a delegation led by the hon. Member for Worsley at the beginning of December and a delegation from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South later.

The exhibitions are generally at an end but, at the request of the hon. Member for Worsley, I have arranged for two further days' exhibitions to be held in the Worsley area in early January. We have had 12 days of exhibitions and 6,829 people attended. That figure contains a certain element of double counting, because many people understandably wanted to go twice or more.

We have received 880 comments sheets, and my Department has received 520 letters. There have been a number of multiple letters from the same individual or family, but they are none the worse for that, and some 690 pre-printed objection leaflets have also been received.

I confirm that I am pleased to receive all objections in whatever reasonable form they should appear and, at the request of the hon. Member for Worsley, I made available an additional 2,000 objection forms that were sent to him at the House of Commons. They will, of course, be counted as proper representations. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South has also asked for a large number of additional forms, and they too will be properly counted.

The number of applications that we have had for statutory blight purchase stands at 168, and so far we have accepted 84 and have had 35 applications for discretionary purchase. A housing co-ordinator has been appointed and is in post, and she is currently establishing contact with local authorities and other interested bodies.

Bury metropolitan borough council and Manchester City council have accepted our invitation to join the M62 liaison committee, which has been formed to consider wider housing issues. *[Interruption.]* Salford metropolitan borough council has, I am sorry to say, not replied to our letter of invitation.

Mr. Lewis: I am becoming too sensitive about the over-emphasis on Manchester city council and the overlooking of Salford. I apologise.

Mr. Key: If I wanted to, I could not overlook Salford but, as sponsor Minister for Manchester and Salford, I would not want to. I am well aware of the sensitivities either side of the river. I pointed out that we have received an acceptance from Manchester city council, but not so far from Salford. I hope very much that it will respond to the invitation, because it is important for its residents and the hon. Gentleman's constituents that it should.

We all know that the M62 is the busiest road in the north-west and one of the busiest in the country, and conditions on it are poor. To describe them as dreadful would not be an overstatement. Delays, frustration, congestion and accidents are words that spring readily to mind to describe the situation. There is no doubt that it is a road under stress, with drivers under stress.

Doing nothing is not an option. Congestion on parts of the M62 will get worse this year, next year and the year after, as well as into the next century, which is the time scale that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South has absolutely right. By then things will have got worse, so we must address the problem now.

It is worth emphasising that congestion reduces the efficiency and reliability of road transport for industry, and so increases the cost for consumers. It is also bad for safety, and congestion harms the environment, because slow-moving vehicles burn more fuel and hence create more harmful emissions. We need to tackle those problems now.

If we do not act, the travelling public will face increasingly difficult driving conditions, and the resident population of the area on either side of the existing motorway will face increasing unpleasant side effects in terms of the noise and smell that they have to put up with.

In the transport arena, it is not only the roads that are receiving Government support. My hon. Friend is right to point out that roads can perfectly reasonably be described as public transport, and we shall continue to invest heavily in public transport. We spend about 56 per cent. of our budget on roads and the remaining 44 per cent. on railways, buses and other forms of public transport. Ninety per cent. of all journeys and freight movements are undertaken by road, and only 10 per cent. by rail and yet —quite rightly—the balance of spending does not reflect that fact.

It is worth pointing out that I have also received representations from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt), who cannot be here tonight but who has taken a very close personal interest in this difficult problem.

As with any road scheme, the first stage was the initial investigation of options. It took place with as little publicity as we could manage, not because we wished to deny anyone the opportunity to study and comment on what was being proposed but because at that early, fact-finding stage, our consultants' investigations were extremely wide-ranging. Many options were considered and eliminated in the search for a viable solution. To have released details on the routes or corridors under investigation would have led to widespread and unnecessary blight.

The first option we considered was the possibility of improving the existing road. Widening the M62 to four lanes will provide interim relief in the short term, but it will not deal with the long-term problem of congestion on the route.

A number of alternative routes were considered, including a completely new road corridor through the area. We found that all the options away from the existing motorway corridor affected too many and too broad a range of interests for them to be viable. For example, they would have had an impact on community buildings, including three schools; they would have passed through formal parks and consecrated ground, run close to the centre of a small town and damaged major factories.

In addition, there was the problem of Radcliffe Ees, a huge landfill site between Radcliffe and Whitefield, which is steadily being converted to attractive open space. It was not possible to devise a method for building a new road through the centre of the Ees without the need to remove large quantities of the deposited waste material and to find somewhere else to put it.

In general terms, a new road line away from the M62 would impact on a whole new range of people and interests, without bringing any significant improvement to those living close to the existing motorway. On balance, therefore, we believe that a new motorway alongside the existing one is the only viable option for a M62 relief road.

Without the new road, we would have to consider controlling access to, or even closing, a number of junctions on the present M62 in order to help the flow of traffic on the motorway. However, it would also have a

[Mr. Key]

severe impact on the local road network. The area would suffer increasing congestion, with worsening conditions for residents. Access to the motorway system on which the Bury district plan is based would no longer be available.

I deal now with the current stage of the scheme's development. Following the identification of a viable route on 7 September, I announced the start of consultation on the relief road. It is a large-scale and wide-ranging process, which allows us to explain our proposal, and provides people with the opportunity to view large-scale plans, ask questions and present their views. Consultation will continue until the end of February next year. I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South that no decision will be taken until I have fully considered what the public have to say.

The consultation process is non-statutory and gives people an early opportunity to have a say in the development of the scheme. At a later stage, when orders are published, they are able to exercise statutory rights of objection. At that stage, the matter will be considered by an independent inspector, appointed by the Lord Chancellor, presiding over a local public inquiry. The decision on whether to proceed with the scheme will not be taken until the end of 1994.

Of course I recognise that consultation is an unsettling time for those affected by the proposed route, which is why we have protected the route against development. That brings the statutory blight provisions into force and enables affected owner-occupiers to serve a blight notice requiring the Department to buy their property in advance. I hasten to say that there is no compulsion about that, as the Department is not, as some would have it, in the business of buying off the opposition. Of course, the question of compulsory purchase will not arise for some years.

I shall now deal with some of my hon. Friend's detailed concerns. I know that a major proposal such as the M62 relief road brings uncertainty to people living in the area through which the road will pass. We gave considerable thought to the best way of informing those affected. There is no easy way to break unwelcome news. Our aim was to tell those affected before they found out either from a neighbour or from the local media. We are not indifferent, and we shall always try to minimise problems and deal with them as sympathetically as possible.

Of course there has been concern about the effect on local housing, especially on properties just outside the proposed line of the relief road. I greatly regret the unavoidable impact. As I have explained, we have set up special arrangements to help those who would lose their homes.

There are worries too, about what we shall do with the properties that we buy under blight. I understand that. I can tell my hon. Friend that we shall appoint experienced agents to manage and let the property on our behalf. We know that it is important to the local community to maintain housing standards. We shall not let our properties decline and decay.

That leaves the question of the perceived effect of new road proposals on the local housing market. We know only too well that a major road proposal can being uncertainty to people living in the immediate area, but there is no evidence that that uncertainty will have a long-term effect on house prices.

The Department's experience all over the country, acquired over many years, has been that, although there may be an immediate effect on the housing market following a road announcement, prices quickly return to normal once the proposed line of the new road and its likely effects become better known, and the degree of uncertainty recedes. We know that house builders quite happily build close to motorway boundaries and have little difficulty in selling those properties—there are examples alongside the M62 in my hon. Friend's constituency.

We shall take full account of the total impact by way of an environmental assessment that will result in a published statement under EC directive 85/337 at the time of line order publication. That will be the appropriate time to publish.

I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend and of the hon. Member for Worsley. I give them my word that I shall continue to listen carefully to their representations. We have a duty to fulfil all the statutory procedures, which we shall carry out scrupulously and fairly, as we decide whether to proceed with the scheme.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 26 November 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

VAT (Public Transport)

9.34 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I wish to present a petition signed by about 6,000 people from the Wakefield area urging the Government not to introduce VAT on public transport. The petition draws attention to the public concern in my constituency and elsewhere over the impact of introducing VAT on public transport on poorer sections of the community, and especially the increase in car journeys that are likely to arise as a direct result.

I am happy to endorse the petition, which states:

Wherefore, your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will take care to reject any moves to impose VAT on bus and coach fares and to ensure the maintenance of zero rating of public transport.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Education and Training

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. 6764/91, relating to the vocational training of young people and their preparation for adult and working life, and 4070/93, relating to access to continuing vocational training.]

9.35 am

The Secretary of State for Education (Mr. John Patten): At the heart of the Government's policies for education and training is the need to secure increased levels of attainment and, where appropriate, participation. At each age and stage of education and training, our efforts are aimed at improving quality, and I hope that we can share that across the Floor of the House.

The national targets for education and training provide an important focus for the actions required of all those involved in education and training; I am therefore delighted to have the opportunity to draw the targets to the attention of the House. The targets have the absolute commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Employment, and, of course, they have the absolute commitment of everyone who works in my Department, including the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell).

It may seem unusual for a Secretary of State to be present on Friday morning. I recall from my early days in the House that the sight of a Secretary of State in the House on a Friday morning was a sign of bad news—that he was about to offer his resignation—or a sign of something important. I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Members for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) and for Bath (Mr. Foster), but I am present this morning because the national targets are important, and I am strongly committed to securing their achievement.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, who will be winding up the debate, will make it clear that reaching the goals set by the targets is essential if we are to succeed in the international marketplace. Our competitive position depends crucially on the skills of the work force and, at the same time, there are immense benefits for individuals in developing their ability to the full.

Perhaps we should first consider international comparisons. They are always dangerous indicators to use, and they can be used too easily, but on education and training targets, they show that we have no room for complacency, because our competitors have equally ambitious plans. In today's world, competition comes from all quarters. We are naturally most familiar with the position in Europe and in the United States. However, we need to look far wider—to the burgeoning economies of the Pacific rim, where our competitors not only have ambitious plans, but start from a higher base of current achievement.

In making international comparisons, we can also take credit for our current position. We have always catered well for our highest fliers, and I am pleased to be able to tell the House that overall participation in education and training at age 16 now stands at 93 per cent.—an all-time high. One unusual international comparison shows that we

[Mr. John Patten]

spend more on education than many countries. It is unusual because figures are rarely quoted in the House that show that we spend more in any area.

We spend more than many other countries on social security and on education. We have a higher investment in education, standing today at 4·6 per cent. of gross domestic product, than, for example, Japan or Germany. Those who enter the education and training debate should constantly remember that that is the case. However, against that background, overall performance has been disappointing.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I am obliged to my right hon. Friend, who has given way so early in his speech. I am particularly interested in his point about spending in schools. It would be helpful if he could say a word about per capita spending and pupil-teacher ratios, and the reforms that the Government have introduced over a considerable period.

Mr. Patten: Pupil-teacher ratios have improved substantially since 1979, as has per capita expenditure. As my hon. Friend knows all too well, because he has often told the House so, what is important is not just the quantity of money spent, but the way in which the money is used. I am proud of the fact that we spend more of our GDP on education and training than do Japan and Germany. We have to make absolutely certain that we spend that money to the best effect.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the staff-pupil ratio has got worse over the past couple of years, as the Audit Commission's report on local management of schools has made clear? While he is on that point, will he clarify the Government's position on class sizes? His junior Minister has said that class size does not matter. What does he think?

Mr. Patten: These days, the budgets for schools, which stand at an all-time high, are placed substantially in the hands of individual schools—up to 90 per cent. under LMS—and, in the case of the more than 1,000 grant-maintained schools, the money is wholly in the hands of schools. That means that there is considerable opportunity for local decision-making on expenditure. It is rather like the argument over beds in the NHS: what is important is not how many beds there are, or how many teachers there are, but the use to which they are put.

Nevertheless, I am proud of the overall pupil-teacher ratio and of the fact that we spend a substantially greater proportion of our GDP on education and training than do Germany or Japan, but what is important is not the overall sum of money but the way that it is spent. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) to whom the hon. Member for Dewsbury was presumably referring, makes a notable contribution to our debates, as he does, with his ties, to our sartorial standards. He is right. I pick my words carefully. None of the research available to me in the Department shows that a particular class size makes a difference to the standard of education. We have some spectacularly good results from large classes, in both primary and secondary schools, and some spectacularly bad results from schools with small classes. We should be wary about drawing implications from raw statistics.

I hope that the targets will be a matter of cross-party agreement, because those involved with the targets, and the council that will be running them, represent all strands of British life, including distinguished trade unionists such as Bill Jordan. The TUC is as much a supporter of national targets as are the CBI and the Government. I welcome that, as I am sure will the House. The national targets provide a clear and valuable challenge to all users of education and training to get better results, with particular emphasis on the all-important middle range of ability, which is where we need to concentrate more.

Before going further, I shall comment on targets and achievements to date. The first four targets deal with the foundation learning of young people. Foundation target 1 is aimed at achieving substantially higher levels of basic attainment. By 1997, 80 per cent. of young people should have a national vocational qualification at level 2, a general national vocational qualification at intermediate level, or four or five higher grade passes at GCSE. The latest figures—I have only those for 1992, although I shall soon have those for 1993—show about 55 per cent. of young people at that level.

We are aiming at the ambitious target—ambitious targets are the best ones—of an increase of 25 percentage points over the next five years in attainment by our young people, particularly those in the middle range of aptitude. That is important, and I am sure that we shall achieve it. Whenever the Government set targets, we tend not only to reach them early but to out-perform them. I shall show that later, when I make an announcement about participation rates in higher education.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My right hon. Friend spoke of the need to raise the attainments of those in the middle ability levels. I am sure that he will agree that we need to look again at how we teach that range. Over my long experience, little change was made in the way in which children were taught, and if we are to get those children achieving better, we need to teach them differently. Is there any research on that?

Mr. Patten: Yes. Much independent research is being done, by universities, by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, and by others, into different teaching methods.

My hon. Friend speaks with considerable experience as a distinguished ex-deputy headmaster. We listen to his clear and authoritative voice on those matters with great interest. In the numerous school visits that I have made—my ministerial team has also made such visits—I have been impressed with the different styles of teaching being introduced. Without over stressing the point, I am aware that many are looking back to the fundamentals, the basics, in what is taught in the classroom. People of all political views—it is not a party political matter——

Mr. Pawsey: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: Has my hon. Friend eaten three Weetabix for breakfast?

Mr. Pawsey: I do not normally eat Weetabix. Cornflakes are my preferred breakfast dish.

Could I persuade my right hon. Friend to say a brief word about performance tables? I ask him to do so because I believe that the tables put into the hands of parents a valuable tool that enables them to assess the quality of teaching and the standards in individual schools. It takes away some of the guesswork and the problems associated with school-gate gossip. I hope that, at some point in his

speech, my right hon. Friend will be able to draw attention to the excellent tables being produced, and the additional information contained within them.

Mr. Patten: I am extremely grateful for that point. I have just said that we are aiming to reach advanced targets in the next five years, and they will be demanding and challenging targets. That means that our performance will be measured. Because the Government are responsible for almost everything except the weather, if we fail to meet those targets by 1997, I and my ministerial colleagues, along with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment—I had better bring him in to share the blame—will be rightly blamed for that failure. That means that we shall be exposing our performance.

Equally, what we did with the performance tables of schools last year, and this year with the important additional performance tables for further education colleges is to expose——

Mr. Pawsey: Will my right hon. Friend give way again?

Mr. Patten: Let me just finish my point.

Taken together, the tables are of great significance. Last year, before I published them for the first time, I was subject to a lot of advice from many different people. I was told that it was a dangerous thing to do, and that the material should not be published. The argument was, "Not in front of the parents; not in front of the pupils. Keep it all secret."

The publication last year was right, because it gave parents information which enabled them and their children to make informed choices. That is exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) said. Further education college tables are important, because they are aimed at adults of all ages to give them the information on which they can make informed choices.

It was right to make the information available last year to give the consumer of education the opportunity to make well-informed choices. That is entirely consistent with the innovation of the citizens charter by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. The charter sets public standards and states whether those standards have been reached.

Mrs. Ann Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I have not quite finished my answer to my hon. Friend, but I shall give way to the hon. Lady as soon as I have finished.

The Prime Minister was right in saying that we should have publicly set targets for publicly provided services, and that we should make that information publicly known. I think that the citizens charter is a great constitutional innovation, and by the end of the decade it will be widely recognised as such.

I did not spot last year—Honest John Patten reveals his shortcomings to the House, unusually—that the tables have been one of the most powerful post-war innovations in education. By their very nature, they lever up standards. There is evidence that a number of schools were so dissatisfied with their published performance, that they set up action teams of groups of teachers to move around and improve their performance. That was not in the interests of the school, but in the interests of the pupils.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I will give way first to the hon. Lady, and later to my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth and for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland).

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Secretary of State said that the publication of further education tables would help adults make informed choices. Why, then, are the exam results that are published in those league tables only the results of those aged up to 19? They do not include the considerable achievements of adults, who happen to be the vast majority of the pupils in FE colleges.

The Secretary of State said a few moments ago that we have to be careful about using raw statistics when it comes to class sizes. Is not that the case when jt comes to examination results?

Mr. Patten: I will deal with the hon. Lady's points in reverse order. It is too easy to point a finger and say glibly of examination statistics that they are raw results. If they are raw results, young people carry those results with pride in their pockets as their educational currency throughout their adult working lives. They are the things which employers wish to see.

I am prepared to consider seriously what the hon. Lady said about further education tables. We want to improve the tables year on year. We took the decision to publish further education tables in the form that we did, along with the results from sixth form colleges and from sixth forms, to ensure comparability for everyone within the age range of 16 to 19. These days, I think of people of those ages as adults.

The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the marvellous achievements of so many people who go to FE colleges as adults. We will see in future whether there are ways of building on that information, and I shall be happy to think about the hon. Lady's suggestion.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have become obsessed with class sizes? Might we not draw lessons from Japan, where, I understand, it is quite normal for class sizes to go up to as many as 50 children, yet they perform extremely well? Does my right hon. Friend agree that management of a class is more important than its size?

My right hon. Friend touched briefly on the benefits of league tables and schools that have performed less well, and the efforts that are being made to help those schools. Will he spell out what his Department is doing to help those weak schools?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is quite right on the first point. My hon. Friend the Minister for Further and Higher Education has reminded me that sometimes not 50 but as many as 55 children can be taught in Japanese secondary schools. Those schools have no computers of any kind. That is the Japanese way, and they get high results from it. I am proud that our class sizes are much smaller, and I am also proud that we have more computers and associated software in primary and secondary schools than any western European country, and certainly within the EC.

My hon. Friend raised the important issue of what we are doing about the poorest schools. It does not do any good at all to sweep under the carpet the fact that there are poorer schools. When the evidence is in front of us, we will be prepared to use the powers in the Education Act to take over the running of those poor schools. We will send an

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education association to take over the running of the individual school or the group of schools. That will be done in the interests of the pupils, to make sure that they get the education that they deserve. A child has only one chance in life, and will not get chances again and again.

I think that the number of such schools will be relatively small—a few hundred at most. They will be highlighted and picked out not by me as Secretary of State, but by the entirely independent chief inspector of schools. The Office for Standards in Education—Ofsted—is an independent department, which acts entirely independently of Ministers, and it will make judgments on whether to use education associations.

It is apposite that my hon. Friend picked up that point, because I can report to the House that we may have the first report from the inspectorate before Christmas. That report will pinpoint the first schools which the inspectorate thinks are failing. One may imagine the substantial effect that that will have locally, and I hope that it will be a beneficial effect.

The reports will begin to land on my desk from 1 January, when the powers become operative. It might be of interest to the House if I explain what will happen then. At that stage, the school will have 40 days within which to bring out an action plan to put right those things which the inspector has highlighted as an indicator that the school is failing—not just failing as an institution, but failing its pupils. The action plan will then be published and put in the hands of the local authority. The authority will have 10 days in which to respond to that action plan from the school.

At that stage, I will decide whether I accept the action report, which may say that a list of things must happen within six, nine or 12 months. The report will involve some tough decisions by local schools and by local education authorities. I pay tribute to LEAs of all political colours which, in recent months, have taken such tough decisions without the legislation.

The action plan may involve getting rid of the school governors, and will almost certainly involve getting rid of the head teacher, because a failing school is normally led by a failing head teacher. Some other members of staff at the school may also have to go. In the case of LEA schools, those actions should be taken by LEAs, as many have done —including a good number of Labour authorities. More power to them in the action that they have taken in the interests of children.

If I judge that the action plan is not adequate, and the LEA and the school are unable to take the necessary action in the interests of the children, I reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam that I will immediately institute an education association to take over the running of the school from the earliest possible date. I hope that that will happen rarely, but that it will get general support. Those young people are the sorts of people who will have to meet the targets to which I will now return.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath) *rose——*

Mr. Patten: Before I return to the targets, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman who speaks for the Liberal Democrats. Hon. Members of that party do cry such a lot if one does not give way.

Mr. Foster: I hope that my point will be in fact helpful. The Secretary of State has described what will happen when Ofsted reports on a school that is possibly failing.

What thought has the right hon. Gentleman given to what will happen to other Ofsted reports on schools which are not so categorised? Has the Secretary of State given any thought to suggestions which have been made that, between the four-yearly inspections, there should be some annual reflection on the report that is given and the action plan which has been developed?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member makes a positive point. Most schools in Britain are good and I pay tribute to them, but a small number are failing. A larger number are in a middle tier. They are not recognised as failing; they are open to doubt. That is perhaps the category to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I shall draw his positive suggestion to the attention of Professor Stewart Sutherland, the chief inspector of schools. If any risk is picked up in the four-year cycle of inspections, something should be done to make sure that the school does not drift down to the failing level in those four years.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) referred to colleges of further education. I invite my right hon. Friend to cast his mind a little further. Does he agree that one of the best performance indicators is the number of young people who enter advanced education? I hope that my right hon. Friend will develop that theme as his speech progresses.

My right hon. Friend referred to the period of 40 days which will provide an appropriate interval for consideration to take place. The period of 40 days struck me, as it did my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway). We wondered whether there was any biblical significance in 40 days and whether that was the reason why it sprang so readily to my right hon. Friend's mind.

Mr. Patten: I shall report later in my speech some important information about the increased levels of participation in higher education, exactly as my hon. Friend wishes. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not answer his first point immediately. As for my hon. Friend's second point, I had never thought of it. It is a jolly interesting justification.

I said that foundation target 1 sought substantially higher levels of basic attainment. By 1997, 80 per cent. of young people should have either a national vocational qualification at level 2, a general national vocational qualification at intermediate level, or four or five higher grade passes in GCSEs.

Before we had an important discussion about failing schools, following interventions from my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), I was saying that the latest figures showed that about 55 per cent. of young people were at the foundation target 1 level. An increase of 25 percentage points is needed in the next five years. Those are the targets which I lay before the House now. If we fail in those targets, it will be our responsibility in Government.

The next two targets deal with higher level skills. Foundation target 2 is for training and education to the level of NVQ level 3, or advanced level in either GNVQ or GCE, to be available to all young people who can benefit from it. Entitlement to post-compulsory education is

already available to those who stay in education. The youth training arrangements guarantee training to at least NVQ level 2.

Foundation target 3 provides that, by the year 2000, 50 per cent. of young people should reach NVQ3 or advanced level in GCE or GNVQ. A third of young people did so in 1992. An improvement of some 17 percentage points is needed in the next eight years. So we shall have to work hard to meet that target, too.

Both the basic and higher skills need to have appropriate breadth. Accordingly, foundation target 4 is that education and training provision should develop breadth, self-reliance and flexibility—important skills in the modern work force for women and men. The thrust of developments in both curriculum and qualification frameworks is all in that direction.

One thing of which we can be certain is that the pace of technological and other change will not slacken, either within our country or in our competitor countries. Better attainment by young people needs to be accompanied by better agreements for keeping the skills of the work force up to date. Therefore, the second four national targets deal with lifetime learning—something in which I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) is extremely interested. That interest has brought him here this morning. I am sure that we can look forward to a speech which, because of his knowledge of lifetime learning targets, will be longer than his usual brief interventions.

Lifetime target 1 sets the general scene in providing that, by 1996, all employees should take part in training or development activities as the norm. The last full survey, as long ago as 1986-87, showed that about 48 per cent. received some training.

Lifetime target 2 turns a particular focus on the key national vocational qualifications. By 1996, 50 per cent. of the employed work force should aim for NVQs or units towards them. NVQs are only now becoming widely available. That is reflected in the available figures. However, we shall see an explosion in the use of NVQs in the next two or three years.

The work force in general needs to be better qualified. Accordingly, lifetime target 3 provides that, by the year 2000, 50 per cent. of the work force should be qualified to at least NVQ level 3 or advanced level in either GCEs or GNVQ. The 1992 figure was about a third. So hitting that target will require an increase of 17 percentage points in the next eight years. So, again, we are setting ourselves tough targets. If we do not set ourselves tough targets, we shall not successfully drive towards meeting them.

The last target deals with the key role of employers in the education and training process. Lifetime target 4 is that, by 1996, 50 per cent. of medium and larger organisations —defined as those with more than 200 employees—should be accredited as "investors in people". More than 400 recognitions have been made so far. More than 4,000 organisations are working to achieve "investors in people" status. They include my Department. We are working hard at it. I expect us to be successful. There will be trouble in my Department if we are not shortly successful. Many schools and colleges are also working towards meeting the high standards of "investors in people", of which I am a strong admirer.

How do all those targets come to be? I have given a brief description of the targets. The national targets were developed under the leadership of the Confederation of British Industry. I congratulate it on its initiative. I also welcome the care that it took to involve other influential bodies, other representatives of employers, representatives of staff, the Trades Union Congress and a wide variety of education and training interests.

The targets are entirely consistent with the thrust of Government policy. The Government were glad to lend their support. I made that clear when I spoke recently to the council of the CBI. I spoke mid-morning and I had the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) as a warm-up act. He gave not a bad performance. We all need warm-up men before we speak.

The overall aims of the targets should commend themselves to all interests, including all parties represented in the House. I note that the recent Hamlyn National Commission spoke non-controversially in favour of the targets. So there seems to be considerable consensus. Of course, there is room for debate about the best means of progress, but I hope that the targets are common ground.

General agreement about the ends does not make their achievement easy. As I have said, there is much hard work to be done. That work is being spearheaded by the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets. It is an important body, chaired by Mr. Peter Davis, the co-chairman and chief executive of Reed Elsevier. A wide range of interests is represented on it.

I chaired the council's first formal meeting with Ministers last month. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I will take it in turns to chair the council. All Ministers and Secretaries of State will be there on every possible occasion.

It is very important that we work collectively on this matter. My fellow Ministers, including my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who was present on that day, and I were greatly impressed by the way that the council was tackling its task. Progress towards the targets will be better co-ordinated and stimulated. The council also has in its sights the possibility of developing the targets over time so that their relevance and challenge is maintained.

How are we responding in the Department for Education? Delivering the targets must obviously be in the hands of the providers. However, my Department necessarily acts at arm's-length from day-to-day provision, so what is its role? To try to answer that question, I will quote from my Department's action plan in response to the targets. Just as potentially failing schools have to develop action plans to improve themselves, we in my Department had to develop an action plan; otherwise, how on earth could we meet the targets when we signed up to them?

Any who doubt the close and effective working between the Departments should know that this was set alongside the Employment Department's complementary plan in an excellent single leaflet published in March. The document states:

> "The Department for Education is committed to securing higher participation and attainment in education and training at all levels. It welcomes the National Targets for Education and Training as a means for increasing demand for, and achieving improved levels of attainment in, high quality education and training. Through its policies, the Department aims to give individual institutions maximum freedom to meet the needs of students, employees and employers in response to such demand."

That is a pretty good statement of how we are trying to set about these things.

[Mr. Patten]

To give effect to that, we are pursuing a fourfold strategy: promotion, monitoring progress, reviewing policy and developing human resources. I shall comment briefly on each strategy in turn, beginning with promotion and publicity.

When we are trying to get something new going, publicity is obviously the first and most obvious lever. Among other things, fact packs and action packs have been sent to all further education colleges, and copies have been made available to schools.

The new national council is also an important player. Its annual report on progress towards the targets will form an important peg for publicity, as will the accompanying major national conference. I understand that the first report back from conference is being planned for the spring of 1994. I was interested to see in mail sent to me in my capacity as a Member of Parliament, that the council has briefed all Members of the House of Commons in a useful document which sets out the background to the council's work.

It is vital that we monitor progress towards the targets. Together with the national council and others, we are developing the necessary data sources. The messages that those yield may not always be comfortable. However, as now established in my Department's major exercise in publishing comparative performance tables for schools and colleges—as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth pointed out—the point is not to comfort but to provoke debate and action as necessary to improve standards. That is why we are publishing.

There has been a particular difficulty over the measure of attainment for foundation target 1. The standard measure of education performance at age 16 is five or more higher grade GCSE passes. For the purposes of foundation target 1, however, the "academic" equivalent to NVQ 2 has been four GCSE passes. I am pleased that the national council has recently advised that things can be simplified by adopting a single bench mark of five higher grade GCSE passes. That serves to raise already ambitious objectives, and the Government are happy to accept the advice of the council.

On the monitoring front, it is useful that Ofsted and the Further Education Funding Council's inspectorate will consider progress towards the targets as one of the key inspection indicators in its visits to schools and colleges.

The Department's main role comes in the development of policies. In everything we do, we have the targets clearly in focus. Earlier this year, I issued an instruction to my Department that every policy proposal put to me should set out how the policy would, if implemented, contribute to the achievement of the targets.

Every time that a policy paper comes to myself, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Higher and Further Education, my hon. Friends the schools Ministers and my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State for Education in the other place, it has a paragraph to show how, if implemented, that policy would help us to meet the targets. In other words, it is going down into the warp and weft of the Department for Education and the way in which our excellent civil servants work within it.

Many existing policies already bear directly on the targets' achievements. In schools, where foundation target 1 will be largely achieved, there is pre-eminently the national curriculum, together with the associated testing and the GCSE examinations.

Mr. Harry Greenway: This is a very important area. Will my right hon. Friend add to what he has said about publishing school examination results in league table form? I welcome that, but will he note and respond to the concerns of many schools that results should be published on a year basis—on the chronological age of the child, and not necessarily the school year in which the child finds himself? The present rifts between all independent schools, some maintained schools and the Department on this matter are serious, and by next year separate results will be published unless something is done, and that would be a pity.

Mr. Patten: That is an interesting and very important point. What we are trying to do with the performance tables —we do not put them in rank order as league tables; they are simply alphabetical performance tables of schools—is to try to get the best possible approximation of the results.

It is important that we try to accommodate all interests, and that is why, before we published the performance tables for the first time, and again before we published them for the second time this year, we consulted very widely. Sometimes, Secretaries of State and Ministers are accused of not listening to consultation. We listened to consultation, and the overwhelming majority of those who responded were in favour of publication of results—GCSE results in particular—by age groups and not year groups.

There seems to be a particular problem affecting the independent schools. Independent schools educate about 7 per cent. of England's children, and do an invaluable job in representing the interests of those children and educating them. They often stand as beacons of excellence around the country, and I welcome that.

I attended a debate yesterday of the Girls School Association annual conference at Stratford-on-Avon on exactly this issue. There are a number of changes that we can introduce that might accommodate the independent schools' understandable points that have been raised in correspondence by a number of distinguished Members of the House—and not only by the Girls Schools Association but by the Headmasters Conference and others—for example, to make it quite clear that we take into account the performance of children who move from one school to another. Under the present system, they carry their results with them, rather than leaving them in the school from which they came.

There are a number of things that we could do that would have a substantial effect, but only at the margins. The core is that the independent schools, for reasons that I will not trouble the House with now, have slightly different needs in that respect from the great majority of maintained schools. The great majority of maintained schools, as the overwhelming responses to the consultation exercises of this year and last year show, are very happy, and are strong advocates of the present system.

I agree with my hon. Friend. I have taken his advice on this and a number of other matters, and if he can suggest bright ideas as to how we can accommodate independent schools in the third round next year, I shall be happy to take any ideas from him—and from any other hon. Members, such as the hon. Member for Bath.

Mr. Don Foster: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. He is right to inform the House that if there are concerns about the accuracy of league tables—and if, sadly, we are to go ahead with them—it is vital that those issues are resolved. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is even more important, if that procedure is to be adopted, that he ensures that there is full support for the recommendations of Sir Ron Dearing, and many other people, that we urgently continue with research to find ways of indicating added value? That is one of the most crucial issues on which we should be reporting about the work of schools.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman has raised two points. One is partisan, to which I shall respond in a partisan vein, and the other non-partisan, to which I shall respond in kind.

It is outrageous—the House can tell by the tone of my voice that this is my partisan response—that the hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the Liberal party, which is devoted to freedom of information, should seek to suppress information and to lock the door to the hitherto secret garden of education. The Conservative party is devoted to freedom of information, but we all know that the hon. Gentleman does not share that devotion.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, it is absolutely right that we should do all that we possibly can to improve the contents of the further education and school performance tables. As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), I shall take into account what she said about adults and their performance at further education colleges.

I am equally happy to respond to the second request of the hon. Member for Bath. Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, is my main curriculum adviser along with the authority, and I have specifically asked him to address exactly this issue. I do not believe that any of us should delude ourselves. We would all like to see more value-added measures in the performance tables, but it will not be an easy task to get agreement on what those measures should be. A lot of work must be done.

Mr. Pawsey: It is very complicated.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is correct. It is extremely important that the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, under the chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing, should continue to address this important issue. I have specifically asked him to advise me further about what we can do in future years. I know that, whatever he recommends, however, the hon. Member for Bath will not like it, because he does not want any information about schools to be published.

Mr. Pawsey: It is a great shame: "There are none so blind as those who will not see."

Mr. Patten: I note that you are about to intervene, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank you for saving me. *[Laughter.]* The House is becoming extremely rowdy, and I can hardly hear myself think with such constant barracking.

Mr. Don Foster: It is important to put on record that I disagree with what the Secretary of State has said. I am in favour of information being made available, but it must be accurate, comprehensive and informative. On all three counts, the current league tables fail miserably. The Secretary of State is a well-read man, and I am sure he is aware of the quotation from Alexander Pope:

"A little learning is a dang'rous thing".

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing and that, unfortunately, is what is offered by the current league tables.

Mr. Patten: In sight of my little house in Oxfordshire is Pope's tower. Many locals think that in some previous century a pope sat there. It is found in the grounds of the manor house at Stanton Harcourt. Unfortunately, part of the great manor house has gone, and some of the grounds are derelict, but the rest are in splendid condition. Pope's tower is next to the church.

In the middle of that splendid scene Alexander Pope recorded how he saw two young lovers sitting, in a perfectly modest way, under a hayrick who were struck by lightning at the same time. What a way to go. The hon. Member for Bath is a well-read man, and I am sure that he is aware of the poem that Pope wrote about that. It is recorded on a gravestone in Stanton Harcourt church. Should the hon. Gentleman ever wish to visit the area, I will show him the tower and the gravestone.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, contrary to the assertion of the hon. Member for Bath that the league tables have failed miserably, they are warmly welcomed by parents, who scour the lists?

Mr. Patten: In future years, I shall campaign vigorously in my constituency to point out that the Liberal party wishes to suppress that information and to take away from parents the right to know about school performance. The campaigning techniques of the Liberals in my constituency are quite disgusting, but I know that you would not wish me to go down that track, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Foundation target 1 will be largely achieved in schools, and that will be done pre-eminently through the national curriculum, associated testing and the GCSE examinations. There will be an inevitable time lag before the full benefits of it come on stream. Try as we may, children still take 11 highly important years to get from the age of five to 16 in educational terms. We must not rest on our laurels. We are also aiming to develop vocational education, pre-16, and we will encourage breadth through progressive implementation of the national records of achievement.

More generally, we are pursuing measures to encourage choice and diversity still further. The targets, for example, are integral to my recent technology colleges initiative, which has been widely welcomed by many, including the Confederation of British Industry.

The new Further Education Funding Council arrangements mean that, for the first time, we can adopt a coherent approach to what was once thought to be a Cinderella sector. I gave the targets a central place in my letter of guidance to the new funding council on its launch last year.

Moves towards achieving the targets are also appropriately reflected in the funding council's powerful funding method, which is now being put in place. We put money where our mouths are. Expenditure plans for this year and the next two years provide for a 25 per cent. expansion of further education numbers. That represents an extraordinary revolution, and it will be a substantial step towards achieving the targets.

[Mr. Patten]

It should be the lasting credit of the Government that, at a time of considerable economic difficulty, we have found the priority to expand the further education sector by a quarter. To make the most of the structural changes, we have developed new comprehensive post-16 curriculum and examination policies. In place of what was often described as an alphabet soup there is now a coherent framework of qualifications.

The best-known qualifications are probably the GCSE and the tried and tested GCE A-level and AS-level examinations. They make up the so-called academic route. I have asked the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority to ensure that standards are maintained through strengthened quality assurance arrangements.

The previous jungle of essentially work-based and job-specific vocational qualifications is being simplified by the now widely available NVQs. The close involvement of employers in the specification of those qualifications—I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment is keen to promote that involvement—is a guarantee of their quality and their fitness for purpose.

Bridging the gap between the two types of qualification to which I have referred is the new family of general national vocational qualifications, including the new vocational A-level. They are designed to enable people to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a broadly occupational context.

When I visited the annual conference of the Girls Schools Association yesterday, I was pleased to note that Miss Joan Jefferson, the head of St. Swithin's school in Winchester, issued a press notice specifically to welcome the Government's action on vocational A-level qualifications.

The GNVQs prepare for a progression to both further study and worthwhile jobs. The first GNVQs started in September 1992, but the response is already very encouraging. In the light of experience in the pilot phase, I have asked the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, under its new chairman, Mr. Michael Heron, to strengthen the quality mechanisms.

More centres and courses are coming on stream. By 1996, I want one in four of 16-year-olds to be following GNVQs. That is the target that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment have set ourselves.

Lady Olga Maitland: May I give a warm welcome to the progress of the GNVQs? Although it is important to develop vocational studies, will my right hon. Friend confirm that considerable emphasis is placed on numeracy and literacy within that qualification?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Whether one is studying NVQs, GNVQs or A-levels, that study is conducted in the medium of English. English is the most important cross-curricular theme that anyone can study. It is important that throughout the study of those different qualifications, they are imbued with strong attention to the correct use of English, both written and spoken, and that matters relating to numeracy are equally attended to.

That I have to say that, sometimes to hoots of derision in this House and elsewhere—although, happily, not today—would amaze people in Korea, shock people in Taiwan, and reduce people to helpless laughter in Singapore or Hong Kong, and would cause Education Ministers, Industry Ministers and Employment Ministers to dance in the streets of our competitor countries in western Europe. In western Europe, it is an extraordinary reflection that the teaching of the basics should still be attacked by some—although, happily, by a declining number of people in this country.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I notice the emphasis that the Secretary of State placed on the need for good English. Can he explain why the Government are severely cutting section 11 grants, which would help those people for whom English is a second language and whose access to the curriculum will be harmed because they lack basic language skills?

Mr. Patten: I spent some happy years at the Home Office as a junior Minister, when one of my responsibilities was section 11 grants. One of the first things that I did was to ask how those grants were spent. I found that, disgracefully, in a number of education authorities throughout the country—such as Labour-controlled Avon—many hundreds of teaching posts that were meant to be funded for the teaching of English to ethnic minority groups had been kidnapped and that the money was spent instead on general education. A substantial amount of section 11 money was wasted.

It is critical now that that money, which is already running at about £100 million a year, is targeted at the teaching of English. I stress the teaching of English although I respect minority cultures and fully understand that some people may need help in the language of their mother tongue if they come from households in which only the mother tongue is spoken or is largely spoken. I think, for example, of Somali communities in Tower Hamlets in east London.

None the less, English is the national language and unless a member of a minority community is able clearly and effectively to speak and write that majority language, which has a world currency, he or she will remain socially disadvantaged in this country. I do not want to see any social disadavantage among members of our minority groups.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Possibly the most pernicious effect of section 11 funding that is incorrectly targeted is that it does not go into mainstream education—where, one hopes, it would improve standards—but often into nonsensical multiculturism that divides communities and reminds them of their differences rather than of what they have in common.

A recent classic example was the advice given by the Pre-School Playgroups Association to a Lambeth playgroup, which decided as a result to forgo all Christmas festivities and any mention of the nativity. Fortunately, that playgroup saw sense and changed its mind. That was done in the guise of the kind of multiculturalism that has too often been the result of section 11 funding.

Mr. Patten: I greatly value the PPA's work nationally, and was glad that Margaret Lochrie, who runs the PPA nationally and whom I have known for years, quickly came forward to make it clear that there was some confusion

between the association's central office and that Lewisham playgroup. All is now well, and I pay considerable tribute to the PPA.

As to my hon. Friend's first point on the question of where multiculturalism becomes political correctness and begins to harm people, I will give a specific example to show where the line should be drawn. Again, I call on my experience as a junior Minister at the Home Office.

I continued to approve section 11 funding in the form of grants to clubs for Asians and Afro-Caribbeans over retirement age. Many Asian women in particular speak no English and it struck me as absolutely right that, as they would never change, special accommodation should be made for their culture. Equally, many people having an Afro-Caribbean background had been left to live alone without their families. It was entirely right to make special provision for them also.

However, I immediately stopped the provision of money for Afro-Caribbean-only day nurseries. Such funding struck me as totally wrong. How could anyone think it right? Pensioners' clubs for Bangladeshis and others who cannot speak English are right, but nothing could help to split this nation more than nursery or other accommodation for people from different ethnic groups. We must be absolutely straightforward about that. What is politically correct is nonsense. What is effective is good. I give way to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), who is always politically correct and always good.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): I am grateful to the Secretary of State. I had intended to pay him a compliment anyway, because my own constituency—under a Conservative-controlled authority—benefited from his actions when he was at the Home Office, in preventing Conservative authorities such as Trafford from using section 11 money to support general educational spending. His action at that time was most important.

The Secretary of State made a strong and profound case for section 11 funding, emphasising the need to acknowledge the language problems among different minority groups. I do not know whether that was a coded attack on his colleagues in the Home Office and an appeal to them to rethink section 11 grants.

The right hon. Gentleman answered the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) when he said that as a Home Office Minister, he was able to be selective in the use of section 11 funding. Would not that have been the right way forward—recognising the usefulness of and need for section 11 funding and maintaining it at present levels, but being selective and ensuring that it was targeted where it would do most good?

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about Trafford council—which, under Conservative control, is an excellent metropolitan authority which has done exceptionally well educationally in recent years. The hon. Gentleman suggested that I, of all people, might make a coded attack. I have never been accused of doing that—writs fly around my head every time I open my mouth.

It was not a coded attack, because I agree wholeheartedly with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the section 11 policy that he is promoting. We are spending more than £100 million a year, which is a huge amount of taxpayer's money. I want to see it targeted at people who really need help, in Tower Hamlets and elsewhere, and not spread too thinly throughout the country.

People in Tower Hamlets suffer terribly from being disadvantaged—most notably, from the disadvantage of having a Liberal-run council. We need to help them all that we possibly can. And, for the avoidance of doubt, it is a racist Liberal council as well.

Mr. Don Foster: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would the Secretary of State care to withdraw that statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is not a point of order or a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Patten: Surely the hon. Gentleman has seen the leaflets published by the Liberal party in Tower Hamlets —but, judging by your stern look, Mr. Deputy Speaker, perhaps I should return to GNVQs, which prepare for progression to both further study and worthwhile jobs.

The first GNVQs started in September 1992. The response is already most encouraging. In the light of experience gained in the pilot phase, I asked the National Council for Vocational Qualifications to strengthen quality mechanisms. More centres and courses are coming on stream. By 1996, I want one in four 16-year-olds to be following GNVQs. That is another target—and if I do not meet it, I shall be in trouble with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, because we will not have delivered the goods.

The signs are not bad. By September, 1,000 institutions in England alone—about 500 schools and about 500 further education and sixth form colleges—had begun to teach GNVQs. The signs are pretty good, and I wish that GNVQs were spread more throughout our schools and colleges.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: My right hon. Friend is right to say that there are grounds for optimism about the spread of GNVQs. Of the full-time students of Kidderminster college in my constituency, no fewer than half are following GNVQ courses.

Mr. Patten: That is excellent news, and I congratulate the principal and staff of Kidderminster college. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education has just reminded me that, in addition to mentioning the statistic of 1,000 schools, sixth form colleges and further education colleges, it might be more telling to state that 80,000 young people are undertaking GNVQs this autumn. That is from nothing—from a standing start—and we shall see it taking off.

The framework provides options to suit the wide range of talents found among young people. I very much want to see parity of esteem between different outcomes at the same general level. The skill levels represented by those outcomes are far more significant than the specific means by which they have been achieved.

The fact that there are various ways through the qualifications framework underlines the importance of early, informed and impartial careers education and guidance. That is an important function of schools and colleges, and sits squarely with other steps to increase their responsiveness to those they seek to serve. In turn, that is part and parcel of the citizens charter philosophy of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. With the parents

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charter and the recently published charters for further and higher education, that policy is now applied throughout education.

The focus of the targets on the vital craft and technician levels means that higher education is mainly outside the targets. Higher education institutions run an increasing number of two-year diploma courses and similar courses suitable for the high-powered and high-level technical skills that we increasingly need in this country. I should like to see more such courses in universities.

Higher education certainly has a role in some of the lifetime targets. More generally, it has an important effect on school and further education. The Government have a clear target for young people in higher education, and we have made record progress towards achieving those ends.

The progress that we have made so far has been unparalleled. In the May 1991 higher education White Paper, the Government said that they expected that approaching one in three of all 18 to 19-year-olds would enter higher education by the year 2000—that was our spring 1991 target. We confirmed that as our target for the year 2000 in our manifesto for the general election last year—just 18 or 20 months ago. I am glad to be able to tell the House today, for the first time, that this autumn, in only two years rather than eight, we have achieved that target.

Early information about enrolments shows that, for the first time, about 31 per cent. of all young people have entered higher education this October. That is a staggering success story for the universities and colleges involved. It is also a staggering success story on the part of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the leadership that he has given in that sector. He launched the White Paper on higher education in 1991. It is not a bad achievement for the Conservative party. Never in the history of manifestos has such a target been met so far—six clear years—in advance of the target laid down.

We have witnessed an expansion of participation rates on a scale much greater than anything ever seen in the post-Robbins era of the 1960s. Let us consider the figures. In the 25 years—the quarter of a century—from 1963 to 1988, the participation doubled to about 15 per cent.

Now, for the first time, I can report that, during the past five years, the participation rate has more than doubled again, to approximately 31 per cent. I am pleased to say that the number of mature entrants—those over the age of 24—has doubled. Therefore, the absolute numbers of students in higher education today is very much greater than at any time before.

On the evidence of the figures that I have been collecting this week—they are up-to-date figures—for the first time in the history of this country there are now 1 million students on full-time courses in higher education in England. In the past year alone, the number of students on full-time courses has increased by 100,000.

I shall set those figures in context, and also repeat them for emphasis. In the last year alone, the number of students on full-time courses has increased by 100,000—that represents about half the number of students in all our universities in 1963 at the time of the Robbins report, which is an outstanding achievement.

That increase of 100,000 students over the last year is the equivalent of creating a dozen new universities in England—an extraordinary achievement. In just one university term, this October 1993, there has been a much greater expansion in the equivalent number of universities represented by the 100,000 students than we ever saw in the immediate post-Robbins era, with the setting up of new universities in places such as Sussex and Essex.

Mr. Pawsey: My right hon. Friend rightly places emphasis on the expansion. I was delighted to hear him apportioning credit to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. However, he is being unduly modest, as I believe that a considerable amount of credit should also go to him for what he has done in the way in which he has promoted advanced education.

As to the main thrust of my question, although my right hon. Friend properly draws attention to what has taken place in advanced education, does he not agree that some remarkable conclusions must be drawn about the quality of education in our schools? The substantial expansion could have taken place only if large numbers of young people were properly qualified and able to take advantage of advanced education.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right, and I take the opportunity of answering his question to pay tribute to all the hard-working teachers in our schools in England who have made the rapid expansion possible. That work has been mirrored by the hard work of vice-chancellors and university lecturers in all our universities. Their efforts have made possible the extraordinary advance.

Lady Olga Maitland: I join my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) in warmly welcoming the excellent news that there are 100,000 extra students in our universities. That is an enormous tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but does it not tell us something else? The great debate about student grants and student loans has clearly had no effect on students, who wish to go to university because they value the importance of university and realise that they should make a contribution.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is right, and I thank her for her kind words on the rate of expansion promoted by the Government. I agree with her entirely. I am proud to represent the university constituency of Oxford, West and Abingdon, which contains one of Oxford's two universities. My constituency houses several thousand students and several thousand dons.

A few years ago, when my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State introduced student loans, my advice centres were full of students and dons in Oxford saying that the loan scheme would be an unmitigated disaster and would choke off participation. There has been no evidence of that—I have given evidence to the contrary this morning to show that, far from choking off participation, a regime under which students have to contribute to their living costs through loans has produced a record participation rate. Far from choking off participation, the equivalent of a dozen universities have been created this autumn.

I was also told that the loan scheme would have an adverse effect on minority groups and those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, but that has not happened either. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam is right. A bit of motivation among the student population is a good thing. They must be motivated to develop themselves and stretch themselves intellectually; a bit of financial motivation is good.

It is perhaps because of that motivation that we have the most efficient and effective university system in Europe. Most of our university degrees are studied over just three years and, in international terms, our universities enjoy the lowest drop-out rates, which has much to do with the motivation of our splendid university students. In other parts of Europe—I had better tread carefully for fear of causing an international incident—it can take students seven or eight years to get through university, so it is a form of outdoor relief for those in their early 30s.

Mr. Pawsey: Indoor relief.

Mr. Patten: Indeed. But our young people get outdoors after university aged 21 or 22.

I should not concentrate purely on young people, however, because a bare majority of those entering our universities this autumn were in fact mature students aged more than 24, and that is excellent. I also welcome the fact that so many of them are women: 48 per cent. of all undergraduates this autumn were women, which is exceptionally good, and the Government should be proud of it.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The Secretary of State is dishing out accolades to the Conservative party for having expanded higher education. Will he take this opportunity generously to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the Labour Government to creating the Open university, from which millions of people have benefited and which is a milestone in educational achievement? Gratitude should be expressed by those millions of people to the Labour Government for setting up the university some years ago.

Mr. Patten: Of course I recognise that it was a great idea of Lord Wilson's—assisted also, during her four-year reign as Education Secretary, by my noble Friend Lady Thatcher, who presided over the expansion of the Open university and who got from a succession of bemused Tory Chancellors the additional sums of money that made that possible. The House is delighted to know that, from next year, Madam Speaker will be chancellor of the Open university.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I am in my 14th year on the council of the Open university, and proud to serve there. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the wonderful and imaginative changes that there have been in the Open university, which, as he rightly said, was saved by Baroness Thatcher? There are courses for the unemployed, all sorts of vocational courses and exported courses. The institution is given to all sorts of innovation, and it has all been inspired by the lead of Conservative Governments. That, too, must be acknowledged.

Mr. Patten: I am delighted to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work over the past 14 years on the Open university's council. I visited the university in September and was much impressed by the work that Vice-Chancellor Dr. John Daniel and others do there.

I was also impressed earlier this month when I went to Bratislava—for the benefit of the geographically challenged, it is the capital of Slovakia—and saw at the city university the excellent work that the Open university is doing to promote the learning of English and other subjects. There is an excellent and close working link between the Open university and the city university of Bratislava, and the rector is very proud of it. It is doing an enormous amount of good to shore up democracy in the emerging countries of central Europe. It is also excellent that the Open university sells and exports the English language.

Incidentally, I am somewhat shocked to learn that about half the £6 billion worldwide market for the teaching of English is taken up by colleges teaching English in Australia and Ireland. I intend to put that right as far as possible.

I was also struck by the excellent work done by the British Council in Bratislava. Under its director, and with the use of know-how fund money, it does an enormous amount to export British education services to central Europe. That was stressed to me by the rectors of a number of universities during my enjoyable stay in Bratislava.

I found out, too, that rectors in central European universities are called to their face, "Your Magnificence". That is rather interesting; those who wish to gain preferment in the Department for Education now have a clear route to it when addressing their Secretary of State.

When talking of education and training, there is a temptation to focus on the needs of young people, but, as the hon. Member for Dewsbury and I have agreed, adults are just as important. The lifetime targets rightly direct attention to the need also to maintain and develop provision for adults. The base here is higher than generally appreciated. I did not realise how high it was until I first entered the Department for Education. Mature students already make up the significant majority of enrolments.

We also need to guard against letting all the focus fall on the particular levels highlighted in the targets. Improved performance in that area needs to be underpinned by better performance in basic skills by both young people and adults.

The last of the four limbs of my Department's action plan relates to the development of human resources. A much greater recognition of the need to devlop the potential of the work force—the very principle at the heart of "investors in people"—is needed to stimulate the right kind of demand from the supply coming on stream.

I cannot emphasise too much the key importance of the point at which employers meet education, and vice versa. The targets are therefore about higher overall levels of attainment. That will be wasted unless the attainment is in useful areas. If education and training are to supply what employers need, it is crucial that employers make their needs known to students, parents, providers and examining bodies.

Those signals need to be both clear and sent in good time. That is why I welcome all attempts to foster better links between schools and industry. The CBI is doing this with the close co-operation of the TUC. The Institute of Directors has a vital role too, and other important bodies such as Business in the Community and Industry in Education are making an impact in this area as well.

As I told the CBI at its recent conference, the opportunities for links between business—at all levels—and our increasingly responsive schools, colleges and universities have never been better. As illustrated by the case studies in my Department's recent business fact pack about further education, the best thing about these links is that they are mutually beneficial: they are not a one-way street; no one is a client here. The benefits flow almost directly to the immediate participants. More generally, this

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will help to secure the necessary and irreversible shift of culture, so that higher skill levels are both the normal expectation and highly valued.

Inevitably, I have concentrated on the national position, but achieving the targets will be the result of improvements institution by institution, especially in institutions where achievement is already near or above the targets. It is in local institutions such as the Kidderminster college, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest referred, that the real effort is being made.

The answer is provided by the local yardsticks being developed through the TECs, and I am grateful for their invaluable work in establishing local baselines and the progress needed to contribute to the targets at national level. The Department of Employment has done excellent work here, and the TECs are to be commended. That work has always been accompanied by important promotional activities which, through the TECs' local education and training networks, are also helping to change the culture to one of expecting success.

There are many more things that I want to say today. I came here this morning with a great deal to lay before the House, but, in the interests of fairness, I want to give everyone in the Chamber a chance to speak. We all look forward to the remainder of the debate.

The Government have radically improved the structure and content of education and training, and there is now a unique opportunity to secure a step change in the attainments of young people and adults. The national targets provide a clear context for the widespread effort that is now required. Those targets are demanding, but achievable, and we cannot afford to fail in this vital national endeavour.

The hon. Member for Bath was kind enough to say that I occasionally read books, a daring fact for Ministers to reveal. Flicking through Shakespeare, I found that, as always, he has a phrase for us. In the prologue to "Henry VIII", Shakespeare refers to "a noise of targets". May the modern-day noise of targets represented by the national education and training targets be loud, cheerful and successful.

11 am

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): We must thank the Secretary of State for Education for his contribution. I do not know whether his target for finishing was 11 o'clock precisely, but if it was, it is one target which the Government can claim to have reached. The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the CBI conference and warm-up speeches. He read his warm-up speech well, and it was only when he started to improvise that he got into difficulties. A significant number of issues need to be addressed and the Secretary of State has set the scene for some of them.

If everything is so good, why is there so much that is so bad? I share the Secretary of State's welcome for the fact that more young people and adults are spending time in higher education. Therefore, it is all the more of a pity that many graduates cannot get employment of the kind for which they are qualified. I am sure that the Secretary of State is aware that graduate unemployment stands at 14 per cent. and that many of those who graduated recently are in jobs requiring qualifications well below the level of the degrees for which they have worked.

We welcome the expansion of higher education, but the Secretary of State must recognise that that is leading to a great deal of overcrowding in our universities and that much of the expansion has been underfunded. Such significant problems will have to be addressed on another occasion.

The CBI initiative which led to the national education and training targets and to the debate was a positive move. Some will argue that such a move should have come from Government rather than from the CBI. However, we welcome the fact that the Government support the targets and that there is some co-operation between the CBI and the TUC and other bodies. I am pleased that we are debating these issues, but we should not stake too much on the initiative alone. The Minister's rosy picture and his talk of action plans and targets are not as genuine as he would have us believe.

I should like to deal with some of the specific targets. The Minister spoke about some of the difficulties with target 1. The information that all hon. Members received this week while preparing for the debate shows that between 1991 and 1992 there was a 3·7 per cent. increase in the number of people reaching that target. However, the same briefing said that to be on target overall the increase should have been 5 per cent. and will need to be 5 per cent. in future. There is plainly no room for complacency, because much more needs to be done.

I share the concern of those who think that the picture that has been presented and some of the targets and their attainment are not necessarily an indication of progress but more a profile of where we are at the moment. There is still a long way to go. The Secretary of State did not address any of the difficulties with NVQs and GNVQs, which were raised in the recent Ofsted report. Does the Secretary of State share the concern expressed in that report that those new qualifications may do rather little to increase skills and could give students false hopes? The Secretary of State often quotes Ofsted reports and tells us about their importance and I was disapointed that he did not deal with criticisms in that report.

The Secretary of State did not mention the research conducted by Alan Smithers of Manchester university which was recently reported in the press. That research analysed the impact of NVQs and GNVQs and showed that they are moving people forward but measuring what they can currently do. The Minister should deal with those criticisms rather than brushing them to one side. If we are to make progress, we must take problems on board rather than just hearing the Minister boast about progress.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): No, rejoicing.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Lady is in a rejoicing mood, but rejoicing can lead to too much complacancy and it would be dangerous to be complacent about the problems that still exist.

The targets were launched with the laudable aim of creating a world-class work force. The CBI and the TUC and many other bodies involved in education and training agree that our work force needs a proper basis for education and training. That is essential if we are to be internationally competitive and have a flexible work force.

which will be necessary in future. Such a proper basis is also essential to avoid the skills shortages that could undoubtedly arise if—or when, as we hope—the economic upturn finally comes.

The Minister should recognise the urgency of the problem. In its briefing to hon. Members for the debate, the CBI states:

"We have to sprint rather than run to catch up with our competitors' progress."

For that reason, it is right to stress future challenges. We have to look forward in considering the needs of our young people, rather than simply considering where we are at present.

We will not transform qualifications or the basis of education and training or attack future problems simply by concentrating on what happens to post-16s and adults. We must look at the fundamentals of our education system so as to enable young people over 16 and adults to take advantage of new education and training opportunities. That is the main reason why we must move away from the Government's view of education. The Secretary of State moved away from the debate, but perhaps other hon. Members will take on board the necessity to move away from the Government's narrow view of what education is all about.

We have had several recent debates on education, but the Secretary of State has kept rather quiet about the report from the National Commission on Education, which clearly shows that how well people are educated depends on where they live, their social class, their gender and their ethnic origin. All too often, it is difficult to break through those barriers. All too often, children and young people do not get the opportunities that they need. Their horizons are limited and their opportunities restricted. It is the Government's responsibility to counter the disadvantages that block the way for so many young people.

The CBI—which, as the Secretary of State said, has a clear interest in this matter—says that a quantum leap is needed in Britain's education and training performance if we are to become a super-skills economy. That is the basis of the whole problem. What sort of economy do the Government envisage our being a part of in the future? It appears that they are quite happy with an education system that will equip too many people to participate only in a low-skill, low-tech, low-paid society.

The Government's 14 years in office—and the Secretary of State does not always mention this—have not resulted in even basic literacy for all and certainly not in high-skill training for the majority. We are now fewer than seven years away from the year 2000, yet Ministers hark back to the Victorian era when they should be preparing children and young people for the 21st century. The right hon. Gentleman speaks as though he still believes that the country needs an academic elite supplemented by a technological elite, which is why he concentrates on such items as super A-levels, elective schools, exorbitant amounts of money for city technology colleges and, more recently, bribes—small though they may be—to a few schools to become CTCs.

If the right hon. Gentleman is genuinely interested in preparing all our young people for the future, why have 15 CTCs received £150 million, while 24,000 schools throughout the country have struggled with neglect over many years? Ministers are happy to accept a position in which the majority of children receive a different and less well-resourced education. That is one of the fundamental difficulties that we are struggling to overcome.

We cannot continue with the outdated belief that there are children whose future employment and lives will not demand a great deal of them in terms of technological skills and enhanced levels of knowledge. The range of understanding and skills needed by young people is now very broad. Sound achievement in literacy and numeracy is fundamental and every child needs that before he can progress. However, today every child also needs familiarity with information technology, the ability to communicate and the ability to work in teams, as so many schools are encouraging them to do.

The Secretary of State must realise that currently there are unnecessarily wide differences in the basic educational attainments of our young people. That is a great cost both to the individuals concerned, who lose out, and to the country as a whole. Whether in the short or the long term, our youngsters need a higher level of basic education if they are to succeed and if the country is to make the progress that we all want.

The Government are not dealing with specific problems. In particular, they are not dealing with the cycle of under-achievement that occurs where parents did not receive very much from the education system and so are not able to motivate their children or join in the partnership at school that would be in the best interests of their children. The recent Ofsted report—which I hope we shall have time to debate on another occasion—deals with some of the problems. If there is to be progress in the schools that fact those difficulties, we need an approach other than the threat of hit squads being sent in. Instead, local authorities should be allowed to offer the support and the guidance that has proved to be so successful in many areas.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Lady has raised an important point about what, in the old days, we might have called a cycle of educational deprivation whereby parents have had learning difficulties and great problems with literacy and numeracy and passed that on from generation to generation. I hope that the hon. Lady welcomes the fact that the Government are supporting the invaluable work done by the adult literacy and basic skills unit—also chaired, as it happens, by Mr. Peter Davis who chairs NACETT. He is a much-valued pluralist in these matters.

We are now making available substantial sums of money in an attempt to break into the cycle. We are concentrating on parents, through experimental schemes, in the hope that if they can be helped educationally they, in turn, can help their children.

Mrs. Taylor: I shall shortly deal with the problems of adult literacy, when I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will recognise the other main priority in tackling the problem. If we are to break the cycle of under-achievement, the single most important factor must be the extension of the provision of nursery education. Without that, all other efforts might fail. I hope that he will respond positively to that approach.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the national curriculum and the need for it to provide the right basis. During the past year, Ministers have changed tack. They have recognised that throughout the country there has been total agreement that the Government have got it wrong. However, I and other people throughout the country still

[Mrs. Taylor]

have serious reservations about the Government's intentions for the national curriculum. The most recent journal of the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations contains an article by Baroness Blatch on the national curriculum—she writes such articles in such magazines from time to time. Although she says that Sir Ron Dearing is carrying out his review, she refers to the national curriculum not as a framework, not as a curriculum in the way that most people would understand it, but as a programme of study. That will cause concern to many people who are involved in education, as would the letter that the Secretary of State wrote to me at the end of September, when he asked me whether I supported a national curriculum, but asked whether I supported a national curriculum consisting of a syllabus to be taught in every maintained school. While there is such difficulty in the minds of Ministers about the difference between a national curriculum and a national syllabus, we obviously shall not make the kind of progress that we want on the reform of the national curriculum generally.

I shall now mention an area where I think that a former Conservative Government got something right—GCSE.

Mr. Harry Greenway *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Taylor: That was, as I am glad to see the hon. Member agrees, a change for the better—a change which, along with the comprehensive movement, is probably responsible in part for the increased entry into higher education. The change to GCSE has been an important breakthrough for motivating many young people. One of the reasons why the GCSE has worked in that it has had a large element of course work and continuous assessment. That has helped young people to see the reason for concentrating on their studies on an on-going basis and I am sure that problems such as truancy would have been much worse had we not had that change of examination.

I will not go over old ground, with the Minister criticising the quality of GCSE, but I ask him to be careful when he is considering what should happen at key stage 4, so as not to destroy the beneficial impact of GCSE on our 14 to 16-year-olds. We should not be destroying or undermining GCSE but building on the success that it has brought. By that I mean changing our post-16 qualification system, and that involves changing our post-16 qualification system, and that involves changing A-levels.

The Secretary of State has mentioned A-levels only in passing today, but he ought to understand just how isolated he is when it comes to reform of A-levels. There is no body of education opinion behind him in his determination to preserve A-levels at the present time. [HON. MEMBERS: "We are right behind him."] Yet again the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) is right behind the right hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that one day that loyalty must be rewarded. We keep having Government reshuffles and I am sure that one day that loyalty will be rewarded, but I know that the hon. Gentleman has waited very patiently.

Mr. Pawsey: My loyalty is always rewarded by the fact that I am here, behind my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That in itself is reward enough.

Mrs. Taylor: I thought that the hon. Gentleman's loyalty could not be quite so total and amazing. I think that when—

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Lady is almost speechless.

Mrs. Taylor: For once I can agree with the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth. I am almost speechless at his degree of loyalty, but I am also reminded of what the Secretary of State said about his European travels and the name given to the rectors. I cannot quite recall what it was.

Mr. Pawsey: I know the word that the hon. Lady is seeking. The Secretary of State said that the rectors of universities there were addressed to their face as "your magnificence". We would not dream of addressing the Secretary of State in quite such fulsome words, but we would be delighted to refer to his speech as magnificent.

Mrs. Taylor: As we near the season of goodwill, perhaps I should not say too much about the loyalty of the hon. Gentleman except to say that I am sure that the Secretary of State will be working on that title and that I am sure that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will probably be the first to call the Secretary of State "your magnificence". He has called him many other things of almost such devotion and praise. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has another suggestion, but perhaps he can leave that one for his own speech and come back with it later.

Mr. Pawsey: Wait until we get to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Taylor: I hope that we can get to A-levels and the reasons behind the Government's intransigence. It is rather strange that Ministers should isolate themselves quite so completely on that point. After all, the CBI, which the Secretary of State has quoted today, the Institute of Directors, the Girls Schools Association which the Secretary of State visited yesterday, the vice-chancellors, the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal Society are all united against the Secretary of State, and yet he alone stands out, believing that he is right.

The Secretary of State has in the past accused me of wanting to lower standards because I want a reform of A-levels. I think that that is rather a strange accusation against someone who has two children in the school system, as if I do not care about their future. I have to tell the Secretary of State that it is precisely because I want something better for my children than A-levels that I want change.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way, but none the less her remarks about A-levels do give rise to the thought that she wants to water them down. The great advantage of A-levels today is that they are a benchmark of excellence which is recognised worldwide. That is why Conservative Members totally support and endorse the Secretary of State in his endeavours to back the A-levels.

Mrs. Taylor: I am interested in what the hon. Lady says. If she will not take my word for it, is she saying that the Royal Society—those Nobel prize winners and great scientists—do not believe in high standards? What does the hon. Lady think that they are about when they say that A-levels should go?

There are real problems in the way in which A-levels are structured in this country. They are not delivering the breadth of education that universities want university entrants to have. Also, the narrowness of the post-16 academic curriculum is such that it leads to all sorts of problems even for those who are considered to be high flyers.

I have the figures of A-level entrants for sciences and mathematics for the past few years. Since 1990, there has been a 7·3 per cent. reduction in the number of young people taking mathematics and science A-levels. The Secretary of State, about this time last year, said that he wanted universities to offer more science places, yet we have that trend in A-levels. Many young people with very good A-levels results in arts subjects could not get into university because their post-16 education had been so narrow that they had no flexibility; they could not transfer to science courses. That is why many departments of science in many universities lowered their entrance requirements and had vacant places. If we are really interested in quality, if we are really interested in being competitive on an international basis, we have to embrace changes in post-16 qualifications.

The Secretary of State was speaking yesterday at the Girls Schools Association about school sixth forms. His statement—let schools do A-levels and let further education colleges do job-related vocational qualifications—shows that he has not learned anything about the problems that this narrow and strict divide creates in our society and for our economic competitiveness.

The Secretary of State is clearly wrong, but he also seems to be ignorant about what is going on in our schools. He has admitted that the further education league tables are pretty nonsensical, because they give us only a tiny piece of the FE picture of achievements. He has not mentioned the very significant developments that have been going on apace in many schools, which are offering not merely A-levels post-16 or resits of GCSE examinations but BTEC and a whole range of qualifications. The Secretary of State has been left behind in understanding the changes.

If, as the Secretary of State says, the Government want a skills revolution and a breakthrough in educational achievements for all our children, and if he wants to break the cycle of under-achievement that he has acknowledged exists, I suggest that he thinks about nursery education and that he follows the apparent lead of the Prime Minister.

For Labour Members, nursery education has always been a priority. We are desperately worried that all our European neighbours and economic competitors provide much better nursery education. We are proud of the fact that so many Labour councils deliver good nursery provision for so many children.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Taylor: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, but I wish that Ministers would speak on the topic and would acknowledge the problem.

Lady Olga Maitland: On the subject of comparisons with nursery education in other European countries, there is no parallel, because we start main school education at five whereas in other countries in Europe it starts at six or even seven.

Mrs. Taylor: In other countries, even when children start school at six, a higher proportion of children aged three and four are getting that best start. The hon. Lady cannot get away from the fact that 50 per cent. of a child's development takes place before the age of five. If other countries have the sense to give their three and four-year-olds the best start, we have a lot of catching up to do.

The evidence is so overwhelming that I do not understand why the Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues always want to keep quiet. Children who have had the benefit of nursery education settle into school more quickly and successfully. They achieve more during, and are more likely to obtain jobs at the end of, their school lives. The girls are far less likely to have teenage pregnancies. Children who have had the benefit of nursery education are less likely to be involved in criminal activities.

Lady Olga Maitland: It is unrelated.

Mrs. Taylor: I am sure that when the Secretary of State was at the Home Office he saw the evidence that was presented by the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and from this country and abroad showing that Governments are making a significant investment in the future through spending on nursery education.

We still await answers from the Secretary of State. We have still not heard whether the Prime Minister's so-called plan for a million places is a reality. His office has not denied the story in the *Daily Express,* but it has not confirmed it either. I hope that the hon. Member who speaks for the Liberal party will tell us whether he has received a reply to the letter that he sent to the Prime Minister, which the right hon. Gentleman referred to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Don Foster: If it helps the hon. Lady, may I say that, sadly, the answer is no.

Mrs. Taylor: We live in hope of a positive response and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will report to the House as soon as he gets any response from the Secretary of State. The hon. Gentleman was also present at a reception in the House last week, hosted by the Association for Science Education, when the Secretary of State actually spoke.

Mr. Foster: Very well.

Mrs. Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman says, he spoke very well on that occasion.

Mr. Patten: I have NVQ 1 in joined-up speaking.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure that that is always the case, but we will give the right hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt this morning. One thing that he said on that occasion which might surprise some people, given the Government's record during the past 14 years, was that "Successful change in education can only come about slowly." That was something of a surprise, given the pace of change and the panic response that the Government often exhibit.

If that is the case, there is all the more need for urgency in tackling the under-provision of nursery places. It cannot be done overnight. If we do not invest in education for the under-fives, we will have more problems and we will not be able to get on top of some of the problems—for example, illiteracy and problems with numeracy among adults—to which the Secretary of State referred in an intervention. He is clearly aware of the research that has

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been done during the past few years by the adult literacy and basic skills unit. Its recent evidence is chilling and frightening and shows that 25 per cent. of young people between the ages of 16 and 20 find it difficult to understand and to fill in a job application form. That is a frightening statistic and state of affairs. Far too many adults have real literacy and numeracy problems.

Lady Olga Maitland: Does not the hon. Lady agree, therefore, that there is an argument for the regular testing of pupils throughout their school career?

Mrs. Taylor: The most significant thing that we can do to improve literacy and numeracy is to get young children into nursery school so that they receive the right preparation and can be taught properly and will be more responsive when they enter infant school. Every piece of educational research shows that to be the case. The Government have accepted, in the targets that we have been discussing, that by 1997, only 20 per cent. of adults in this country will be at less than NVQ 2, which means that there will have to be some effort made to tackle those literacy and numeracy problems. We will do so only if we improve literacy in those leaving school, which means not merely concentrating on language within the national curriculum but ensuring that young people get the best start.

We must also tackle the backlog of illiteracy. The Secretary of State boasted about investing and about making some money available. I was at the launch of the National Literacy Association's "99 by 99" campaign. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was also there and he signed up to that aim. I am afraid that he went on to say that no extra Government action would be needed, because everything would come right now that we have a national curriculum. That was a staggering display of complacency. Even the resources to which the Secretary of State referred are not adequate to deal with the existing problems. For example, the Government have allocated £3 million to the reading recovery programme, which is welcome expenditure. It is right that the Government put money into programmes of that kind. However, I return to a point that I raised in an intervention during the Secretary of State's speech. If the Government insist on cutting section 11 money, the job of reading recovery will be a bigger job at a later stage. If we delay the learning of the English language of children for whom English is a second language, those children will need more help later. It is a false economy to cut section 11 money, because the Government will have to pay more later to tackle the problem of illiteracy.

I do not want to delay the House much longer, as other hon. Members wish to speak. The Secretary of State needs to shift from such a complacent approach. There are some serious problems and whether there is agreement on the targets—as there is now—or not, we will not achieve those targets, let alone meet all the desired international comparisons, unless there is an overall improvement in opportunities for every child.

Earlier, the Secretary of State said that, despite some of the changes, overall performance had been disappointing. In October, at the Conservative party conference, for which the Secretary of State must have mixed memories in the light of some of his comments at the fringe meeting, he said:

"For too long, too many children left our schools without the basic skills they need."

Mr. Patten: What remarks at what fringe meeting?

Mrs. Taylor: Those matters may be sub judice, but I refer to when the right hon. Gentleman said that, when he spoke, writs were sometimes issued.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that clarification, and I am happy to repeat the apology to the chief education officer of Birmingham, Tim Brighouse, for anything I said that may have offended him. There is no more public a place to apologise than the House of Commons.

Mrs. Taylor: Those matters are outside my hands, but I am sure that other people will take their own actions on that matter.

Mr. Patten: I am just off to see my solicitors!

Mrs. Taylor: In that case, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to report his apology to them.

I was concentrating on the Secretary of State's comments at the party conference when he said that too many children left school without basic skills, unable to read fluently, unable to express themselves clearly and grammatically, unable to do basic arithmetic and unable to read our great classics. That is a catalogue of failure, yet the Government have been in office for 14 years. If we are to set targets, they should improve the education of every child in the country. The Government have still not found themselves able to take that on board as a target and they do not accept that the education of every child matters. The Government are developing a two-tier system and for that reason their approach and policies are inadequate.

11.43 am

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): The speech of the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was rather like her hair style—modest, elegant and extremely revealing. It revealed a lack of constructive thought from the Labour party after 14 years in opposition. Labour Members have not a single constructive thought. I found it remarkable and disappointing that the hon. lady did not attempt to answer the debate in any way. My hon. Friends may also note the empty Benches opposite. There is not one Labour Back Bencher present—only the hon. Lady, sitting in splendid isolation, lonely in her place on the Front Bench.

The national targets produced for education and training are one of the Government's best kept secrets. At a time when leaks are sadly commonplace, this document has remained under wraps. It may serve as a good example of how to maintain Government security.

I shall now quote from a letter that I received from the chairman of the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets because one of the paragraphs in the letter summarises today's admirable debate. It says:

"The National Targets are rooted in the need to maintain and, where possible, improve our competitiveness in the international economy. It is now widely recognised that competitiveness both for the individual business and the economy as a whole, depends crucially on the capacity of the workforce at all levels."

That is absolutely right, and I am delighted to have the assent of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), who, as a business man, is well aware of those matters. We shall listen with great interest to what my hon. Friend has to say. The targets present a genuinely challenging and ambitious attempt to lift the standard of training and education for a substantial part of the nation's work force. It is an entirely laudable objective. British industry, employers and trade unions have long been calling for a real improvement in the quality of education and skills of British people.

The excellent document, "National Targets for Education and Training", goes a substantial way to meeting those demands. The targets are detailed and cover two distinct areas: foundation learning and lifetime learning. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has a memory aid in his possession. I have a similar one, but the difference between us is that I do not need mine.

I return to the two distinct subjects—foundation learning and lifetime learning. By 1997, the target is that 80 per cent. of young people should reach national vocational qualification level 2. That is a fairly bald statement, but it represents a great leap forward, for it starts from a 51 per cent. level in 1991. To achieve the 80 per cent. target by 1997, it will be necessary to produce an increase of 5 per cent. per annum. That is a massive undertaking.

My right hon. and hon. Friends will try to ensure that training and education to NVQ level 3 will be made available to all those young people who might benefit from that specific and important qualification. It is intended that, by the year 2000, 50 per cent. of all young people should be at NVQ level 3. That is another ambitious challenge, for the starting point in 1991 was only 30 per cent. and the progress required is therefore an increase of 2 per cent. per year.

Mr. Don Foster: If that target is to be reached, will it not be necessary to make additional resources available in education? Will the hon. Gentleman be pressing the Secretary of State for such additional resources?

Mr. Pawsey: Substantial added resources have been made available to education over the whole period that the Government have been in office. I have no doubt that what we have seen in the past we shall continue to see in the future.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the increase in the numbers of students. I draw comfort from that. We have been able to exceed the original targets set for admissions to universities, and that augurs well for the targets that we are discussing today.

I should like to draw the attention of the House to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe). I am delighted to see her sitting in her accustomed place on the Front Bench. I am aware that she has launched an important programme entitled "Getting On". It is designed to encourage employers to train those who are aged 55 or over and it sets out a five-point plan for employers in recruiting, training and retraining programmes. I hope that guidelines will shortly be issued. I am also happy to acknowledge the fact that this is my hon. Friend's initiative. I am not surprised, as she has a well-deserved reputation for having an original mind—something that Labour Members clearly know nothing about.

I shall deal now with lifetime learning. By 1996, all employees should have taken part in their training or development activities. That is a harder target to measure because there are no current figures which, in itself, may be something of a comment on the situation. Surveys suggest that 60 per cent. of employers have some form of training activity, albeit of somewhat variable quality. The target is that, by 1996, 50 per cent. of the nation's work force should be aiming at NVQs. The figure in 1991—I give it merely for comparison purposes—was under 10 per cent., so the progress required to reach that target is a fivefold increase in 10 years. When that happens, that will be both a memorable and a notable achievement.

The Government are probably determined to increase levels of attainment and participation in education. To do so, they are building on substantial achievements. They have introduced a wide range of innovations, including the national curriculum and testing, city technology colleges, grant-maintained schools, local management of schools, Ofsted and league tables. They have given the nation's parents and employers a far greater say in children's education than ever before.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: My hon. Friend mentioned local management of schools and the grant-maintained movement, which give schools greater flexibility and allow them to achieve the closer links with industry on which high-quality training depends. However, is not the most important measure, particularly in further education, allowing further education colleges to be independent of local authorities so that they can act as self-justifying and activating businesses, thereby improving links with the community? I know from my local college that that is happening apace.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend has referred, most eloquently, to a point that I was going to bring to the attention of the House. He has done it so well that I probably need not refer to it myself, or perhaps I shall do so only in passing.

Mr. Coombs: I am sorry.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend need not be sorry; he was right to draw attention to it. I believe that the freeing up of further education colleges will become one of the great educational achievements of the Government. As a direct result of the initiatives that I have detailed, the Government have presided over the greatest expansion in advanced education ever. When we came into office, only one in eight of our young people were in advanced education. Today, the proportion is one in three, and last year the total number of young people in education was almost 100,000. That is equivalent to about 10 new universities, a point which was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his admirable speech.

There is a continuing and vital role for schools to play. Foundation target 1 seeks to stretch young people, particularly those at GCSE level. I acknowledge freely that the point was made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury. The national curriculum is already helping to set higher standards in schools and is seeking to raise the expectations of the pupils and the teachers.

Teachers have a major part to play in the attainment of national education and training targets. I have long argued in the House that the overwhelming majority of teachers

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are dedicated both to the profession and to the children in their charge. I have no doubt that they will rise to the challenge of targets.

I wish to refer to another admirable document that I have received. It is produced by Industry in Education—a partnership for the achievement of excellence in education—and some of the comments are well worth quoting in the House. I was particularly impressed by the statement welcoming the implementation of the general national vocational qualifications to provide a wide range of skills in vocational subjects to suit a broad cross-section of students:

"Industry in Education applauds the Government's initiative in recognising the GNVQ as a Vocational A level thereby making the A level qualification available to a significant number of students."

I mention that particularly because the point was made by the hon. Lady and was enhanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). My hon. Friend raised the specific question of A-levels and made a considerable point about their importance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest made the point that further education colleges have a major part to play, especially as they are now free of local authority control. The colleges are able to pursue their own aims, ambitions and programmes.

Colleges hold a significant share of the market, in both training and education. I believe that that share will continue to grow as more young people require—and, more importantly, receive—further education courses. I also believe that more adults will be engaged in lifetime learning, to their own and the nation's benefit. The targets properly enjoy the support of a wide range of major organisations—for example, the Confederation of British Industry, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Government, training and enterprise councils, and even the trade unions. All those bodies properly understand the importance of a value-added work force.

My final quote comes from the CBI, which should be congratulated on its initiative:

"The CBI was the instigator for the establishment of National Education and Training Targets (NETTs). It first lobbied for challenging world-class targets to be set in the CBI Task Force Report 'Towards a Skills Revolution' (1989). Then, after extensive consultation with all the key players in the education and training field, the national targets were launched in July 1991. The NETTs were launched with the support of the Government, the TUC, most of the TECs and LECs, educationalists, public authorities and other bodies involved in education or training."

The only name missing from that catalogue seems to be the Opposition. I am not sure what they were doing or whether they were thought worthy of consultation by the CBI, but it seems that, sadly, no reference was made to the Opposition.

It is, indeed, a truism that a nation's people are its most important asset. If that asset can be improved, sharpened and enhanced, the nation's prosperity will increase. No one out there owes Great Britain a living. If our industries and our businesses are to succeed, they will require a better trained and better educated work force in the future—a work force able to take on our competitors and produce better products more competitively.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the Pacific rim countries—the Tigers. There is no doubt that those countries have expanded their programmes and training schemes at a phenomenal rate. We in Britain must at least match those countries in skills and education if we are to hold and improve our position in an increasingly competive world.

I referred earlier to the enormous expansion that has taken place in advanced education. That expansion has been funded and fuelled principally by the taxpayer. I believe that we shall soon have to reconsider the way in which that funding continues, as there must be a limit to the amount of cash that we can extract from the British taxpayer for the support of our university students. It may be necessary to expand the interest-free loan more quickly than was originally envisaged, with a corresponding reduction in the value of the grant. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam made the point that the number of students was increasing, despite what people said when the interest-free student loan was introduced.

The national targets for education and training represent a substantial initiative in a particularly important area of our national life. Here I become, I freely admit, somewhat controversial. I may not have the entire and whole-hearted support of at least one of my hon. Friends currently sitting on the Front Bench.

I hold the view that education and training should be under one head and that the current division of responsibility between the Department for Education and the Department of Employment is no longer appropriate.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend wants to make me redundant.

Mr. Pawsey: There is no question of my hon. Friend being made redundant in any Administration who attach importance to a bright, lively, intelligent mind. I have not the slightest doubt that in the fullness of time my hon. Friend will move from Under-Secretary of State to Secretary of State. I look forward to addressing her in the House as my right hon. Friend. I hope that that puts her fears at rest.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The hon. Gentleman might like to comment on the impending departure of the permanent secretary, who I understand is quite keen on the idea that the hon. Gentleman advocates. The hon. Gentleman has given assurances to the Minister about the rosy career ahead of her in government, saying that anyone bright and lively with an intelligent mind would make such progress—so how come he has not made such progress himself?

Mr. Pawsey: The answer to the first part of the hon. Lady's question is no. The answer to the second part is that I am perhaps a rarity in the House—a contented Member of Parliament. Unlike the hon. Lady, I derive enormous satisfaction from what I do, and I believe that I can make a reasonably positive contribution. The hon. Lady clearly feels frustrated, and I understand why. After 14 years in the desert of opposition, with the prospect of a further 14 years in the desert before the promised land heaves into sight, of course she is frustrated. It is well-known that I like the hon. Lady, and I have the utmost respect for her. I only wish that her talents were more usefully employed—on the Government Benches—as I fear that on the Opposition Benches she is in for a long, long wait before she gets her hands on the seals of office. I regret it, but it is true.

The two subjects should be brought together and one Department should be responsible for both. That

Department should be the Department for Education. That would ensure a much better interface between school, college and business, a better interface between education and training, and an improved relationship that would bridge the gap which sometimes exists between what schools think employers want and what employers actually need.

The targets represent a major step forward both in education and in training, and I look forward to their successful implementation.

12.5 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I am sorry that the Secretary of State is unable to be with us for this part of the lengthy debate, but I understand that he has to attend to important legal matters. Were he here, I would have said to him that I think his speech today was rather less controversial than many of the other speeches that he has made in the House. As the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) pointed out, it is the second time in eight days that the Secretary of State for Education has made what, for him, was a relatively uncontroversial speech. That is to be welcomed.

I was saddened by the Secretary of State's remarks about Tower Hamlets. That is an issue about which we can have further debate outside the Chamber.

The only detailed criticism I would make of the Secretary of State is about the way that he began his speech. It was very unfair that, at 9.30 on a Friday morning, he should tease us about the possibility of his resignation.

A further point about the increasing emollience of the Secretary of State is the way that he recently agreed to the dropping of his "mums' army" proposals—although he did not do it personally, but arranged for one of his colleagues to do so.

Even though the Secretary of State is less controversial and more emollient, I know that he still upsets some people. I felt very sorry for the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on the day that the Secretary of State's "mums' army" proposals were dropped. I was appearing on a television programme with the hon. Lady and she was extolling at great length the virtues of the measure that was to be dropped later in the day.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was also more emollient than he has been in the past, notwithstanding his strange comments about the hair of the hon. Member for Dewsbury.

One of the reasons for the lack of controversy so far is that, at long last, there is agreement among all political parties—and, I suspect, across the nation—about the vital importance of education and training to the future of this nation. The House is aware that 100 years ago—maybe even 50 years ago—the economic prosperity of the nation did not depend on a highly skilled, highly trained and highly educated work force. We all now acknowledge that it very definitely does.

We all acknowledge that investment in education and training not only benefits the individual but represents an investment in the future of this nation. I would go further and say that it is the crucial investment. I suspect, therefore, that today's debate is not so much about ends as about means to ends. One thing is clear: many of our current economic problems stem from a failure in the past to reach decisions based on the consensus which now exists.

The Secretary of State said that he recognises the difficulty of using international comparisons. It is also dangerous, however, to make selective use of them. I agree with the Secretary of State that this country spends a greater percentage of its gross domestic product on education than Germany or Japan, but he failed to refer to the United States, France, Sweden and the Netherlands, all of which have spent more on education than the United Kingdom in recent years.

The recent report of the National Commission on Education referred to a number of interesting statistics comparing our economic performance with that of a number of our competitors. It also compared our poor education and training standards with those of our competitors. The connection between the two is stark.

If we are to compete more successfully in world markets, urgent but carefully planned action is necessary. Reference has already been made to the excellent and helpful brief that we all received from the CBI. It reported on our competitors' progress and said:

"We have to sprint rather than run to catch up with them."

That phrase struck a chord with me.

Today, we are discussing the first annual report of the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets, and it has acknowledged that the progress made in achieving those targets must be quickened. The Secretary of State also acknowledged that when he said that there is no room for complacency.

The Secretary of State also rightly referred to a number of achievements—for example, the greater participation in further and higher education that has been secured. Sadly, there is always a downside to any such comment. Although the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Front Bench may praise themselves for that increased expansion in student numbers, will they also take time to investigate and try to find a solution to the problem of the growing number of people who drop out of further and higher education?

It is worth reflecting that the drop-out rate in higher education is now higher than it has ever been, at one in eight students. There is also significant concern about the increasing drop-out rate of students from further education colleges.

The other downside is the way in which much of the expansion of higher and further education has been inadequately funded. It is expansion on the cheap. All too often, we now hear about problems of overcrowding in lecture theatres, inadequate stocks of equipment and of books in libraries to cater for students in colleges and universities.

The Secretary of State has proudly boasted that, after a short time, an additional 100,000 students are now in further and higher education. He went on to say that that number was equivalent to founding a dozen new universities. Is there any evidence, however, that the necessary capital expenditure required for a dozen new universities has been made available for those extra students? It has not.

There is growing concern about the increased backlog of repair and maintenance at existing higher and further education institutions. When the Under-Secretary of State for Employment winds up, perhaps she will confirm my estimate that the backlog at higher education institutions alone stands in the region of £1 billion. While there has been welcome progress, the downside must be addressed if the targets are to be achieved.

[Mr. Don Foster]

I welcome the Secretary of State's comment that his key aim is expansion with high quality. The targets that we are debating are, in the words of the advisory council's chairman, not world-class standard but the minimum required to be competitive. Much reference has been made to the foundation learning target 1. While we are struggling to meet that target of 80 per cent. at NVQ level 2 by 1997, it has already been surpassed in some of our competitor countries—most notably, in Germany.

What has been done and what could be done? Reference was made also to the importance of business-education partnerships. I welcome their development in all sorts of guises, which has played a crucial role in developing the vocational work that is increasingly being seen in schools. I place on record my party's thanks to the many businesses that have increasingly become involved.

The problem is that, sometimes, things are taken too far. It is occasionally assumed that the education service can be turned into a business. There is a crucial difference between the key functions of business and those of a service. I was disturbed by the intervention of the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs), when he said that further education colleges, having been freed from local education authorities, could run as businesses. I do not accept that FE colleges should treat themselves as businesses. They should certainly be efficient and economic and provide value for money, but they ought not to operate on the same fundamental principles that underpin businesses.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr. Robin Squire): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, like me, has visited further education colleges since they gained their independence, and has spoken to principals and others involved in them. Does he acknowledge that they welcome the greater flexibility that independence has provided, and that a number of their areas of operation can be very businesslike?

Mr. Foster: The Minister's question gives me an opportunity to say that certain aspects of an FE college's day-to-day operation, as of a school or any other educational institution, can benefit considerably from learning from the world of business and commerce in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and value for money. However, taking that to the extreme and treating the institution and its activities as a business means choosing between courses that will generate money and those that may not generate so much money but are more desperately needed in the local community.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. From his discussions with people working in further education, can he confirm that one of their major concerns is that the Further Education Funding Council is playing a critical role in planning, but it has not yet become very refined? Many colleges feel that it prevents them from operating in the educational interests of their students, because the funding formulas used dictate that colleges move in a direction that may be against the direct interests of their students.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is correct. I shall give an example: current funding arrangements make it increasingly difficult for further education colleges to run courses for part-time students. We want to increase the number of part-time students and widen the access for various different groups in society.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman touches on an important point, which I hope that the Education Ministers present will take on board. Part-time students are not funded in a way that benefits colleges, as full-time students are. A significant number of colleges want to expand part-time provision, but find that they are financially penalised if they do so, which is unfair.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has expanded an issue that I intended to develop later. If the Minister wants to intervene to tell us that his Department plans to consider that issue, I am sure that the House will be grateful to him.

Mr. Robin Squire: There is a lot of prop and copping going on here.

There is at least one other Minister with direct further education responsibility. In my experience, far from the implications inherent in the comments of the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), there has been significant growth, even since April, in interest in both full-time and part-time courses, notwithstanding the different financing structures for those courses. On my visits to and contacts with further education institutions, I have not encountered the disadvantages for part-time students implied by earlier comments.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Minister, but I hope that he will take my word for it—on my visits I have encountered such problems. It appears that other hon. Members share my experience.

I was referring to the importance of education-business partnerships. I have acknowledged that they are important and can be helpful in a number of sectors, provided that they are not to be taken to the extreme lengths that I have described. One such partnership led to the original proposal by the Confederation of British Industry for the targets.

I accept that the targets can, as part of an effective framework for improvement, provide a useful tool, particularly if they are not used in the way that it was being suggested that the Department wanted to use them. We have seen some school examination results and information about truancy used to form the basis of crude league tables. The targets must be part of a co-ordinated package aimed at improving standards.

The Secretary of State said that he hoped that the targets were common ground between the political parties. I must disappoint him by saying that there is growing concern that the targets being debated today are, in some respects, arbitrary and unrealistic, and deal only with the short term. That view can be illustrated in a number of ways.

The first lifetime learning target states that, by 1996, all employees should participate in training or development activities. Yesterday, I talked to CENTEC, one of the London training and enterprise councils. It was made clear to me that 27 per cent. of London businesses have no staff training, and, as far as CENTEC can see, there is no prospect of their doing so. The target is not always realistic.

The second lifetime learning target states that, by 1996, 50 per cent. of the work force should be aiming towards

NVQs or units towards them. My training and enterprise council in Avon states that its figure is between 2 and 3 per cent.—nowhere near the 50 per cent. target.

A further 7 or 8 per cent. are doing other vocational qualifications which, in turn, will be taken on to the NVQ system. But the combined figure will still be only about 10 per cent. So there is evidence that some of the targets are unrealistic.

The Secretary of State admitted as much today, and said that it was important to develop the targets. He clearly shared my view when he spoke of the need to ensure the continued relevance and challenging nature of the targets. He also admitted that one change had already been made in respect of the four-or-five-GCSEs problem. So there is general agreement that the targets need modification and development to ensure that the challenge extends into the longer term.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was challenged by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) because she made no specific proposals. It is for her to defend herself, but I should like to make six proposals for a way forward that might help to develop our standards in training and education.

First, we must have a much more co-ordinated framework for education and training. I am glad that the Government are already committed to the rapid completion of the national framework for vocational standards and qualifications. They rightly add to that the need to ensure that those qualifications are more widely recognised and used. But that in itself is not enough to develop the framework that I want.

It was a Conservative Government in 1962 who said in one of their White Papers:

"a serious weakness in our present arrangements is that the amount and quality of industrial training are left to unco-ordinated decisions of a large number of individual firms."

Thirty years later, one year ago almost to the very day, the then Secretary of State for Employment admitted in an article in *The Times* that the training system in this country is a muddle. She also referred to the "alphabet soup" of acronyms for the Department's many initiatives, which, she added, are largely unknown.

Even more recently, the Institute of Manpower Studies criticised the training targets because they do not form part of a coherent national strategy. I suggest that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth hit the nail on the head when he advocated one approach to this problem.

Liberal Democrats have long argued, and the National Commission on Education argued only three weeks ago, that, as the hon. Gentleman proposed, there should be an integration of training with education. Liberal Democrats and the commission would argue that that be done by establishing a Department for education and training.

I hope for a positive ministerial response to that idea, although I am slightly wary of it, because it may give more powers to the current Secretary of State for Education, and that worries some of us. I do not suppose that it worries the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) much, however, because she knows that, in the right hon. Gentleman, she is assured of a good retraining programme.

I should particularly like the Minister to respond to my second proposal, which is that we devote more energy and attention to small businesses, which are the engine room of recovery. They will provide the future prosperity of this country, and their importance cannot be overstated. I hope today to hear that many of the measures we have been discussing will increasingly be targeted on small businesses and on ways of helping them.

I think that the Minister would agree that far more needs to be done to target, for instance, the "investors in people" programme on small businesses.

Thirdly, we must go still further in establishing parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications.

Miss Widdecombe: Hear, hear.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Lady says, "Hear, hear." Conservative Members have been saying that for the past three months on this issue. Some have suggested that the establishment of NVQs and GNVQs has solved the problem. It has not. There is no parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications, and there will not be such parity while the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and others continue to talk up the so-called "gold standard" of the A-level. Our schools should have a co-ordinated curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds.

Miss Widdecombe: It is relevant to the hon. Gentleman's eloquent argument that we have tried to talk up vocational A-levels. Instead of saying that we should have gold standard A-levels or training, we are mixing vocational training and A-levels, and thereby share the hon. Gentleman's aim.

Mr. Foster: There is a gradual coming together in the House on the issue, but the current arrangements do not achieve what the hon. Lady suggests. A pupil may speak about following a mixture of academic and vocational studies, but we need to find ways in which that can be done. Sadly, there have been far too many fine words in the debate. There have been some developments, but we must move forward.

My fourth suggestion relates to the voluntary nature of much that is taking place. There is growing concern that the voluntary requirements on firms are not leading them to do very much. I welcome the targets that have been set, but what incentives are being offered to push individuals and companies towards them? We should require that every 16, 17 and 18-year-old in employment should be guaranteed a minimum of one day a week off-the-job training. We shall, of course, have to consider ways to fund that and other matters. Perhaps the time has come to reconsider a training levy scheme different from those in the past.

My fifth suggestion relates to more general funding. I acknowledge that, to be successful, funding must come not only from Government but from individuals and companies. There is complete agreement on that.

Let us look at the Government side of the arrangements. Direct public spending on off-the-job vocational training has been cut in real terms over the past five years. That is disturbing. It is disgraceful that Government expenditure on training fell dramatically at the height of the current recession. According to Government figures, there was a fall of 15 per cent. in cash terms and 26 per cent. in real terms between 1989-90 and 1991-92.

I have recently spoken to many people in TECs and have discovered that they find funding, especially for youth training, difficult. People in my TEC told me that funding for youth training is "extremely near the knuckle." The squeeze on local government has also created difficulties.

[Mr. Foster]

One example, although I could cite many, relates to the discretionary awards that are so desperately needed to ensure expansion across the community.

I am delighted that the National Commission on Education recognised the need for increased expenditure on education and training. As hon. Members are aware, my party is committed to such expenditure. We have said that, if necessary, we are prepared to raise income tax by 1p to pay for that vital increase in expenditure.

Sixthly, one of the most crucial actions we could take is to ensure that everyone in this country has the best and earliest possible start. Like the hon. Member for Dewsbury, I urge Ministers and all Conservative Members to think again about the crucial importance of nursery education.

When the Secretary of State heard what the National Commission on Education report recommended, he pushed it to one side, saying, "We simply do not have the money." Sadly, he still sees money spent on education as a cost. In fact, money spent on education is an investment in the future of the nation—and money spent on and invested in nursery education is, without doubt, the best form of investment in our future.

Progress is being made, although I regret that it is often fragmented. Nevertheless, it is welcome. I hope that I have made some positive suggestions for the way forward. There is no doubt that urgent action is needed; otherwise, in the words of the advisory council whose report we are considering, we shall be left with a work force that is under-educated and under-trained.

12.36 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I express the warmest admiration for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Government in achieving the dramatic expansion in the numbers in higher education which my right hon. Friend announced today. It is a brilliant achievement that there are now 1 million students in higher education, with no fewer than 100,000 having been added this year. The universities have made the most enormous effort to accommodate that expansion and they are to be warmly congratulated.

The expansion has not come without a great battle by the Government. I always opposed the binary line, which was first introduced by a Labour Government and has never been repudiated by the Labour party. I debated the matter with Anthony Crosland, no less, and I could never understand how anyone with his views and the views that we hear so often from the Labour party could successively support the separation of private higher education from public higher education, with its two-tier effect, and the lack of parity of esteem for people who are often of equal achievement in higher education. It is very much to the Government's credit—and to the credit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, among others—that the binary line was abolished and that there is proper parity of esteem between those who achieve university degrees and those who achieve other higher education qualifications.

I have a real concern about discretionary awards. Most, if not almost all, of them go to students undertaking vocational courses, which are very germane to the matter before us today. Some local authorities have decided to give no discretionary awards. I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who has wide sympathy in this area, to investigate the matter. Some excellent institutions are on the verge of collapse because they cannot attract students as those students cannot obtain the discretionary awards needed to follow courses that would unquestionably lead to valuable qualifications and to work both in this country and abroad.

I have bolstered many students in my own constituency by seeking to obtain money from charitable institutions and so on, but there is a limit to what one can do in that respect. So, at the same time as saying how marvellous it is that in this very year no fewer than 100,000 additional students will receive mandatory awards, with all the high value of that and the eternal value to those people and to our nation and to the prospects of work for all concerned, it is a real worry that no doubt several thousand other students will not get into a form of advanced or higher education because a discretionary award will not be available to them. Something must be done.

In the middle of September, I called together all the schools in my constituency—every primary school and every secondary school, including independent schools and independent primary schools—and invited my old friend Sir Ron Dearing to come and discuss the work that he was undertaking. It was a conference of the highest value. I invited to that conference, because I thought that it was the right thing to do, the heads of schools, chairmen of governors, an elected parent and an elected assistant teacher, and I invited a student to come as an observer but to be free to speak. It was an extremely well-attended conference.

Lady Olga Maitland: What a good idea.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful to my hon. Friends for their support for that idea. It was a valuable and long afternoon.

We debated with Sir Ron Dearing what we were seeking to do about the curriculum and about idealism in education. I am one of those people who used to applaud the noble Lord Hailsham and others before him, and the great figures in the history of education such as Thomas Arnold, when I read that they said or heard them say that education is a pure science in itself. I want people to be educated for its own sake. That means that they do not have to be applied to any particular discipline to achieve the roundness and full education that everyone ought to achieve. I thought that through many times, and we thought it through at my conference.

I have come to the conclusion, and my conference came to the conclusion, that there is no reason why that type of idealism should not be combined into an education which also takes children and young adults, and not-so-young adults if they are in higher education, through disciplines that are relevant to career opportunities. The educational establishment and its leaders have called for idealism in education because idealism brings out the best in people.

We led into discussions about the national curriculum, which was warmly welcomed and supported by the conference, as was the national syllabus, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor). There is no reason why the subjects in which children are educated should not lead them forward, ideally and practically, into further and higher education courses and then into jobs of value to our nation.

I had the fortune to serve on the Select Committee on Education and Science for three Parliaments until I was removed by an odd device last year. Since then, I have had the honour to serve on the Select Committee on Education and so I have had the unique opportunity of a combined view of the various matters before the House. I visited the Pacific rim countries of Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan with that Select Committee. During the visit I investigated education there and tried to find out what links were made with training and how their people and economies benefited.

First, one must ensure that one has a policy for literacy. Japan claims to be 99·9 per cent. literate. I think that the accuracy of that statement would probably depend on one's definition of "literate". In this country, we define 90 per cent. of our population as literate.

An ability to understand form filling is fundamental. One needs to be able to fill in forms to get a job and to live within society—for example, when dealing with income tax and other demands on the individual. Also, at the lowest level, people need to be able to read and write to comprehend the basic numeracy problems that may be put before any adult in work. It is not enough—as some firms have claimed—to say that a machine operator does not need to be literate because he is pulling a handle and if he pulls it too hard a red light is set off which warns him that he is applying a dangerous level of force. Operators must be able to read the manual for a machine and few of our workers at the lowest, or even the highest, levels can operate machinery—including computers—without being able to read the manual that goes with them.

The same applies in the home. If one purchases a Hoover, one often has to assemble it according to a picture and some basic instructions. A person who cannot follow the instructions cannot live normally in the home.

I have made those basic points because I think that countries such as Japan have realised that that is what fundamental education is about and what literacy is. If one can put one's least intelligent children through an education which achieves that result, one will do them and the nation a service.

I welcome the diversity of schools, educational institutions and qualifications that the Government have been able to establish. They have had to fight hard against uniformity in education and the pressure, from both the Liberal Democrat and Labour parties, for a single form of secondary education, for example, has been enormous. The Government have been right to resist the pressure to have comprehensive schools alone, and mixed comprehensives at that. Those parties would also have stopped independent schools—and I think that that is still their aim—from achieving that goal, which would result in uniformity in the system and would make the children of this nation lack individuality. The only way that one can cater for the individuality of every child is to have various kinds of schools such as single sex schools, mixed schools, church schools, comprehensive schools, grammar schools, city technology colleges and now grant-maintained schools, the principle of which has been so well established by the Government. Surely the principle must now extend to the right of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and others to have their own schools.

Mr. Don Foster: I shall put a quick question and perhaps the hon. Gentleman would be equally brief in his response. Does he agree that the vast majority of children in Britain have no choice whatever about which school they attend, which is why it is crucial to ensure that all schools are capable of providing excellence for all?

Mr. Greenway: It is a frightfully false and dangerous argument to say that because some children have no choice —presumably the hon. Gentleman means geographically —choice should be taken from everybody. That monstrous and false argument has been peddled by the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party for too long. It is intellectual and practical rubbish and wornq.

Three requirements must be met to achieve a good education for all children—including the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is about to leave—and adults, too. Schools must ensure good attendance, hard work and good behaviour. I could talk about those requirements for many hours.

Mr. Pawsey: Go on. We would like to hear it.

Mr. Greenway: Those were my priorities for 23 years in the teaching profession. Children cannot achieve anything if they are not at school, so there must be pressure on attendance and action taken against truancy. While children are at school, it is up to the staff to ensure that they work hard and relevantly. Under the Government's relevant and valuable curriculum, hard work may be inspired. Thirdly, good behaviour is essential. If a child is not behaving, not working and not attending, there will be no achievement.

12.51 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): First I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me in this important debate on national education and training targets. If it does not appear condescending, may I say that I have been struck by the quality and thoughtfulness of the speeches from both sides of the House. There seems to be an emerging consensus of opinion on the importance of the targets as a means of upgrading the skills and aspirations of people in the country. I cannot think of a more important subject for the House to discuss because on it will depend our country's economic and social future, through which we can fulfil the potential of the people. After all, that is what Parliament and democracy are all about. In view of that importance, it is a little disappointing that there is not one Opposition Back Bencher prepared to come along and speak.

National education training targets always seem to be put in an economic context. That is perhaps understandable, as they were suggested by the CBI as a result of its consultation paper, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) referred. In one sense, the economic target is important. The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was right to say that, although enormous progress has and is being made on those targets, an enormous amount of work is still to be done. That is why the targets were set up by the CBI. In its document —produced by the national manufacturing council of the CBI—called "Making It In Britain", it identified the productivity gap between Britain and our competitor nations as between 20 and 40 per cent. The CBI said that we must make up that gap within a period of 10 years. To do that, over the next 10 years we shall have to have consistent improvement in productivity of the kind that we have seen over the past two or three years, despite the

[Mr. Anthony Coombs]

recession. We would be blind beyond belief not to realise that it is a question of sprinting, not running, to catch up. There is every evidence that we are doing that.

We have spoken of investment. The OECD has said that, in terms of both hard investment in manufacturing and soft investment in innovation and training, our investment figures have held up well throughout the recession, in comparison with our competitors. The important point is that how well that investment produces an increase in productivity depends on the skills base of the people using the equipment. It is all about growing people, about people being made more aware of their own potential and, as a result, improving their performance.

Professor Charles Handy told us some time ago, very percipiently, that where 20 years ago two thirds of jobs were unskilled, by now the proportion would be reversed and two thirds would require a significant amount of skill to be performed properly. That has been reflected in the fact that it is estimated that in the course of one's career one is likely to change jobs or professions at least twice and perhaps even three times. Those perceptions have been made evident in the document "The Case for Targets" issued to all of us by the National Advisory Council for Targets in Education and Training. It spoke about the highest qualification of school leavers and compared this country with France and Germany. Although there has been an enormous amount of catching up, there is still a significant gap.

Even more significant for our economic performance, in its "Making it in Britain" document the CBI points out that although we have on occasions reached levels of productivity growth and output growth that match and sometimes exceed some of those in the rest of the world, we have not been consistent enough in doing so. We have not consistently, every year, made a percentage increase in productivity and output. That has as much to do with how we use our investment, and therefore the skills base of the people using it, as with investment itself. In a recent publication in *Education*, it was interesting to see the chief education officer of Darlington writing about the enterprise skills that he is trying to encourage in the north-east.

That is the economic side, but nobody should suggest that the targets are purely economic and about improving human capital, to use that rather ugly phrase. They are about stretching people, about giving them investment, through qualification, in the community and thus making them more contented and, one hopes, more law-abiding citizens. There is no doubt that the most persistent offenders in our society are those who feel most alienated from it. One is more likely to feel alienated if one has no investment in terms of educational qualification and one therefore does not feel that one can reach the levels to which one aspires.

To put all that in context, we have heard that there have been enormous achievements over the past few years. Staying-on rates in schools have risen from 46 per cent. in 1985 to 71 per cent. this year. We have heard about the massive increase in numbers going on to higher education and the numbers doing the general national vocational qualification certificate—80,000 youngsters this year. As I said in an intervention, in my local college in Kidderminster no fewer than half the full-time students are doing GNVQs.

We have heard about yet another initiative—investors in people. Some 4,000 firms are now engaged in that, and it will have some effect on improving the statistic that although three quarters of the work force have some form of qualification, those qualifications are perhaps not of the kind or the rigour that we should like them to be. The Government have put an enormous amount of resources into technical education, both through the national curriculum and through the technical and vocational education initiative, on which I will say more later. The Government have spent £900 million in the past 10 years, with the intention not only of broadening the curriculum but, more important, of improving the links between schools and businesses in local communities. That is significant for improving the skills base and for reaching targets, particularly the foundation targets. At present, 90 per cent. of secondary schools have some permanent link with local businesses.

We are making progress on the targets themselves. Those figures are outlined in the document from the National Advisory Council on Education and Training Targets, and I will not repeat them. There are two areas about which we must talk on national targets—the first is foundation learning and the second is lifetime learning. I was glad that the Secretary of State said that we have redefined what is meant by NVQ level 2. The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) made the point as to whether the level should mean four or five A to C GCSE passes, and consistency is important.

There is a problem in terms of the national consciousness as to what we mean by NVQ level 2. As the numbers who achieve that level increase, it is particularly important that we convince the public that it is a rigorous assessment. The hon. Members for Bath and for Dewsbury have both said that the GCSE has been a tremendous boon for commitment and achievement in our schools.

Nevertheless, the Ofsted report suggested that there was limited confidence in GCSE results and that eyebrows had been raised by the fact that the number of people getting five A to C passes had increased by 6 per cent. when in the previous two years the number had not changed by a great deal.

Reference was made by the hon. Lady to the recent Ofsted reports on GNVQs and their variable standards. The type of problems that were looked at included the level of teaching time, low entry qualifications, and assessment processes which were hard to understand. Those subjects ought to be addressed if we are to maintain the credibility of the targets.

The fact that the targets are to be achieved on foundation learning initially by 16-year-olds means that one must address the kind of curriculum that people from level 3 of the national curriculum will face from the age of 14 upwards. We have been bedevilled by a plethora of validating bodies through the GCSE. We did have 12, and there are now six. We have also been bedevilled, as has been said before, by the 4,000 qualifications that the National Council for Vocational Qualifications is now trying to rationalise. It is important to remember that, although we must rationalise, we must hold on to that which is good.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) that it would be lunacy to throw away A-levels, which are used as a benchmark of excellence by employers, just because we wish to make the progress in education of people from the ages of 14 to 18

more consistent. If we set great store by pupils reaching targets at 16, it is crucial that we have rigorous testing at key stage 3 at the age of 14. We need to know the point where people start so that an appropriate curriculum can be devised for when they will be achieving the two foundation learning targets. There comes the rub. Should we have a 14-to-18 curriculum which glories in diversity and includes not only academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels but GNVQs, BTEC and so on, or should we, as the National Commission on Education appears to argue, settle for a general education diploma which, with a certain amount of flexibility, would be taken by everyone?

We are too narrow in A-level choices now. If we are to tempt students into doing a broad variety of subjects up to 18 we must, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment mentioned, make available a menu at different levels, some at A-level and some at GNVQ and so on, so that we provide the rigour of A-levels but, at the same time, the breadth of GNVQs. It may cause a few heart attacks for university entrance examiners, but that is too bad: they will have to face it. They have to face it now because 15 per cent. of new entrants to universities are mature students, and they will have to get used to it for the sake of breadth and rigour in the school curriculum.

The technology colleges are an excellent idea, as are city technology colleges, which are three times oversubscribed. I am delighted that the funding that the Secretary of State suggests for them will be results-oriented. It is right that one of the results that will be borne in mind is longer hours for children in the classroom. I understand that some of the technology colleges are aiming for 1,200 hours a year, as opposed to an average in England of about 850 at present. I should like to see results-oriented funding extended to all maintained schools, not only to voluntary and grant-maintained schools. I understand that the CTC chairmen argued for that. I should also like to see more assistance given in technology colleges by local businesses, possibly with the assistance of tax grants.

The targets for lifetime learning represent enormous strides forward. I mentioned that about 75 per cent. of people in companies in Britain now receive some training. The total amount spent on training by firms is about £20 billion to £21 billion—an all-time record. Too often, the training does not result in any vocational qualification. It is more looking over Sally's shoulder and learning how to do a job which is directly relevant to that firm but not relevant elsewhere. It is important that the targets will encourage transferability of qualifications and therefore mobility within the work force.

I congratulate the Government on the large number of schemes for the unemployed. I hope that they will be gradually dovetailed into the lifetime learning targets and that they will encourage people, as they do now, to retrain, re-equip, reskill and find a job again. One thing that worries me slightly is that when one goes through the Department of Employment's job schemes, the one word that continually comes up is "innovative". There is a certain need for rationalisation, as the previous Secretary of State for Employment said last year. It is not just the acronyms. It is a question of people being confused by the menu of different schemes available.

In my constituency, certain schemes were not adequately taken up when they were introduced. The interface between the training and enterprise council and the employment office in the constituency was not adequate. I had people coming to me and saying, "What about the learning for work scheme, Mr. Coombs? I went down to the employment office and they did not know the first thing about it." It is important that we rationalise schemes and make them more accessible to the public.

Equally, it is important that when we consider these targets they should be not only expressions of good intent, but rigorous and achievable. That does not mean that they should be rigid, and I disagree with the hon. Member for Bath about statutory levies. If training is to mean anything to the people who receive it and the people who give it, it must be a matter of enlightened self-interest.

We cannot force somebody to be good; we cannot force somebody to want training when they do not think that it is in their own interest. That is why the idea of a levy would be wrong and totally counterproductive and would unnecessarily push up costs for companies, in a situation where companies, particularly the large and medium-sized companies, are already increasingly aware of the benefits that training can provide.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education partly raised the point that employers tend to provide training, in a self-enlightened way, more for the people from whom they are likely to get a better return on their investment. This sometimes militates against older workers. The figures of the National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets, which are issued annually for each group of workers, show that 15 per cent. of workers overall are trained each year—and that needs to be increased—but the level of training for workers between the ages of 50 and 59 is only 8·1 per cent. There may be a case for specific schemes, such as "Getting On", possibly through the tax system, to encourage employers more adequately to reskill their older workers.

As to employer responsibilities, ultimately it is a matter of self-interest: they cannot force training on anybody. An example is the opportunities provided by the Kidderminster college to my local carpet community for the training of loom tuners. Without fail, I meet my local chamber of commerce once every quarter, and it always told me, particularly during the period 1988-1990, when unemployment in my area was down to 4 per cent., that it could not get skilled people for the carpet industry and that they were leaving for elsewhere. At the same time as it was telling me that, the figures for entry to the loom tuning courses at the further education college in my constituency, which are heavily subsidised, show that in 1990-91 there were only seven entrants when 15 were needed to make it viable; in 1991-92, there were six entrants; in 1992-93 there were none at all. Employers must be prepared to put their money where their mouths are and ensure that they take advantage of the training opportunities available.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) has rejected the view of the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), and my own view, that we need to move towards some kind of levy system because the principle of voluntarism does not work. He has just made a very profound case as to why voluntarism does not work, even when there are heavy subsidies involved. How does the hon. Gentleman seriously expect to persuade those employers who have failed to invest in training if we continue down the lane of voluntarism? In the end we must say, "You must train—it is for your own good and the nation's good."

Mr. Coombs: I gave that as an example of why employers must put their money where their mouths are. I did not say that it was typical. The in-house training going on not only in the college but in companies in my area has significantly improved recently. It will not be improved by an increase in unit costs—and therefore a decrease in the competitiveness of everybody—by imposing a training levy and forcing people into the training that they are actually doing.

Lady Olga Maitland: It has been brought to my attention that the construction industry has been imposing its levies in a perfectly proper fashion in accordance with the statutory instruments passed by Parliament. That levy is based on the number of people that the building company employs, irrespective of whether it is running at a profit or a loss. A building company in my constituency is under great strain because it has been trying to pay a bill of nearly £6,000 over two years. It can ill afford to do that and is now in danger of going under. That is one reason why we should re-examine how the levies are imposed.

Mr. Coombs: The Construction Industry Training Board is an example of how compulsory levies do not work and do not increase training opportunities. I therefore support the voluntary principle.

Great progress has been made on NVQs, but the pace of it must be quickened. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment is present because I have written to her about a delay in producing a NVQ for housing wardens. About six years ago, the excellent organisation, the Centre for Sheltered Housing Studies, was established in my constituency. It is a national centre of excellence for the training of housing wardens. It is worth noting that wardens represent the largest group of professionals who deal with the resident elderly.

We have been waiting for the lead body to produce the appropriate performance standards and competences for the NVQ for housing wardens for about 18 months. The Sheltered Housing Association is the lead body and it has the ability to produce the necessary competences. Will my hon. Friend speed up process so that we can obtain the necessary NVQ for housing wardens?

The NVQs must be flexible and appropriate to specific industries. In my area, we are anxious for an NVQ on carpet fitting. We started off with a construction sector NVQ, which included training on the laying of floor tiles, but that was completely alien to the needs of those who wanted to be carpet fitters. We now have an NVQ relating to the retail sector, but the skills required are not suitable for carpet fitters. I know that this is a parochial point, but will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary ensure that the lead body comes up with an appropriate NVQ for carpet fitting?

I agree with my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth about the need to integrate training and education within one Government Department. I do not wish to make my excellent friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State redundant and I am sure that she is doing a wonderful job. In relation to education and training, however, it seems nonsense that this important debate should be opened by a Minister from one Department and concluded by one from another.

1.17 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): This is an important debate. I was sorry to note that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was rather sour about the welcome news that 1 million full-time students are now at our universities. That is equivalent to the establishment of 12 new universities.

It was rather unfortunate that the hon. Lady immediately started to carp about the fact that 14 per cent. of new graduates are unemployed and ignored the fact that 86 per cent. of them find jobs. It is important to stress that just because a young man or woman graduates from university, that does not give them the automatic right to a job. It merely gives them a better chance of a job.

I was also interested to note that the hon. Lady referred a number of times to the Hamlyn-sponsored report of the National Commission on Education. I read that report carefully, and I found it strange that it seemed to secure only the support of all the left-wing teachers' unions and Opposition parties.

The report does not appear to take a balanced approach to the education problems that it sought to resolve. I note that its panel sought advice from a leading barrister, Helena Kennedy, who is better known for her work in the criminal courts and for supporting left-wing causes than for her contribution to education. One must be rather circumspect about the report, which is not sufficiently independent to merit the backing that the hon. Member for Dewsbury gave. Perhaps the hon. Lady had to depend on that report because there was precious little in her speech about education and training. She preferred to concentrate on nursery education, which is a different topic altogether. I could not find the link between that and the subject that we are debating today.

It is significant that, although my right hon. Friend the Secrtary of State for Education gave up his morning to introduce this important debate, the Opposition Benches are not crowded. I am sorry also that not one Opposition Member of the Select Committee on Education, on which I serve, has been present. That indicates the degree of attention that the Opposition pay to education and training.

For years, we have heard a great chorus of concern and anguish about education and training, but when the chips are down the Opposition's birds fly away, are absent from the Chamber, and do not produce constructive ideas.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am here.

Lady Olga Maitland: That makes just one Opposition Member who is present. Where is everyone else?

I congratulate the Government not just on talking, as the Opposition do, but on acting. It is depressing that the Opposition have consistently opposed all Government youth training programmes since 1979, which reflects their sincerity. Today's debate focuses on the way forward, and it is encouraging that the Government will further develop a programme that is well under way. They have spent about £2·8 billion on training, enterprise and education, and rightly take the view that we should never rest. We ought to aim at higher targets, and should seize every opportunity that comes our way. We realise that we must create a work force that will take us into the next century and beyond.

The drive for relevant skills needs careful handling. By the year 2000, it is likely that there will be 800,000 fewer manual workers, but many more people will have managerial and technical skills—800,000 and 425,000

respectively. Workplace training must be seen as an investment, not as a burdensome cost. I welcome the target of 80 per cent. of young people to reach NVQ 2 or the equivalent by 1997.

The vehicle for facilitating that is the unglamourous-sounding but necessary National Advisory Council for Education and Training Targets. It has been developed by successful business men who have a sharp eye for what is needed in the workplace in terms of capability and utility. I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment not just to establishing NACETT but to participating in its deliberations.

The council's chairman, Peter Davis, is chairman of Reed International, so he is already at the sharp end in understanding the demands of industry. That is true of other council members. They include deputy chairman Michael Heron, chairman of the Post Office; Malcolm Walker, chairman of Iceland Frozen Foods; Dominic Cadbury of Cadbury Schweppes; and Tony Cann, chairman of Terminal Display Systems. They all have a fundamental understanding of the importance of a properly skilled work force that is able to keep Britain ahead of world-class competition. They are a vital and useful spur to advising, guiding and practising vocational and educational training.

However, as in all things, we must aim high and set realistic but demanding targets; otherwise, Great Britain will cease to be the landing platform for so many overseas companies that come to this country to take advantage of the attractive atmosphere created by economic incentives and the highly skilled, motivated work force. I should pay proper attention to the standards of education in Northern Ireland, which has been attracting a considerable number of overseas companies. In Dungannon, I came across a Korean company that felt that it had confidence in the skills that Ulster could provide.

Training for work begins years before, in school. The early years are spent teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Poor standards in those subjects have cost British industry about £5 billion a year in mistakes. It is appropriate that we pay close attention to how to rectify such mistakes. A miscalculation, a typing error, sloppy work on the design board can cost industry dear.

Therefore, I am dismayed by the Opposition's attitude to basic skills. There is every reason to accept their 1992 election manifesto which said that the party would

"modernise the national curriculum."

It is clear that "modernisation" would mean dilution or politicisation, and political correctness would simply blur real education.

In a revealing article in *The Times Educational Supplement* in March 1993, the hon. Member for Dewsbury said that the national curriculum had

"fallen victim to doctrinaire, reactionary influences"

and that it should be revised to

"encourage a critical understanding of social, political and economic arrangements".

It strikes me that she wants to turn the clock back on raising standards. There is no emphasis on or concern for real skills and excellence.

Alarmingly, the Labour party's most recent consultation paper published on 14 September this year revealed the extent to which Labour would water down the national curriculum, replacing the emphasis on the basic skills and the learning of facts with "progressive" ideology and doctrine. The Labour party prefers a child to "experience" education, whatever that means. Phrases focusing on class, race and gender have little to do with basic skills, yet they persist in encouraging

"a critical understanding in social, political and economic arrangements"

and avoiding instruments of indoctrination. What has all that mumbo jumbo got to do with real learning? All that must be imposed also on schools in the independent sector. What does it mean for employers? They are looking for children who are properly prepared for the world of work. It strikes me that they must be alarmed when they hear that the Opposition do not accept testing but dismiss it as "dangerous nonsense"

It is not only the Labour party that takes a worrying attitude towards basic skills. I must turn my attention to the Liberals.

Miss Widdecombe: They do not get much attention.

Lady Olga Maitland: They do not get much attention —in fact, they struggle for it. Perhaps I should ignore them altogether. However, as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has taken the trouble to come into the Chamber, it would be invidious to pass him over.

The Liberal party has already committed itself to abandoning the national curriculum and putting in its place another curious animal called the "minimum curriculum entitlement," which will be required of children in all schools. The Liberals also say that this will take up little more than 50 per cent. of pupils' timetables. I hate to think what they will do for the rest of the time—surely they should be getting on with learning basic skills.

Mr. Don Foster: Is one to infer from what the hon. Lady has said that she disagrees with Sir Ron Dearing's interim report, which has been largely accepted by the Secretary of State and other Ministers and which says that there needs to be a reduction in the content of the national curriculum?

Lady Olga Maitland: Ron Dearing is merely making sure that the curriculum is properly focused.

The Liberal party has made a commitment on testing —a commitment to the abolition of tests in the national curriculum. That will hardly be encouraging to employers, and goodness knows what sort of school leavers that will produce. The Liberals propose the move on the ground that the tests are "restrictive" and contain little information of use to parents. It hardly increases my confidence to learn that the Liberals would prefer "individual diagnostic tests". That is just more mumbo jumbo.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Pick and mix.

Lady Olga Maitland: Quite so.

Employers will be further alarmed by the fact that the Liberal party would like to abolish A-levels and replace them with a watered-down version which they would call the English baccalauréat. For heavens sake, why knock out a highly successful and world-respected examination system just for the sake of change?

The Government are to be congratulated on having the steadiness of nerve to sustain our national curriculum programme. When we first launched it in 1988, the whole idea seemed a distant prospect. Today, it is universally accepted, even by the teaching unions. There is still some way to go, however, before the principle of rigorous testing is accepted by all.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

Now we must expand the menu by providing high-quality vocational education in addition to academic studies. Alongside the national vocational qualifications, we have introduced the general NVQs, which are ideal for full-time education and which offer a bright new dawn for the thousands of young people, Master and Miss Average, who know that they can never be academically inclined. They have surrendered themselves to a listless life of drifting from one dead-end job to another, interspersed with periods on social security during which they may even have been drawn into crime. These people accept life on the dust heap before they even leave school. I ask the House to imagine what it means to them to know that they are wanted and valued members of society. They have talents and skills that can be brought out in courses tailored especially to their needs and abilities. Hence the real enthusiasm that I feel for the 70,000 students in 1,400 schools who are already pursuing the GNVQs—and the number of increases each month.

It is natural to expect that, in the long run, half of all 16 and 17-year-olds will take GNVQs, which are the key building blocks to the future.

This is not the time to be sour, to take part in the popular British sport of self-deprecation. The training programme needs support all the way. The wider public must be educated to accept and understand this exciting new programme, too.

We must emphasise the quality of the GNVQ system and educate employers to appreciate the fact that a GNVQ is the equivalent of an A-level and should enjoy equal status with it in terms of university entrance. The foundation GNVQ is the equal of a good GCSE. Let us examine the progress so far. When I made my maiden speech just over a year ago, I highlighted the importance that I attach to valuable vocational education. In my constituency, which is in south-west London, we have always recognised the importance of high standards in schools. Our schools are rated at least second in the latest league tables on average performance, and our two grant-maintained grammar schools, Nonsuch and Sutton Manor, glow with excellence in GCSE and A-level results.

I should like to outline the approach to vocational education of another grant-maintained school. Although education is treated seriously by all my schools, it is particularly exciting that Cheam high school has a host of people who are deeply committed to it—children, teachers, parents and employers. That school started from almost minus zero. A few years ago it could have been described as a bin school. Nobody wanted to send children there. A boy once rode a motor-bike along the school corridors.

The school was given up for dead, but under new leadership and a new headmaster and grant-maintained status the school is oversubscribed. Its secret of success is its understanding of the role that vocational education can play for children who believed that they did not have a future. The school places such great emphasis on vocational studies that, by September 1994, the staff in the vocational studies department will be doubled to 30.

Cheam high school concentrates on emphasising a child's abilities and instills a sense of position and discipline. Because the school is grant maintained it has the flexibility to take advantage of the grants that are available. As a result, 60 children are following vocational courses and the number is growing fast. The children started by taking the BTEC first diploma and are going on to GNVQs.

We must dispel the myth about these courses. They cover a wide range of subjects which can be suited to the child's interests, and they include business studies, sports management, leisure and tourism, art and design, and information technology. Next year, children will be able to study hospitality and catering. In the pilot programme that is planned for the country as a whole, children will also be able to study the environment and science subjects. In 1994-95, there will be pilot programmes on distribution, engineering, more information technology, land-based industries, advanced level management, and media and communications. Such courses open a field of opportunity for children.

It is hardly surprising that vocational courses are growing in popularity and that children are encouraging each other to follow them. They see the way forward. The key factor is not only the relevance of the courses but children's understanding of how they will open job opportunities and work experience. Three years ago, Cheam high school set up the Cheam education-business partnership. The headmaster has forged links with local business men by which he can introduce them to what the school is doing.

Only last night, the headmaster and his deputy attended a meeting of Sutton chamber of commerce. Their aim was to develop networking, meet new business men and help forge more links for the children. The school takes the view that, rather than complaining, it should push out the boat and get on with it. As a result, it is able to give every child the experience that is needed for moving forward. I shall give some examples of the effect on these young people. One young girl could not be shaken into taking an interest in her work. She was falling behind, was inattentive and could not see the point in studying for GCSEs. Basically, she had given up. Now she is on a GNVQ art and design course. She is motivated and is working late at school. She has a positive approach to life. She will not become one of the tragic statistics for single mothers with babies on their laps.

Another example is a young man who was on the point of drifting out of school at 16, unskilled, unqualified and with poor GCSE results. He is now fired with enthusiasm for his business studies course. He is working late into the evening to complete his studies.

Those examples show how we can shape our young people and give them a sense of involvement. That is how we can keep them on course.

Work experience outside the school also plays a key role. However, all the employers and children to whom I have spoken feel that one week is not enough; two would have much more meaning. The lessons business men teach the children are invaluable. They learn about punctuality, courtesy, social graces, how to talk to other people, how to handle the telephone and how to dress properly. They cannot go to work wearing jeans and trainers; they must be tidy. They learn about flexibility and how to produce clear, accurate written work, but it a simple telephone message or a short report. All those disciplines are vital for the children's development.

I want to refer to some of the views of those local employers who have developed these links, not just with that one school, but with others in my constituency. Their experience is invaluable. One employer, Orbcram, told me

that the students may have the skills, but they do not always know how to apply them, so work experience is an opportunity to see how they fit into a work environment. Its spokesman advocates children practising at school on a phantom company before going to outside companies. However, he felt that the children learned rapidly. If he had another criticism, it was that they should learn to ask more questions. For him, the proof of the success of that programme is that he has taken on a number of former work experience students.

Another company, the Sutton Trustee Savings bank is very pleased with the programme. It says that eight out of 10 young people have done well and responded positively. The TSB says it would be helpful if there were guidelines on precisely what was expected of companies. Perhaps we should consider that.

British Gas in south London runds a two-hour training course at schools before the young people arrive at its offices. It is very strict on punctuality and presentation. It is interesting that the company is prepared to invest so much time in those young people. It realises that they are our hope for the future. Sometimes, the programme can be of mutual benefit. When the young people go to British Gas, it gets its young trainee managers to interview them as though for a job. In that way they both benefit from the experience.

GNVQs are a turning point in education. Not only is there enormous benefit in providing relevant and educated people for the world of work, but GNVQs give young people a chance in life that they never thought they would have. A headline in *The Daily Telegraph* recently said:

"HMI school inspectors find little hope for working-class pupils."

It was not because of lack of money but, as the newspaper said:

"Working-class children in urban schools have only a slim chance of receiving a decent education . . . the inspectors blamed their poor performance on teachers who over-estimated the effects of poverty and social disadvantage and under-estimated the potential ability of the children."

That is the crux of the matter. We must save those children from the streets of crime and give them a sense of future. Let us halt the advance in the number of juvenile offenders. I believe passionately that it can only be to the advantage of the entire country and our employers to give those children a sense of worth, a sense of self-esteem and a sense of confidence.

1.44 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Let me say first, following on from the speech of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), that I was intrigued by her example of the young woman who, now remotivated by access to GNVQs, is saved from pregnancy and from nursing a child in her arms. I had not recognised that the Secretary of State's powers extended to contraception through vocational qualification, but it is an interesting concept and one that we shall watch with some degree of interest.

Lady Olga Maitland *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I did not say that.

Mr. Lloyd: The Secretary of State applauded the hon. Lady at the moment when she made that remark, so he clearly believes that GNVQs——

Lady Olga Maitland *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I shall continue.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is frightened to give way.

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, let us turn to the subject—why not? Let us turn to the speech of the Secretary of State, who spoke for an hour and a half. Like most speeches, rather like the curate's egg, it was good in parts. The bits that were good were few and far between. It was a speech that was remarkable for its blandness, but also for its ignorance of what is happening in the country.

Let us begin to talk about the extent to which we are achieving national training targets. Let us talk about a Britain which, even in the middle of the longest recession that the economy has known, still has a significant number of firms who report that skills shortages are a constraint on the levels of output than they can achieve. Those are not signs of a skills revolution; those are signs of an abysmal failure in building the skills stock of the nation.

Not so long ago, about five years ago in October 1988, at the peak of the Lawson boom, which is now widely discredited by his successors and by the present Cabinet —at the height of that Lawson boom which was supported by the present Secretary of State for Education—skills shortages were experienced by 28 per cent. of British manufacturing firms. Since then, in many of those areas, we have failed to train and we have failed to maintain the skills stock. Anyone who has half an idea of what is happening in British industry knows that if there is to be any kind of recovery it will immediately run up against the severe skills shortages that will exist in our economy. Nothing that we have heard today gives any impression that either the Secretary of State for Education or his colleagues on the Conservative Benches understand the reality of the British economy.

At the moment, although we know that the majority of employers recognise that they need to improve the skills of their employees, we also know that the amount of training taking place in Britain has decreased during the recession and not increased. We know that although about three quarters of firms claim that they are engaging in some kind of training process, that only involves one third of their employees. At the very best, therefore, in any year only one quarter of employees are being exposed to any kind of training. We also know that although the numbers may have dipped only slightly during that period of recession, the amount of training offered to each person has decreased. Again, I must tell the Secretary of State that there are no signs of a major turnaround in the skills revolution.

Let us now consider the targets. Let me make it clear that Labour Members support those targets. We wish that there was a Government who had a real commitment to those targets and did not just pay the lip-service to them that we heard this morning.

Let us go back to when the previous Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), introduced the TECs. In the House he set out in detail a number of targets which, he said, had to be achieved. I quote from his statement to Parliament. He said that by "the end of 1992"—last year—"no young person should be employed in a job without training." The reality is that about two out of five of young people in jobs go without training. He said that by the same date two thirds of young people should have achieved NVQ level

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or its academic equivalent; that is, two thirds of all young people should get the equivalent of five old-fashioned O-levels. The then Secretary of State said that.

The Secretary of State this morning told us that we have not even got anywhere near that two thirds. That figure was achieved by 55 per cent. only of young people.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield went on to tell the House that by the end of 1995, two years from now, we should take it further and

"secure that all young people should by the age of 18 have a recognised qualification at Level Two".

We know that the Government dropped that target, which is now 1997 and 80 per cent. of our young people. We know that he also said that by 1992 all employees should be taking part in company-driven or developmental activities, but only about 25 per cent. of the work force are doing so. I could continue, but the reality is that the Government abandoned the targets of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield because they did not have the will or the commitment to achieve them.

The sad reality is that there are problems even with the achievement of the reduced targets that the Government are now adopting as their own. For example, let me quote from research carried out by the Industrial Society, which questioned personnel managers about their views on the targets. The report contains a staggering figure; the target that all employees should take part in training or development activities received an optimistic response, as nearly 50 per cent. of personnel managers believed that it was achievable. However, 50 per cent. did not think that they could give training to all their employees.

The report continues that the survey was very pessimistic over every other target. It is not difficult for us to determine the reason for that pessimism. Basically, it comes down to a Government who have no clear strategy for employment or training and the fact that there is an absolute division between the role of the Departments for Education and of Employment. Recently, the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education made a serious bid to take over the youth training budget from the Department of Employment.

Mr. Patten: Claptrap.

Mr. Lloyd: If the Secretary of State wants to come to the Dispatch Box and say that there was never any attempt to take the money from that budget, the House will be interested to hear that.

Mr. Patten: There was never any attempt to take the money from that budget. The hon. Gentleman should not base his assertions on what he reads in the newspapers.

Mr. Lloyd: In that case, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his clarification; he has clearly slapped down the Under-Secretary in those activities.

Mr. Patten: I am all in favour of banter across the Dispatch Box, but the Under-Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell)—I should say my hon. Friend, although I hope that he soon will be right hon., but it is not a matter for me—has at no stage been involved in any attempt to take over anyone's activities. I am afraid that the stuff in the newspapers is the kind of baseless tittle-tattle that sometimes appears in newsapers. I will not have the good name and conduct of my hon. Friend, who is not in the Chamber, criticised so outrageously. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that part of his remarks.

Mr. Lloyd: I accept what the Secretary of State has said. If he insists to the House that there was no youth training plan and no rift, I must simply say that the rift was such that it caused John Troth, the chairman of the TEC chief executive network, to write to the Secretary of State for Employment to say that he viewed with the greatest possible concern the reports that there could be cuts in funding of the youth training budget. Perhaps when the Under-Secretary of State for Employment replies to the debate she will say whether there will be the same sort of cuts in that funding that have taken place fairly consistently over the years.

As has been pointed out, one of the problems with training in this country is that the Government have no commitment to it.

Miss Widdecombe: Nonsense.

Mr. Lloyd: I will read the hon. Lady the figures. In 1989-90, Department of Employment spending, in real terms, was £2,696 million. By 1991-92, it had dropped to £1,987 million. The expected outturn for this year will be down to £1,771 million. There might be a small increase for the following year, depending on the Chancellor's Budget next week—who knows? The reality is that there has been cut after cut and we have shoddily funded public sector training.

When the former Secretary of State for Employment launched the much-vaunted TEC movement, he described the TECs as part of "a Second Industrial Revolution" and

"a truly radical step. It will give leadership of the training system to employers, where it belongs."

That, of itself, has been part of the system's failure. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State will be able to tell us in clear terms whether the budgets of the TECs will be reduced next year, because we know that they underspent them this year. We know that from the £1·7 billion funding, the training and enterprise councils underspent to the tune of £232 million—an astonishing 14 per cent. underspend. That money could and should have been used, not to build on the reserves and balances, but to improve the appalling rates of success of youth training and in the training for work scheme and its predecessors. We know that those schemes produced poor results.

Youth training leaves a quarter of those trainees in unemployment at the end of the scheme. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State wishes to deny those figures. The Secretary of State said earlier, perhaps in a slip of the tongue, that the scheme guarantees a vocational qualification. It does not. Only a third of trainees receive a vocational qualification. It is a failure of the system, because in the hierarchical system run by the two Departments, vocational training is at the bottom end, neglected and far from the rosy descriptions of Conservative Members. It has been badly abused under the Government. Only a third of those adults engaged on employment training schemes obtain a vocational qualification, when we are supposed to be trying to get them back to work to build the stock of skills in the country.

The biggest scandal in training this year was the collapse of Astra Training Services Ltd. The Government conspired in that scandal because, even when they were

given notice that the firm was about to go out of business, they sat on their hands and did nothing. Since the true measure of the scandal has come to light, we know that Astra fiddled the output funding system. It approached TECs on the basis of how it intended to fiddle that system and neither TECs nor Astra stopped an indulgent and outrageous activity that robbed the taxpayer. The Secretary of State said earlier, "not in front of the parents". Will the Under-Secretary of State say whether that scandal is a case of "not in front of the taxpayer", because she and her Department are prepared to see taxpayers' money wasted at the expense of people in the country who desperately need that kind of skills training? The surpluses that the TECs built up should not have been spent on the bonuses and salary increases for the chief executives which have taken place almost all over the country. Those bonuses should have been devoted to skill training for those who, sadly, are not receiving it at the moment. The Under-Secretary of State must answer that charge.

We know that the pressure on the TECs has been to bear down on the trainers. Trainers complain that they are receiving less and less money and that the pressure on them to award qualifications in a shorter time scale is acute. Yet the TECs have been seeing their budgets and reserves grow at the expense of the trainers and trainees.

In developing a system where there is parity of esteem, what do we make of a system where the NVQ system, which the Labour party supports in the absence of a comprehensive qualification base that includes everybody, itself comes under pressure because there are doubts about its quality? People in training express increasing concern that the downward pressure on costs and time means that they feel that they are being asked to undermine the whole NVQ system. The concept of self-assessment, for example, is already intrinsic and implicit in the NVQ system, and that raises many important questions.

A company such as Astra was prepared to abuse output funding systems by creating artificial jobs for people to qualify for bonus payments from the Department of Employment and through the TECs. If such a company is asked to assess its students to devise a qualification base, I have little confidence that the Department of Employment has any interest in stopping them. We know that the Department of Employment is concerned with ensuring that the numbers are balanced so as to massage unemployment figures.

Lest that criticism seem to be just normal malice across the Chamber, I will quote Martin Pollard, the chief executive of the employers and unions joint council in the electrical contracting industry. He has warned in clear terms that some TECs were funding two-year courses and releasing trainees to find jobs as electricians although they had not reached the required standard. He said:

"the only position in which they could be employed is that of a labourer—surely a waste of two years' training."

He is right. He spoke of their being "let loose" in the work place. Implicit in that is that such people are potentially dangerous.

What can we make of a report sent to me by Janet Salmon, who looked at the progress towards the NVQ training targets in the leisure industry? She pointed out that only 41 per cent. of the firms that she sampled in that sector were involved in NVQs and that one of the reasons for that was that a number of firms found that NVQs were not up to the standards to which they already trained their employees. They felt that NVQs did not offer what they wanted. Among the other reasons were the cost of registration for certification, the duplication of training, the inappropriate nature of the training and the bureaucracy and paperwork involved, but quality was at the centre of their complaints.

The recent Ofsted report into GNVQs referred to standards at intermediate level being much more variable and, in some instances, unsatisfactory. It said that at intermediate level some completed portfolios of students' work assessed at merit level by teachers were later marked down by external verifiers to a pass level, either because action planning was weak or because teachers had intervened too prominently to improve students' work. Again, if the pressure is on an institution to perform on an output basis as a business, it will try to achieve those standards irrespective of the quality involved.

What are we to make of the Under-Secretary's TEC comparison tables? She should have a quiet word with the Secretary of State for Education. He is keen on league tables. He is all for publishing information, on whatever basis. However, for TECs we do not get league tables such as those that he produces. Instead, we have a selective list of comparisons, so we cannot properly compare TEC with TEC. Nevertheless, we can see that the variation in levels of performance by TECs is enormous.

I take as an example the cost per output involved in providing employment training courses. That varies from £3,100 to nearly twice that—£5,800. We know that the number of NVQs per youth training leaver varies from 43 per cent. to as low as 25 per cent. Why can we not have a proper league table? Why can we not make the kind of comparisons that the Secretary of State goes in for? Is it again because of the "not in front of the taxpayers" theory? Are not we, as taxpayers, entitled to know? All we know is that they are not full league tables.

Sadly, we know that the Government's commitment to the real issue behind the targets is more in the breach than in the observance. We have had fine words from the Secretary of State, but heard little about practical action. For example, we have heard nothing that addresses the fundamental issues that beset training. With a TEC system that is not accountable, we have no way to bring pressure on it to deliver the goods that we expect.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes we have.

Mr. Lloyd: In that case, TECs are accountable to the hon. Lady, and she is accountable to Parliament, so she had better begin to account for the poor qualification rates that bedevil both training for work and youth training, because they are a disgrace. We are not giving either young people or older people a fair crack of the whip.

The real difficulty in achieving national targets will be the Government, who have failed to get across to the bulk of the private sector, or even the public sector, any belief that training targets are important. Those industries and enterprises will be passed by the target mechanism. The fault for that will lie on the shoulders of the Under-Secretary of State and her colleagues. We will support them if they take practical steps to achieve targets, but we will not support them when that is not the case.

I will take the example of one industry—the construction industry—where we can see the simple failure of the Government's training strategy. We knew a few years ago that the industry was shedding jobs at an alarming rate. Anyone with the briefest knowledge of the

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industry knows well that if two people leave the construction industry, only one will come back when things pick up. The stock of skilled labour is being shed.

The Construction Industry Training Board is one of the bureaucratic boards about which the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam is concerned, but it is supported by the Government. The board has obviously tried to keep up the level of skills in the industry, but it has failed because it has not had the resources. In a couple of weeks, when the matter comes before the House, we shall see clearly that the Government are planning to cut the budget of the CITB by 15 per cent., from £54 million to £45·8 million. Perhaps the Minister will say whether that is inaccurate. If the budget is not increased, it will be a betrayal not just of the industry but of the country. When the economy finally begins to move up, construction will become vitally important. Without a healthy and skilled construction industry, bottlenecks will develop in the economy.

The Secretary of State said that he has presided over what he describes as the great advance of further education. Let us talk about construction in terms of further education. There is no planning mechanism within further education, other than the fairly crude things that we have seen from the Further Education Funding Council. I am told that 40 colleges, or one in 10 further education colleges, are cutting construction trades training altogether. The reason is that young people are not coming forward in the middle of a recession because the industry is not putting them forward.

The Government refuse to take responsibility for planning in the labour market. They have no national targets, no national strategy, and they no longer have adequate national information on which to plan. They have delegated the provision of training to a number of notional targets without putting any flesh on those targets. They have abrogated their responsibilities, and have put the responsibility on TECs and training schemes through the Department for Education, and also on the colleges. They are doing that without giving any of them the proper funding or the opportunity to provide the training that we want.

We are seeing the dismantling of the infrastructure for training in the construction industry, and what applies in construction will apply to many other industries. The talk of the Government's success and their commitment to training targets is, I am afraid, bogus. I pay tribute to these outside the House who are concerned with making progress in training, including many people in industry and some of the leading industrialists to whom the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam referred. Those people are committed to training and to reinvigorating the way in which we do things in this country, but they are being betrayed by the Government.

Finally, we believe that we can begin to turn the nation around in terms of training provision. We need a different approach from that taken by the Government. We need co-ordination and planning at a national level which makes sense of the skills shortages in our economy. We need more than pious words from the Government, and we need commitments by way of resources. It is also important that the voluntary principle on which the Government's training programme depends is abandoned.

We need look no further than the Secretary of State for Employment who, we are told, is considering a plan to abandon the reliance of voluntarism with a scheme to give all 16 to 18-year-old school leavers the right to vocational training. That may give heart attacks to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, but it shows that a little progress is being made within the Department of Employment. An article in *The Independent* states:

> "The Cabinet might have some difficulty in backing the policy because it marks a critical break with the principle of 'voluntarism'".

If the Secretary of State for Employment is sincere in wanting to provide such compulsory training for young people, he is clearly moving in the right direction. We might criticise the detail, but we shall support him in the broad context. However, it will depend on him and his colleagues having the guts to say, "We have got it wrong in the past: if we want to achieve the targets, we have to do more than simply blame everyone else and take no responsibility when things go wrong." The Government are central to that approach.

It is up to the Government not only to adopt the targets as their own, but to make those targets work in practice. That means the commitment of resources and of ministerial energy, which has been sadly lacking. It means the abandonment of voluntarism. It means beginning to work in real partnership across industry in a way that the Government have not done in the past. With such a recipe, we can begin to move forward. Without it, in a couple of years—when the Secretary of State invited us to criticise him if he failed—I shall be here to criticise him, just as I criticised his predecessor the then Secretary of State for Employment, whose targets were abandoned even though they were introduced only four years ago. We can make the targets work, but I am not sure that the Government have the will to do so.

2.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): If, as the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) says, the Labour party has the answer to training, if it believes that it can effect the skills revolution which it denies that we are achieving, and if it believes that it has the policies that will bring about all the results that it says that we are not achieving, I am left wondering why it never raised the matter in a debate of its choice and in its time in the previous Parliament or, indeed, in my memory.

Why is it that the debate on training and targets has been initiated by the Government today? It is not only because we are proud of our record but because the Opposition have nothing to say. As has been demonstrated by the acres of empty Opposition Benches today, there is precious little interest in training among Opposition Members. It is worth repeating, although it is already on the record, that for the vast majority of the debate today no Opposition Back Benchers have been present. The only contributions from the Opposition Benches have been made by the Labour Front Bench and Liberal spokesmen. Opposition Back-Bench Members have made no contributions to the debate and have given no evidence of commitment on the part of the main Opposition party, or any other Opposition party, that entitled the Opposition spokesmen to criticise a Government who have brought about a skills revolution, instituted a completely new policy on skills and demonstrated their commitment.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) sat in splendid isolation for most of the debate. Her speech was pretty isolated, too. It was isolated from the main, indeed the only, topic of the debate. I suppose that in the usual way we are discussing what is on the Order Paper. The Order Paper simply says:

"Progress towards the National Education and Training Targets."

Yet we had from the hon. Lady a rant on nursery education. According to her, nursery education prevents everything. It prevents crime. It prevents teenage pregnancies. I was waiting for her to say that it would prevent the 'flu. She did not go that far. But when she drew a comparison between our country and other countries that provide nursery education, I was tempted to ask why those countries have as high, if not higher, levels of crime and teenage pregnancies. Why is nursery education a pancea for all ills in Britain?

Not only did the hon. Lady not produce the essay for the title that we required while all her friends played truant but she got her homework wrong. She said that graduate unemployment was running at 14 per cent. She was wrong. It is running at 5 per cent. For the economy as a whole, unemployment is a little more than 10 per cent.

Mr. Tony Lloyd *rose——*

Miss Widdecombe: What she meant—I will save the hon. Gentleman the intervention, as he tries to tidy up the hon. Lady's poor homework—was that recent graduate unemployment was 14 per cent. In other words, she took a snapshot picture of time.

Mr. Lloyd: Are the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State saying that it is an achievement that 14 per cent. of the people who left our universities this year are unemployed, and that the Government do not think that that is a problem?

Miss Widdecombe: If the hon. Gentleman had contained his impatience and not interrupted—if he had sat in class and watched the blackboard—he would have heard me say that that 14 per cent. is a snapshot in time. It does not mean that they stay unemployed. It was taken at a time that corresponded to the height of the school and college leaving period, when we would expect graduate unemployment to be higher.

The hon. Gentleman asked me if it was a problem. If it was a genuine figure and graduate unemployment was running at 14 per cent., it would be a problem.

Mr. Lloyd: We are making a little progress. Will the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Employment give a precise estimate—or even an imprecise estimate —of what the Government expect graduate unemployment to be among this year's leavers by next spring, when the economy is in its upward phase? If that figure shows high levels of graduate unemployment, will the Government think that it is acceptable? I do not.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman needs some remedial lessons in unemployment figures. He will have noticed that the rise in graduate and school leaver unemployment this year was lower than last year on a seasonally adjusted basis. He will have noticed in the course of his new responsibilities that unemployment is coming down. I am sure that he will have managed to work out that, just as graduates have had to share in the pain of the recession, so they will share in the joy and economic benefits of the recovery. My prediction is that the position will improve for graduates, as it will for everyone else.

I will turn from answering the nonsense questions of the Opposition and address some of the other points raised in the debate. Among a number of distinguished contributions—all from the Government Benches—there was a very pertinent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). I was particularly grateful to him for drawing attention to the Getting On campaign. I was less grateful to him for proposing my early redundancy.

In addition to education, the debate has been about training targets. I have listened to the huge emphasis that has been placed on A-levels, nursery schools and other aspects of education, but it is important for us to put a separate emphasis on training and to give it the attention that it deserves.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) made a very supportive speech, and I was heartened by the fact that half of the Opposition in the Chamber have come round to supporting what the Government are doing, but I refute his suggestion that we have turned the education service into businesses. What we have done is to make it more business-like.

I am delighted that more educational institutions are aspiring to and achieving the Investors in People standard. They are developing the skills of their work force to achieve their aims and objectives—which is better, relevant and targeted education. We would ask business men to adopt the same approach, which would be most welcome.

Similarly, we are targeting small businesses in respect of the Investors in People programme. We have urged small businesses, if they are sub-contractors, to join as a cluster with a main contractor and get in on Investors in People, or for individual companies to get together as clusters.

That is being greatly encouraged by the local training and enterprise councils. I was delighted the other day, when I was making a presentation, to be able to include an employer who had only 22 employees. On the scheme are employers with as few as six or eight employees, who are also looking at the possibility of achieving the award. Great progress has been made, but I take the point that it is important, and we will continue to monitor it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) spoke about improving the skills base of the economy. That is at the heart of the Government's programme. We believe in training because it is a vital tool in economic prosperity and education alike.

The Opposition did not raise that important topic today. One of the most disturbing pieces of evidence of their attitude was given during Question Time a few weeks ago when they greeted with jeers the fact that a record number of people are staying on in education. They cried out that that was happening only because they could not get a job. If the Labour party sees jobs as being in opposition to education and training, rather than natural developments thereof, it is still in the dark ages.

It is essential that we see the development of Britain's skill base as a recipe for our prosperity in world-class markets towards the end of this century and the beginning of the next. Training is not merely nice for individuals; and although it brings benefits to individual employers, that is not its main aim either. The main aim is to have a flexibly

[Miss Widdecombe]

skilled, multi-skilled, adaptable, world-class work force that will enable us to build on the recovery with which the rest of Britain seems to have caught up. It is obvious, however, that the hon. Member for Stretford has not done so since he spoke just now about "when the recovery comes". It is here and we are building on it, but his party is still lagging desperately behind.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest, in common with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, called for more training for older workers. He said, with some justification, that employers often perceive older workers as not worth while for training because they offer fewer returns than a younger worker. That is a total misconception, because the very fact that it is harder for older workers to find jobs means that they are extremely committed when they get them. They are less likely to think about changing their job between then and retirement. Investing in the training of older workers is likely to pay as much or more in terms of commitment and motivation as investing in the training of younger workers. In this connection, the Government have set the best example of what they preach because our training for work is available for people right up to their fifty-ninth year and eleventh month. We do not turn round and say, "Ah, you are going to retire in five minutes, so it is not worth training you."

I should like to refer to some specific points that were raised in the debate, wisely in the case of my hon. Friends and less wisely in the case of the Opposition. The hon. Member for Stretford suggested that skill shortages are at such a high level that employers are having difficulty in recruiting. The Skill Needs in Britain survey 1993 covers 4,000 establishments with more than 25 employees. The survey found that only 6 per cent. of establishments were experiencing recruiting difficulties attributable to skill shortages. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may dispute my interpretation and I will give way to him if I have misrepresented him, but only if that is the case.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am grateful to the Minister because she has misrepresented me. I referred to one in 20 firms, but 6 per cent. is a more accurate figure. Those firms are experiencing skill shortages that lead to a curtailment in output. It is worrying that the figure of 6 per cent. has been recorded in the middle or even at the end of a recession. That does not give any cause to believe that the scene will be any different at the height of the recovery than it was in the late 1980s when nearly one third of firms cited skill shortages as the reason for curtailing their output.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman has failed to take into account the positive pointers towards rectifying the skill shortages as Britain moves into and builds on the recovery that doubtless exists.

The hon. Gentleman may speak about what goes on in a recession, but that is not always as indicative of what the situation will be like when our training programmes have had time to take effect as he seems to think. Things will be different when employers have been convinced by our Make it Your Business and Investors in People campaigns, and when we have developed NVQs in new disciplines. We are working towards that end and making good progress.

Unlike the incredible waffle that we heard from the hon. Member for Dewsbury, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State went through every single target and announced the progress made towards achieving each of them. The hon. Member for Stretford asked, "When?" He could not have been listening to my right hon. Friend, who stated not only the level but when it would be achieved and how much progress had been made. My right hon. Friend's speech answered the hon. Gentleman's question.

Much as the hon. Member for Dewsbury—who has apologised for not being present—lauded the Open university, we have taken the process of open learning much further with our learning credits, youth credits and open learning pilots, which we are developing to ensure that they are easily available locally.

I must spring to the defence of the much-maligned training and enterprise councils. The only people who malign them are the Opposition, because TECs are much welcomed by everbody else. The hon. Member for Stretford criticised TECs' reserves. He is completely wrong if he thinks that all that TECs do is to take the money for the programmes that we insist being delivered, which we closely monitor, make savings, and redistribute those savings as bonuses to chief executives.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my other colleagues in the Department and I have a programme of visiting every TEC in the country. I have never yet but been shown in the most encouraging detail the various initiatives that TECs have introduced from their own funding and reserves to supplement our programmes. That is what TECs are supposed to be—local bodies delivering according to local need, in accordance with the requirements of the local economy and local employers, and working in conjunction with local education. That is why TECs enjoy a large degree of autonomy in their activities over and above our set programmes.

It is precisely because TECs enjoy that autonomy that we have seen initiatives for not only older workers but those with special needs, geared to an area's particular economic requirements. For example, there has been retraining where companies have gone out of business, and particular shortages in an area have been addressed. That is what TECs do with their spare money.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: But that does not happen.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman says that that does not happen. When did he last visit his local TEC?

Mr. Lloyd: Is the Under-Secretary aware that people involved in special needs training are livid with what they regard as underfunding by the Department of Employment, through TECs, of them as trainers? They feel that the Minister and her colleagues have betrayed some young people with the greatest needs.

Miss Widdecombe: When did the hon. Gentleman last visit his local TEC? He will not answer. When did any of his colleagues last visit their local TECs? If the hon. Gentleman would visit his local TEC and ask what it is doing with its money over and above the Government programme, I would take a fair wager that he would learn of a large number of initiatives that specifically address local needs. I should be surprised if the hon. Gentleman did not also discover initiatives that specifically address local special needs.

I should use the last two minutes of the debate to reiterate what the Government are doing. They have endorsed the highly ambitious targets for training and education. They have specified and published the dates by which those targets will be achieved, and they are already able to report extremely encouraging progress.

We have addressed, and are seeking to address, the problem of parity of esteem between vocational and academic education, a matter raised by the hon. Member for Bath. In doing so, we have devised a comprehensive system of national vocational qualifications, the like of which the Opposition never produced. We have devised a system that converges and diverges alongside the academic system so that one can reach university through the ordinary academic level or through NVQs and workplace competence. That is our aim. That is what parity is about. We have devised the policy and implemented it. There are now more people than ever before with a qualification and working towards a qualification. The Opposition have proposed nothing.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 7th December, the Speaker shall put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to public expenditure, including the Question on any amendment thereto which she may have selected, and the said Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Five Ways Primary School, Cannock

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

2.30 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): One of the minor glories of the House is that it enables Back Benchers, if they are lucky in the raffle, to bring Ministers —sometimes in the early hours of the morning, sometimes on a Friday afternoon—to listen to the grievances of constituents. I am grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Like many other hon. Members, I had an American student working for me in the early part of the year. He came to my constituency for the weekend and attended a meeting at a school. After he went back, he wrote to me describing his experiences. He said that the most interesting and important event that he had attended during his stay was that meeting at the school. His letter even said —we should allow for youthful hyperbole—that it had restored his faith in democracy because he had found a school, staff and parents actively engaged in large numbers in talking about their future.

I need to explain a little of the background. The community to which the student referred is Heath Hayes in my Staffordshire constituency. The district is a former mining area, which in recent years has been massively extended. The area of extension is known as Hawks Green. The other day, I read an article in the then local newspaper, the *Cannock Advertiser and Courier,* on 2 March 1974. The headline read:

"Hawk's Green: Design for a New Town".

The article said:

"During the next 15 years, a multi-million pound plan to change the face of Cannock Chase will create a completely new town. The aim is to transform nearly 1,000 acres . . . to build a new community of 14,000."

It continues:

"Nearly 100 acres will be set aside for schools within the Hawks Green complex and within the field of education there is likely to be an integration of the new and existing communities."

Therefore, we are talking about something of enormous significance in terms of development and population.

I shall fill out the headline with some figures. The ward has doubled in size in the past 10 years. In 1981, it contained 5,605 people; in 1991, the figure was 9,304. If we examine the census figures more closely, we see exactly what is happening. In 1981, the nought to four age group accounted for 225 children; by 1991, that had increased to 909. The five to nine age group numbered 392 in 1981 and 762 in 1991. Moving on to what we might call the reproductive classes, we find that the 25 to 29 age group numbered 707 in 1981; by 1991, it was 1,119. In 1981, the 30 to 34 age group accounted for 628 people; by 1991, they numbered 1,114. Those figures are important to explain the context.

We have a draft local plan which proposes further developments to take account of about 625 more dwellings. That is why the development was described as a new town. It is a significant development, with all the associated infrastructural issues.

With a development of this size in prospect, in the 1970s the planners originally proposed three schools. One of them, Gorsemoor primary school, opened in 1983. It is now bursting at the seams; eight temporary classrooms are being used and numbers need to be reduced.

[Dr. Tony Wright]

The second proposed school failed to materialise for a range of planning and purchase reasons involving the county council and British Coal, so a fallback plan was devised—not part of the original plan at all. It involved the extension of an existing school on the periphery of the development: Five Ways primary school. It was a 1950s school of unsatisfactory prefabricated metal construction, but it had space and places. It therefore seemed sensible, at least to the county council, to extend that site to begin to meet the developing needs of the area.

The plan was to extend the school in two stages by about 420 places: in the first stage, by 180 places, and in the second, by about 240 places. The first stage went ahead. It was approved and completed in 1992, and it takes the form of a truly splendid infant block. The second stage application was included in the basic needs capital bid for 1993-94, to begin this year, with the roll numbers at the school expected to rise to 599 or more by 1995-96 from an existing capacity of 413.

Now we get to the heart of the issue. The bombshell came when this capital bid application was turned down for 1993-94. That caused massive bewilderment and anger among the parents, staff and governors associated with the school. They wondered how anyone could not see the need for what was proposed. Was there not a commitment on the table to go on extending under phase 2? How was it possible for anyone to produce half a plan and not complete it? Was it conceivable that an infant block could be approved but a junior block turned down, when the numbers clearly showed that the capacity would have to increase to accommodate the increasing numbers of pupils coming to the school?

This was all especially difficult to understand because it was in any case a second-best proposal for the area, involving the use of surplus capacity and surplus places to extend an existing school to meet the area's needs. This way forward commended itself to Staffordshire county council at the time, if only by dint of necessity. It did not commend itself to the local community or to parents, however. Nevertheless, the plan went ahead and was working. As I have said, a splendid new school was arising from an old one, although the draft local plan contains provision for further schools in some areas.

The anger and bewilderment of local parents were compounded when the reasons for the decision emerged. It seems that someone in London who did not know the area at all, as it turned out, had drawn on a map a two-mile circle for primary schools and had discovered that there were some surplus places in schools in that circle, albeit only just.

It is important to remove surplus places and I am in favour of that, but in this case the argument is absurd, especially as the essence of this scheme was a proposal to use existing surplus places. Heath Hayes is a village and Hawks Green is a physically bounded community: the area is surrounded by two main roads, the A460 and the A5190 and the new eastern bypass at Cannock.

It was clear to everyone concerned that pedestrian movements out of that area were dangerous, if not impossible. There is a catalogue of no footpaths, narrow footpaths, busy junctions, dangerous crossings, blind bridges and ponds. There is now even a massive opencast mine that is akin to a lunar landscape in the direction of one of the schools that is said to have surplus places.

Only two schools are available to the parents in the area. Gorsemoor is already bursting at the seams and the number of pupils needs to be reduced. The other school is Five Ways and the next nearest, Heath Hayes primary, is already full. The Department for Education told us that it wanted more details to enable it to look at the scheme again. The parents gave it more details. I pay tribute to the parents and to everyone associated with the school for the way in which, over the past few months, they have made a case and taken it to everyone who is prepared to listen.

It was gratifying for those people to have a letter from the Secretary of State for Education earlier this year. The letter states that he was impressed by the perseverance with which Five Ways primary school was pressing its case, and he applauds the parents' concern for their school. We have submitted an enormous petition and visited the Department to explain the case in detail. We have extended an invitation to the Secretary of State, but unfortunately he could not take it up.

The parents have documented in fine detail all the proposed routes to other schools with surplus places; we have photographic evidence; and we have even had video evidence. I have a video tape, which I shall give to the Minister, that shows precisely the consequences for children's safety if this decision is not reversed. We are able to support that with devastating evidence from the local police, who have stated:

"any decision made which may force young children to walk long distances along busy roads in the locality will seriously increase the risk of them being involved in road accidents.

The additional dangers and temptations to children of the Bleak House Open Cast site, which the children will also have to pass when going to and from the schools should also be considered."

There can be no desire for more detail. The Minister has the new bid for 1994-95. In terms of the criteria, there is evidently a most basic need. In the spirit of back to basics, this is one of the most basic needs and, also in the context of the criteria, there is a commitment arising from a previous project approval. The case is understood and supported by all concerned and is the leading bid by Staffordshire county council for the current year.

The school is only half extended. It is an excellent school with a fast-growing reputation and tremendous parental involvement and support. It serves a natural and fast-expanding community and is an essential part of the infrastructure of that community. On the ground of parental choice alone, the case for completion of the school should be compelling. However, the case is even stronger than that—and it arises out of an existing commitment and in quite distinctive circumstances. There can be no doubt that a terrible injustice has been done, if only through misunderstanding. Fortunately, there is still time to put that right.

I am grateful to the Minister for listening to me. I shall be even more grateful, on behalf of everyone associated with Five Ways primary school, when the good news arrives that the school is to be allowed to complete its development in the service of the whole community of Heath Hayes.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr. Robin Squire): In the light of the way in which the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) began his speech, I shall begin mine by assuring him that although I would invariably be ready to respond to future Adjournment debates when he is so fortunate as to obtain them, I should be even happier if they are at this time on a Friday rather than late at night or even, as the hon. Gentleman implied, early in the morning.

I have listened with interest to what the hon. Gentleman said about the history of the development in his constituency. He explained to the House why parents of children living in the vicinity of Five Ways primary school consider that the school should be extended. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised—although he may be disappointed—to hear me say that I cannot announce any decision today. It may be helpful if I explain to the House the background against which our decisions have to be made.

Staffordshire local education authority published on 16 September statutory proposals for the enlargement of Five Ways primary school. There followed a two-month period during which any 10 or more local government electors could lodge objections. That period expired on 15 November—last week—and my right hon. Friend hopes to reach a decision on the proposals as soon as possible. Because of his role in these matters, I cannot comment on the proposals because that might prejudice his decision. In the meantime, my right hon. Friend is also considering a capital bid from the LEA for appropriate basic need on the basis of agreed criteria.

As Staffordshire's capital bid is still under consideration, I shall not be able to comment in detail on the Five Ways project or pre-empt conclusions on it. I can say that my right hon. Friend will announce before Christmas the 1994-95 annual capital guidelines for each LEA together with its voluntary school capital allocation. The hon. Gentleman may find it helpful if I explain how the ACGs will be calculated and, in particular, how we will assess the merits of cases where authorities have made bids for capital funding for projects such as the enlargement of Five Ways primary school.

First, however, I am bound to remind the House of the considerable capital resources that the Government have made available to maintained schools in recent years. In 1993-94, total central Government support for LEA, grant-maintained and aided schools will be £598 million. Of this, LEAs' ACGs for county and voluntary-controlled schools will total £444 million. That is a significant proportion of the £598 million. These are substantial sums and come on top of the considerable resources we have provided in recent years, when capital spending per pupil increased by 19 per cent. in real terms between 1978-79 and 1990-91.

Staffordshire itself has done particularly well. In each of the last three years, its ACG has represented a considerably larger proportion of its bid than the national average. For this year, Staffordshire's ACG amounted to just over £6 million, which represented 34 per cent. of the authority's plans, in a year when 27 per cent. of cash plans were met nationally. With an ACG of £7·8 million in 1992-93 and £8·6 million in the year before, that amounted to 70 per cent. of the authority's plans when 37 per cent. of plans were being met nationally. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that we have dealt very reasonably with Staffordshire on the basis of those figures. In saying that, I am, of course, in no way prejudicing decisions in future years.

As well as our support for local authorities' capital spending on schools, it remains the case that LEAs themselves have the opportunity to top up their ACGs from their own capital receipts and other income, including their revenue budget. Central Government allocations, which take account of a proportion of LEAs' self-financed expenditure, will total £660 million, an increase of 33 per cent. in real terms during the five years to 1993-94. Up until the end of next month, authorities will also have been able to take advantage of the temporary flexibilities on the use of capital receipts that were announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last year.

Since the introduction of ACGs in 1990-91 with the new local authority capital system, LEAs have been told in detail how their ACGs have been calculated. Councils' understanding of the priorities and criteria that are applied has shown in the quality and range of their bids. In line with our long-standing agreements with the local authority associations, we shall continue to give priority to, first, meeting commitments from work supported in previous years, secondly, providing for new school places in areas of rising demand—known as basic need, as the hon. Gentleman referred to it throughout—and, thirdly, projects to remove surplus places.

Within the limits of available resources, we then seek to support other high-priority expenditure, such as LEA liability on projects at voluntary-aided schools and urgent work to meet the needs of pupils with special needs. The remaining resources are then distributed by formula to contribute towards the cost of improvement and replacement projects and all other schools' capital work.

I believe that those national criteria properly reflect authorities' statutory and contractual liabilities. They also reflect the importance that the Government attach to balancing the provision of new school places to meet population growth and migration, against the pressing need to remove surplus places which waste money and undermine educational standards. I was grateful, in passing, to hear that the hon. Gentleman recognises the importance, in policy terms, of proceeding further with the removal of surplus places throughout the country. I do not in any way seek to link that with the rest of his speech. The method of allocating resources provides a strong incentive for LEAs to provide new places and to remove those surplus places as cost-effectively as possible.

Let me emphasise that my ministerial colleagues and I remain fully aware of our responsibility to help authorities meet their section 8 duty to provide sufficient school places, especially in areas of rising population or growing demand. That is why we give such a high priority to basic need in our capital procedures.

Where there is such growth, our decisions on LEA capital expenditure on schools will reflect that, but, inevitably, there is a limit to the resources that are available for distribution. Strict criteria are therefore necessary to determine those cases that most need and deserve support. Not all bids will be successful, but the Department's criteria are fair and LEAs are well aware of the way in which bids will be assessed. My Department sets out in full, in the annual capital bidding letter, precisely how bids

[Mr. Robin Squire]

in the basic need category will be considered. LEAs should be in no doubt then about whether their bids are likely to meet our requirements.

Along with basic need, we also give high priority, as I mentioned, to the removal of costly and wasteful surplus places. With the priority in mind, it is clear that there cannot be a justification for providing resources to accommodate population expansion when an area already has surplus places that will adequatley accommodate the anticipated future growth. We simply cannot afford—given the many urgent calls on the available resources—to fund the provision of new school places when there are already sufficient places in the area. Our capital procedures therefore make it clear that, in assessing any basic need bid, we shall take account of all existing places in maintained schools within three miles for secondary schools and two miles for primary schools. Those geographical limits tie in with the statutory walking distances for free transport for five to 16-year-olds.

That said, our procedures also make it clear that, in certain circumstances, support for basic need in an area with surplus places may be justified; for example, where the physical circumstances of an area mean that pupils cannot be expected to travel to alternative schools, surplus places in those schools could be disregarded. I noted the hon. Gentleman's comments about moon walking.

Our published procedures make it clear that such geographical exceptions will be limited to schools cut off by motorways, rivers and railways, where there are no realistic crossing points. We do not believe that we can extend that further. I appreciate that there are other circumstances that make travel to schools up to two or three miles away difficult or unwelcome. If we attempted to allow for some, let alone all, where would we draw the line? In practice, the result would be that allocations in the basic need category would be very much higher, leaving much less for the lower priority categories, particularly improvement work. Those LEAs that do not have a growing population would lose out, possibly severely.

I believe that LEAs have themselves looked at those issues and have, in the main, accepted that our approach is consistent and fair, but questions of difficulty or dangers of travel must be local ones. LEAs have the flexibility to use the resources available to them to respond in ways that they think most appropriate. I mention that because Staffordshire's bid for Five Ways primary school makes a case on physical grounds for discounting some surplus places. It will be looked at, on its merits, in the light of the clear criteria that my right hon. Friend has set for the determination of whether physical factors constitute a special case.

The major factor that helps to determine my right hon. Friend's decisions remains the availability of resources. There is always pressure on resources and this year will clearly be no different. Last year, the total amount of basic need cover amounted to over £125 million, spread over three years, to provide for 30,000 new school places. Our criteria are strict, but they have to be so. Even with those, LEAs have bid for support to provide more than 95,000 new school places, and that bid is 15,000 places more than last year. Many of those require statutory proposals. It is clear that the resources available are under still greater presssure in this capital round from LEAs' building plans to meet basic need.

Our criteria and methods of assessment of bids for basic need support are aimed at ensuring that resources are distributed on the basis of real need. We ensure that they are consistently and fairly applied, but retain sufficient flexibility to ensure that special cases are rewarded. If Five Ways school is such a case, Staffordshire's ACG will reflect that.

Each year, we undertake a review to determine whether the procedures should be amended, in the light of changes in the organisation of schools and of comments from local authorities and other interested bodies. Hon. Members can be assured that my right hon. Friend will consider carefully any representations for changes in the national criteria. It remains, however, the responsibility of LEAs to determine their capital expenditure priorities between services and, further to those decisions, between individual schools. It is for LEAs to make best use of the resources available to them. We shall continue to play our part by ensuring that the role of central Government in the determination of capital spending on schools remains supportive, fair, consistent and as generous as possible in the current economic climate.

Finally, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that both sets of proposals will be carefully considered and will take account of all the relevant factors. As I said earlier, decisions on these matters can be expected before too long.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 29 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Northern Ireland

2.35 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There is to be an important statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland after Question Time. I do not know why the papers relevant to that statement are embargoed until after the Secretary of State gets to his feet. The effect is that hon. Members will not have the documentation available. Surely the House should be entitled to the documentation upon which the Secretary of State will expand. I have been informed by the Library and by the Vote Office that they cannot give any of the documents out until 3.30, at which time hon. Members will be in the Chamber listening to what is being said.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that that is normal procedure. It is of course at the discretion of the Minister concerned whether he allows the documentation to be released before he makes a statement or when he rises. In most cases, the documents are released when the Minister rises. There is nothing untoward about today's statement in that respect.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Rolling Stock

1. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how soon the train leasing companies created as a result of the passage of the Railways Act 1993 will be in a position to order the construction of new railway rolling stock.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): The new companies will assume responsibility for the provision of rolling stock from April 1994.

They will be able to order new stock provided they can make a sufficiently attractive investment case.

Mr. Bayley: Does the Minister accept that if no work is done by the leasing companies to prepare for giving orders early next year, some of the important manufacturing companies in Britain will have unacceptable, and possibly fatal, delays in their order books? The Minister gave a press conference in my constituency a couple of months ago, at which he looked forward to a time when rail rolling stock manufacturers could look ahead over 10 years, see what sort of work was available, and decide how they could gear up for it.

What will the Government do to create those conditions in railway rolling stock manufacturing, and stop making companies go from hand to mouth and from one order to another? Will not the industry go from crisis to crisis if the Government approach continues?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that orders totalling £400 million have been received for new rolling stock in the past few weeks, made up of £250 million for the Jubilee line and £150 million for Networkers. That is an excellent start.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must move from a situation of companies going from order by order to one in which they can look forward 10 years. The best way to achieve that is to put the rolling stock companies and the train operating companies into the private sector. *[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) laughs, but his hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) does not share his mirth. It is important that those decisions are taken by the private sector, not the public sector.

Mr. Gale: May I thank my hon. Friend for the considerable encouragement and support that he has given to the case of providing new rolling stock for the Kent coast line? May I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team on securing the order for that line? Will he continue to give every possible encouragement to other private companies to produce the kind of rolling stock on the coastal services that we used to expect, and hope to expect again?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It was a British Rail decision, but the House should be aware that the rolling stock supply industry has been delivering stock not wholly free from defects. If there is to be an improvement in the frequency and quantity of orders, the rolling stock industry must play an important role. The Kent link Networkers are already 12 months late, the class 323 Regional Railways electric trains are 18 months late, and the class 158 Regional Railways diesels were two years late. That is not good enough, and an improvement by the railways supply industry will help to instill confidence into the private sector.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister not realise the extent of the crisis in the private sector railway manufacturing industry, where tens of thousands of jobs are now at risk because of the blight on investment created by the run-up to privatisation?

Mr. Riddick: More scaremongering.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman may say, "More scaremongering," but he should go to speak to the private sector Railway Industry Association to find out what it thinks of the Government's performance, rather than mouthing nonsense from behind the Minister.

Could the Minister tell us why, while every airline in the world uses leasing to acquire new planes and every European railway uses leasing to acquire new railway stock, we are still talking about a single leasing contract being authorised by the Government, while the west coast

main line is starved of investment and, all over the country, local authorities want to be involved in new rolling stock deals?

Will the hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that, before we have anything of the new leasing companies, there will be a more positive approach to leasing to acquire new rolling stock, thereby saving jobs? There is no need for the fragmentation of the railways or privatisation to get leasing schemes going and investment in railway rolling stock.

Mr. Freeman: We should have orders for new rolling stock to serve the passengers, not to protect jobs. The jobs will be protected automatically if two conditions are met—first, that the railways can prove that they need rolling stock on a particular line—one does not order it simply to keep the production line going, as I am sure that the hon. Member for York will agree—and, secondly, the order can be classified as an operating lease. There is no need for British Rail to wait until 1 April 1994 to place another order. If both the major manufacturers step forward and make an attractive offer to British Rail between now and then, I am sure that such an offer will be well received and carefully considered.

Mrs. Browning: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, once small lines such as the Tarka line, part of which goes through my constituency in Devon, are privatised, when there is a need for new rolling stock, those franchisees will not be precluded from providing the rolling stock and, contrary to the scare tactics of the Liberal Democrats of the south-west, those small lines will continue to be run and to be well stocked?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I can assure her that the Tarka line, like many other small branch lines, has an excellent future. I am not aware of any proposals for closure. She is right. We look to the private sector— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) seems to find that funny. If the hon. Gentleman did not hear it, I will repeat the answer. That branch line and other branch lines are not under threat. Members of the Labour party and Liberal Democrats put about those scare stories unnecessarily.

London to Midlands Rail Link

2. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received from industry and commerce in the west midlands in respect of infrastructure and investment requirements on the London to midlands rail links.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): I have received a number of representations about upgrading rail links to the midlands. We announced in July the appointment of advisers to work on a joint venture to renew the west coast main line infrastructure.

Mr. Rooker: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the importance of that line to west midlands manufacturing and to all the constituencies there, including yours, Madam Speaker? Does he also understand that the signalling belongs to the last century, trains regularly have to slow down to 20 mph, it is faster to get from London to York than it is to get from London to Wolverhampton, and that it is a disgrace that even the public and private sectors, meeting in Birmingham today, which want to put forward joint schemes, see the opportunities diminishing as the Government stick to their dogmatic policies?

The line needs upgrading, and if the Secretary of State wants to win any support for himself, to show firm support for manufacturing, and to prove that not all the infrastructure goes to the south-east, he must come forward quickly, rather than shovelling the matter off to one list of consultants after another.

Mr. MacGregor: The infrastructure is not all going to the south-east. I fully recognise the hon. Gentleman's point, but I am sure that he knows of the £550 million of investment that has been made in the east coast main line. I recognise the need to get on with improving the infrastructure of the west coast main line and I recognise that it will be a massive undertaking, costing on infrastructure alone probably up to £600 million. The priority is the older part of the line south of Crewe. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the appointment of advisers to investigate the possibility of a joint venture between the public and private sectors is not a postponement of consideration of the matter. We have been getting on with it very quickly and we are making good progress. He will recognise, however, that, given the need to keep the line running, it is probably a 10-year project.

Mr. Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is acute anxiety in the west midlands not only about the main line, but about ancillary lines because the local service is a disgrace? Will he give me a real and realistic time scale within which my constituents will have a service that compares with the east coast line?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my hon. Friend recognises the £6 billion of investment that British Rail has made in the past five years. There has certainly been no shortage of investment; the question has been priorities. I assure my hon. Friend that we have been getting on with the study by the financial advisers and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly. The extent to which we are successful in making the west coast main line infrastructure programme a joint venture involving private finance will determine whether we shall be able to release more of the available resources for other parts of the BR infrastructure.

Mr. Dobson: When will the Minister recognise the deplorable and declining standard of service on the line from London to the west midlands and on to the north-west and Scotland, which connects Britain's major industrial centres and most centres of population? Aside from all the waffle about joint projects, further inquiries and guest studies, when will work start on the ground to provide the service that the people of the west midlands, the north-west and Scotland want and deserve?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that, first, the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge the £6 billion of investment that has been made in the past five years. British Rail has been conducting some study work on the infrastructure requirements and all the detailed assessments that must be made before final decisions can be taken about the west coast main line. I assure the hon. Gentleman, who does not seem interested in the answer, given the way in which he is looking around, that there is no question of waffle. We are getting on rather rapidly, with the prospects of a joint venture study—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman seems

to think that guffaws are a substitute for serious thinking. We shall then get on with the further technical work that will have to be done on this major infrastructure project, bearing in mind that it is a busy line and that trains will have to pass over it all the time. I assure him that we are getting on with it rapidly.

M12

3. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to hold a public inquiry on the building of the M12 from the M25 to Chelmsford.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Key): It is too early to say when we would hold a public inquiry. We would expect to consult the public about this route next spring.

Mr. Burns: May I make a suggestion to my hon. Friend that would help to save public spending and to get rid of this unloved, unwanted and unasked for road? No doubt he will be aware that nobody in the area—Members of Parliament, local authorities, local residents—wants this road, which would be an environmental disaster. If he wants to become a much-loved local hero, he will kill this proposal here and now. If he does so, he will be feted in every village and town between the M25 and Chelmsford from here until eternity.

Mr. Key: What a wonderful invitation. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his advice. I might even hold him to it one day.

Transatlantic Air Routes

4. **Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made towards liberalisation of transatlantic air routes.

Mr. MacGregor: My aim is to work closely with the United States Government to meet the objective of agreement on liberalisation of UK-US air services by April next year. The refusal of the US Government to grant British Airways for a reasonable period the code-sharing rights to which it is entitled is a step backwards.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Is it not shameful that our close friend and ally, the United States, should adopt such an outrageous posture in this matter? Working closely with the United States is clearly not sufficient to protect British airlines' interests because my right hon. Friend is, I presume, doing that already. What action does he propose to take, and when does he propose to take it, to hold the Americans to their international obligations?

Mr. MacGregor: I assume that my hon. and learned Friend is rightly referring to the US Government's decision to grant British Airways its code-sharing rights for only 60 days. That has nothing to do with the liberalisation talks that we are undertaking this year with the US Government. It is entirely to do with a breach of the United States existing international obligations. We believe that it is breaching those in allowing British Airways only 60 days for its new code-sharing rights. That is wrong and we therefore have no option but to prepare for retaliatory action against US services that were introduced as a result of the Heathrow deal, from which BA's rights come. On 17 November, we accordingly warned the US Government that we proposed to limit United Airlines services to Washington and American Airlines services to Chicago from 12 January—the date on which BA's code-share approval expires—unless the approval was renewed by the United States in the meantime. I am sorry to have had to take that action, but I believe that we had no option, given the United States decision.

Mr. Olner: I shall fully support whatever action the Secretary of State takes on transatlantic routes, especially those into Birmingham airport which are so badly needed for the west midlands.

In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's previous answers, may I advise him to put some money into the west coast main line, because it will soon be quicker to fly from Birmingham to America than to travel on the west coast line from Birmingham to Heathrow?

Mr. MacGregor: That simply cannot be right. However, I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman a positive reply. In our liberalisation talks, the position of regional airports is very much in our minds and we seek to increase the number of flights to regional airports. On investment in Birmingham airport, the hon. Gentleman will have been pleased to see the consideration that Birmingham airport is now giving to seeking private sector finance for its expansion.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that a robust stand is taken to protect the interests of principal British carriers, such as British Airways and Virgin, on transatlantic routes and to ensure that they have sufficient gateways into the US? Will he also ensure that, to reciprocate, we are more willing to accept US carriers wishing to come to under-utilised British airports such as Stansted? Was it not sad that Trans World Airlines was refused an air service agreement into Stansted?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hoped that we could reach an interim agreement, while the main bilateral liberalisation talks were going on, to agree the TWA flights to Stansted in the summer. I put proposals to that end to my American counterpart and obtained some reciprocal benefits for the United Kingdom. I am sorry that, on that occasion, he could not agree and that he wanted to wait for the wider liberalisation talks. But I assure my hon. Friend that his point about flights to airports that still have capacity is very much in our minds.

Air Quality, West Yorkshire

5. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the dates, times and locations of any surveys carried out in West Yorkshire to monitor the air quality along the routes of the A1 and other motorways in West Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Four surveys have been carried out since October 1992. Twenty-four hour surveys were carried out on the A1 at Aberford and on the M62 at Thorpe in October and November 1992 respectively. There were 10-hour monitoring surveys in August this year on the A1 and M62 in Ferrybridge. The levels of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and lead measured at all locations were well below the designated values defined by the EC or World Health Organisation.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister accept that the M62, which runs through my constituency, is one of the busiest motorways in the north of England? Although monitoring exercises have been carried out to measure the lead in the air, does he accept that people who live near motorways, particularly those near schools, are worried about the sulphur, nitrogen and other pollutants that are emitted? Should not measurements be taken more frequently so that people can at least be assured that the Government are doing something to ensure that there is no danger to people's health, particularly children's health, along motorways and where motorways are planned?

Mr. Key: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, as I am sure is the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), who, by virtue of his office, cannot ask that question. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are taking careful steps to monitor air quality and that when the draft orders are laid before the House next summer, they will include an environmental statement. That will include air quality monitoring and assessment details.

Mr. Waller: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the internal combustion engine tends to emit most pollution, particularly carbon monoxide, when vehicles are either stationary or slow-moving? That being the case, does he agree that, whatever the arguments for or against any scheme bypassing a settlement, it is unlikely that air quality will be one of the arguments underpinning opposition to such a scheme?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is nothing more polluting than a traffic jam. On the whole, when traffic is moving freely, the dangerous emissions are minimised. That is something we take seriously when we are considering our road programme, whether it is widening a motorway or improving, or indeed bypassing, a particular village or community.

Road Construction

6. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made as to the number of miles of new roads that will be constructed in the UK in the years 1993 to 2000 inclusive.

Mr. MacGregor: In 1993-94, we plan to start construction of some 130 miles, the vast majority of which is improvement to existing roads, including widening, and to bypasses, which are environmentally desirable and much in demand. For future years, the amount of road construction that we can do will depend on the availability of funds and the progress of schemes through statutory procedures.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for those figures. In sustaining that level of road building programme to meet the exponential rise of car ownership, has he considered what monetary instruments he might use to redress the balance of the use of the motor car in favour of other forms of transport?

Mr. MacGregor: One of the points that I wish to make clearly, as my hon. Friend talks about the rise of car ownership, is that we are not talking about vast new green field roads or roads over green field sites. Fifteen out of the 130 miles about which I have talked this year are concentrated on green field areas; the rest is widening and so on.

As to my hon. Friend's question about pricing, I imagine that what he had in mind was the consultation paper that I announced earlier this year about the possibility of motorway charging. I am currently considering all the many responses that we have had to the Green Paper from more than 230 organisations. We had a very constructive response, and I hope to make an announcement as soon as the paper is completed.

Mr. Harvey: In the light of the National Audit Office report about the spiralling costs of motorway widening, does the Secretary of State accept that the costs have got out of control? Given that public opposition to motorway schemes is widespread and growing, is he aware that all eyes will be on tomorrow's Budget, particularly on the ordinary roads programme and the public transport spending side of it, and if those areas, like others, are suffering constraint, would it not be quite wrong to continue pressing the case for super-freeways?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not going to comment in advance of anything that may or may not be said tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman will know that there is also widespread concern from most motorists, but significantly from industry, at the congestion costs that arise when motorways are not able to take the flow of traffic. The congestion costs to British industry can be very serious. We have to have a real mind to the competitiveness of British industry, to which improved motorways can make a substantial contribution.

However much we devote public expenditure to rail investment, there will still be an ever-increasing demand for freight on the road, because so many of the journeys are comparatively short or are not made in accordance with the rail infrastructure. There will continue to have to be a substantial road programme if our economy is to remain competitive.

The NAO report looked at only 10 schemes, introduced since 1989. We are looking at that report, but if the hon. Gentleman reads it, he will see that the Department is taking a lot of action along the lines suggested by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Mr. Dykes: I welcome the Government's acknowledgement that the era of massive road building is over, because it is too expensive and it merely adds to congestion. Will my right hon. Friend confirm yet again, however, that over the next 10 years—as we win successive general elections—it will be Government policy to enhance the role of the railways, in whatever form, to ensure that, in this densely populated country, we focus just as much on rail travel?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend will hear when I answer a later question, we devote substantial resources to public transport, especially considering the amount of traffic that it takes. In effect, we are skewing departmental expenditure plans significantly in favour of public transport.

My hon. Friend should recognise, however, that the railways are simply not suitable for large elements of freight transport, so it is necessary to ensure that we have thoroughly up-to-date motorways. My hon. Friend will note that we are concentrating pretty well all the road

programme on the improvement of motorways and principal roads and not building new ones. We are also concentrating on bypasses, for which there is a great demand.

Ms Walley: Is the Secretary of State not shifting his position in that he does not believe in the roads policy any more? Is it not time we had a real debate in this place on the National Audit Office report, and time there was a much greater shift towards public transport and away from a roads policy which is already £6 billion out of control?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not agree at all, and I am not shifting my ground. I make it clear again that we still need significant investment in our road programme if we are to have the road network that we shall need in the 21st century. Large numbers of our fellow citizens are buying cars in increasing numbers and have the wherewithal to use them more and more—and they will want to do so. They, too, will demand such a network—quite apart from the problems of congestion for industry.

I have also made it clear that we are investing substantially in public transport, which represents nearly 40 per cent. of our total spending. Only about 10 per cent. of traffic goes by public transport, so we are clearly and disproportionately weighting our expenditure in favour of public transport and have been doing so for some time.

Dr. Spink: When will my right hon. Friend report on the lower Thames crossing? Has Canvey Island been identified as one of the sites for that crossing?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not in a position to say. It is too early to give my hon. Friend the kind of information that he requires.

Bus Deregulation

7. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he takes to monitor the effect on services of bus deregulation.

Mr. Freeman: The effects of bus deregulation outside London have been fully monitored through a programme of research undertaken by the Transport Research Laboratory, which has published a number of reports on the situation nationally and locally.

Mr. Davies: What has caused the Minister to change his mind about London? If deregulation will not work for London, why should Greater Manchester suffer, especially when unrealistic bids by private operators can work only if services are cut, workers sacked and fares raised?

Mr. Freeman: I am pleased that Greater Manchester passenger transport authority has got on with splitting the bus company and selling the resulting two companies. The hon. Gentleman refers to an unrealistic bid by one company for Greater Manchester Buses (North). I do not believe that it is unrealistic. It is for the Greater Manchester PTA to make the decision and I hope that it will make it quickly. I wish the two companies, once split and sold, the very best.

London is wholly different from Manchester, Glasgow or Liverpool. The number of buses, the ridership and the intensity of use in London are very different. Next year, we are going to get on with privatising London's buses and providing a better service.

Mr. Harry Greenway: I welcome the fact that the Government intend to provide a better service on London buses for Londoners. Does my right hon. Friend accept that that service is already a great deal better than it was 10 years ago? Will he assure the House that, in the improved and deregulated market that he describes pensioners' and disabled people's travel passes will always be safe?

Mr. Freeman: There is no intention to change either the operation of the travelcard or the concessionary fares scheme.

Mr. Raynsford: Why does the Minister not come clean and admit that the real reason for his Department abandoning bus deregulation in London is that he knew it would result in traffic chaos in central London and a collapse of services in outer suburban areas, the consequence of which would have been electoral annihilation for the Government? Why does the Minister not take pride on this one occasion in having done something sensible and allowed common sense to prevail over unnecessary dogma? Deregulation was not right for London and should be abandoned as a policy.

Mr. Freeman: Obviously the common sense approach in London is what we shall follow, which is net cost tendering and privatisation of all London bus subsidiaries next year.

Mr. Milligan: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the effects of bus deregulation has been to create companies which offer a range of transport services? In my constituency, the private bus company Southern Vectis is preparing a franchise bid for the loss-making coastal line. This will increase the frequency of railway services on that line from one per hour to one every 10 minutes. Does that not demonstrate that deregulation and privatisation will lead to an improvement in services, contrary to the allegations from the Opposition Front Bench that it will lead to a closure of unprofitable railway lines?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right. Since 1989, bus mileage has increased by about 20 per cent. and operating costs per mile have fallen by about 40 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Do the Opposition disagree with that? Those are the facts. A deregulated and privatised industry will, I hope, bid for rail franchises and bring about a new dimension and improvement in railway services.

Asthma

8. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the incidence of asthma in residents living in areas of high traffic volume.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I have received a number of representations, both from individuals and from organisations, about the incidence of asthma and high traffic levels.

Ms Coffey: Is the Minister aware that 39 per cent. of the population are at risk from respiratory diseases and that the treatment of asthma, now the most common disease, cost the national health service an estimated £344.4 million in 1988? Many studies have shown an association between asthma and residence in areas of high traffic volume. Will

the Minister initiate a proper national survey of the relationship between asthma and traffic volume so that any future transport policy will take into account the health of the nation as well as the pressure from the road transport lobby?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Lady seems unaware that the Department of Health has an independent expert committee on the medical effects of air pollutants. The committee has looked at this issue and a sub-group is specifically looking at the relationship between traffic and asthma. Had the hon. Lady considered that, she would be aware that, while there is no doubt that asthmatics need to use their inhalors more when nitrogen dioxide levels are high, there is as yet no evidence from studies carried out in this country and America which relates traffic emissions to the cause of asthma or to its onset. It is too early to say what conclusions we can draw; we will have to wait for the working party to report.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will the Government be more vigorous about building the Stockport north-south bypass? Would that not be a useful way of tackling the problem to which the hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) refers?

Mr. Norris: I agree with my hon. Friend's general observation that in all this great talk about every road being somehow inherently evil it should be remembered that when bypasses are in place some tens of thousands of people who previously suffered from traffic volumes, noise and emissions are provided with welcome relief.

Mr. Grocott: Would it not be better for all of us if the Government made serious attempts to transfer traffic from road to rail? The Minister should talk to his friends at the Ministry of Defence. In the past 12 years, the Ministry of Defence has closed down half the rail links from MOD depots to the main rail network, thereby—as a matter of deliberate Government policy—transferring freight from rail to road. One of the links that was closed was at the central ordnance depot Donnington in my constituency. Is that not one example of where one Government Department has not a clue what another Department is doing?

Mr. Norris: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has pointed out, a disproportionate amount of the Department's overall budget is already spent on public transport. In London, for example, some £3 is spent on public transport for every £1 spent on roads. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to the announcement that my right hon. Friend made earlier this year, he would know that the Government have considerably enhanced the provision of freight facilities grant to allow the transfer of traffic from road to rail, to effect precisely the kind of change to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Departmental Budget

9. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of his Department's annual budget is currently spent on roads and what proportion on public transport.

Mr. MacGregor: About 55 per cent. of my Department's expenditure is spent on roads; the bulk of the remainder is devoted to public transport. Given that 90 per cent. of passenger and inland freight traffic is by road, this indicates the priority that Ministers give to public transport.

Mr. David Martin: I recognise the importance of public expenditure on public transport. Is my right hon. Friend aware, however, of the horrendous problems caused by the traffic jams and delays on the A3 between London and Portsmout at present affecting Hindhead, which is the last bottleneck in a road that has seen many improvements under the present Government? Can my right hon. Friend assure me that he will do all that he can to advance the cause of a bypass around Hindhead so that we can complete the excellent work being done on the A3?

Mr. MacGregor: I recognise the importance of a bypass at Hindhead to my hon. Friend's constituents in Portsmouth. Route and environmental issues have caused the delays to date, since the first public consultation in 1987 which led to the rejection of the first preferred route.

The detailed design is now being undertaken on a new preferred route, following an announcement earlier this year. That will lead to the publication of draft orders, expected in 1995. Meanwhile, a number of surveys are being carried out, including traffic and topographical surveys, and a ground investigation is due to start in the new year. I hope that that demonstrates to my hon. Friend that we are getting on with it.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Secretary of State recognise that much of the money that is shown by the Comptroller and Auditor General's report to have been squandered by his Department on the road programme would have been better invested in London Underground? Ministers in their chauffeur-driven cars may not appreciate it, but people who travel on the tube every day know that the system is falling apart—that lifts and escalators are not working, signals are overloaded and tunnels are swilling with water—because the Government have failed to invest the necessary funds to make the tube system safe and sound. When will the Secretary of State change his priorities and ensure that the people of London get the decent tube service that they desperately need?

Mr. MacGregor: Investment in the existing underground network is higher than it was at any time in the 1970s and 1980s, including the period of the Labour Government. Moreover, the Central line is benefiting from a £750 million modernisation scheme. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friends will note that Opposition Members dismiss that £750 million and laugh at it, but it is a significant amount of taxpayers' money. The scheme is due to be completed in 1995 and includes provision for an upgrading of power supplies.

I believe that London Underground has traced last night's fault to power cables at Lots road power station. They have been repaired and we must hope that the service will be able to resume as soon as London Underground is satisfied that the trains can run properly. I have every confidence in Sir Wilfrid Newton and his management and staff, who have worked around the clock to identify the problem and get the Central line operational again. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) should recognise just how much money is being given to London Underground by the taxpayer.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bail

30. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Attorney-General what criteria are used by the Crown Prosecution Service when deciding whether to object to bail.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): The Crown Prosecution Service takes into account the considerations and exceptions to bail set out in the Bail Act 1976 and any other relevant information available to it, including material from the police, the probation service, and other sources.

Dr. Spink: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Does he share with the House the feeling that the interests and concerns of victims should take priority over those of the perpetrators of crime? Can he assure the House that in making decisions about bail he will take full account of the interests of victims?

The Solicitor-General: I can reassure my hon. Friend. The Crown Prosecution Service already gives very high priority to the interests of victims. At present, the police inform the CPS if there is a risk that the victim will suffer further offences or be intimidated by the defendant. If so, the CPS objects to bail on the grounds set out in the Bail Act 1976. We intend to go further, however. On 9 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced proposals under which the police and CPS will, as a matter of course, gather information from the victim concerning his or her view on the granting of bail, and the information will be put before the court as a matter of regularity. That is a step forward.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Minister not have the guts to tell the House and the country that decisions about bail depend partly on the strand of society from which a person comes? Those double standards apply right into court, as was the case with Roger Levitt, who not only benefited from the provisions of the Bail Act but got off with a few hours of community service following a £20 million fraud while poll tax defaulters are chucked into gaol for six months on principle. The Government are riddled with double standards.

The Solicitor-General: The question whether Mr. Levitt should be granted bail was exclusively a matter for the court, and the question of what sentence should be imposed was a matter exclusively for Mr. Justice Laws, who passed sentence. Those were not matters for the Serious Fraud Office, and not matters for the prosecution at all. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the charge on which Mr. Levitt was tried was a single charge. The Crown wanted him to be tried on a number of charges and argued strongly for the inclusion in the indictment of a number of charges. After the indictment had been reduced to a single charge, the Crown argued strongly for the inclusion in the trial of a wide range of evidence, but the judge ruled against the Crown on that.

Mr. Dickens: Does my hon. and learned Friend accept that often when offenders are given bail, rehabilitation or parole—or any of the other measures which release them into the atmosphere, as it were—they offend or abscond time and again? If there is a shadow or a grain of doubt, should not such people be kept under lock and key where they cannot burgle our homes or break into our motor vehicles?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that we are abreast of his thinking. The Bail (Amendment) Act 1993, which will come into operation in January, gives the prosecution a right to appeal to the Crown court against the granting of bail in most important cases in the magistrates court. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has recently announced further proposals under which alleged offenders who reoffend on bail will not have the benefit of the presumption of bail. He also proposes that persons charged with murder, manslaughter or rape who have already been convicted of one of those offences will be refused bail. This House and the other place will have an opportunity to decide their attitude to those proposals quite soon.

Dropped Cases

32. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases forwarded by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service were not proceeded with in 1990, 1991, 1992 and the first half of 1993.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Of the 1.5 million or more cases forwarded by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service each year, the total numbers not proceeded with in each of the years 1990-1993 were, to the nearest thousand, 227,000, 262,000, 281,000, and for the first six months of 1993, 143,000. These figures include for each respective year 79,000, 93,000, 88,000 and 52,000 cases, the substantial proportion of which could not proceed because the defendant had either died or could not be traced.

Mr. Ainger: Can the Minister explain why, in the past five years when crime has increased by 50 per cent., magistrates courts have dealt with 40,000 fewer cases, Crown courts have dealt with 8,000 fewer cases and the number of cases that the Crown Prosecution Service has decided to discontinue has increased by 80 per cent? Does the Minister agree with the First Division Association survey of all Crown prosecutors that 86 per cent. have no confidence in the senior management of the Crown Prosecution Service?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman asks two quite separate questions, although there is some linkage. First, the number of cases coming to court has been reduced as a result of diversionary measures and, in particular, by an increase in cautioning which, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has announced, is likely to be restricted. Secondly, one of the reasons for low morale, in so far as there is low morale in the Crown Prosecution Service, is that it is constantly being wrongly blamed for discontinuing cases which it has discontinued for thoroughly sensible reasons. If such cases are brought to the hon. Gentleman or to other hon. Members, I invite them to ask for chapter and verse and to provide that to me, because in the huge majority of the cases that I have looked into extremely carefully there were thoroughly sensible reasons for the decisions.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: If the Crown Prosecution Service thinks that it is not appropriate to proceed in one in six cases in which the police think that it is appropriate, is it

not time to reconsider the 51 per cent. chance of conviction rule before the CPS brings its charges and also to reconsider the Crown Prosecution Service procedure of trying to accept pleas to lesser offences in the magistrates courts so that many cases do not go to trial before juries? What kind of deterrence is there in a system in which some of the people who are caught have no reason to think that they will be brought to trial?

The Attorney-General: My hon. and learned Friend has great knowledge of the criminal justice system and will wish to take to heart what I have just told the House. It is much better to look at individual cases in detail to find out whether there was a solid reason for whatever course was taken. I have done that, and in a very high proportion of the cases that I have examined there was a thoroughly sensible reason for the decision. To look just at bare statistics and draw the wrong conclusion would be a mistake.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

European Community

36. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of United Kingdom overseas aid is now provided through the European Community.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): In 1992-93, 21.3 per cent. of total aid.

Mr. Jenkin: I thank my hon. Friend for his response. While we should not gloat too much at the European Community's expense, does my hon. Friend agree that our bilateral aid programmes are regarded throughout the world as among the most effective and that they compare most favourably in terms of efficiency and effectiveness with those of the European Community? Will my hon. Friend reassure us that, as far as possible, the United Kingdom percentage of our aid programme will be maintained?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I certainly confirm that our aid programme is widely respected for the way in which it is implemented. I give my hon. Friend the undertaking that we shall always work hard with our European Community partners to improve even further the effectiveness of European Community aid. The Horizon 2000 document which was adopted in November 1992 by the European Community helps towards that end.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Minister accept that, in view of their appalling record on bilateral aid, the Government are right not to gloat over the figures? For the next three years, our aid programme will be frozen at £1.9 million, which is a cut in real terms. Although the House recognises the appalling need in many parts of eastern Europe, does the Minister accept that the Government's response should not be at the expense of other developing nations, particularly those in Africa?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position and congratulate him on his appointment to the Opposition Front Bench. I know that we can both look forward to many interesting exchanges.

I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman said. The British aid programme planning total for this financial year is £2,267 million. In the past six years, the programme has risen by 10 per cent. in real terms.

Aid Budget

37. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his budget for overseas aid in 1993-94.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The planning figure for external assistance for 1993-94 is £2,267 million.

Mr. Riddick: Is that not an enormous sum of money? Will my hon. Friend confirm that Britain is one of the most generous donors of overseas aid in the world and has a record of which he and the Government can be proud? When calculating future levels of overseas aid, would it be sensible to take into consideration Britain's net annual contribution to the European Community of £2.5 billion, most of which goes to the poorer countries in southern Europe such as Portugal, Greece and Spain? Many of us feel that that money would be more appropriately spent in continents such as Asia and Africa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I agree that the British aid programme is both large and effective. However, assistance within the Community for structural funds is not part of our aid programme. It is true that our aid programme goes very wide and includes substantial humanitarian aid and an enormous amount of help for debt relief. It should also not be forgotten that there is significant and substantial private sector investment in developing countries.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister be careful not to misrepresent the Government's position on overseas aid? The reality is that every year we are falling further behind the 0.7 per cent. GNP target. The substantial increase in our budget relates to the European Community total—which is fixed and in which we have no say—whereas our percentage bilateral contribution has gone down.

I know that the hon. Gentleman cannot anticipate tomorrow's Budget statement, but when will the Government honour their obligation to meet the target of giving 0.7 per cent. of our gross national product to the rest of the world, whose problems are growing and not diminishing?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Obviously, I cannot anticipate tomorrow's Budget statement—or, indeed, any future Budget statement.

Mr. Wells: Is not the budget for 1993-94 an increase on our previous expenditure, and are not the Government to be congratulated on constantly increasing the aid budget, despite financial difficulties elsewhere in the economy?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It is true that the planning total for 1993-94 is an increase in real terms on the previous year.

World Bank

39. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he proposes to take to increase the accountability of the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom executive director of the World bank is appointed by and accountable to Her Majesty's Government. There is no reason to change that arrangement.

Mr. Denham: Is the Minister aware that the World bank, through its structural adjustment programmes, in effect determines the political and economic policies of many developing countries to which we donate bilateral aid? Is it acceptable that this House has no information about how the United Kingdom executive director votes, what policies he puts forward, whether we support particular structural adjustment loans or which projects we support? Surely an organisation that receives hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money every year should give the House information on our voting record.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman is an expert on these matters and follows them closely—as I know, having answered some 10 written parliamentary questions from him last week. As he knows, the World bank operates in circumstances in which a degree of confidentiality must be respected because it operates by consensus. The difficulty is always in striking a balance between the need for disclosure and that for confidentiality. However, the World bank is now disclosing much more. Projects under consideration, policy documents, operational guidelines, technical papers and environmental assessments are all made available now to the right people.

Azerbaijan

40. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance Her Majesty's Government intend to give to the refugees in Azerbaijan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are providing £1.6 million of relief in Azerbaijan this winter.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend knows that about 650,000 refugees are in Azerbaijan and that many more are in Armenia, Georgia and the surrounding region. As winter sets in, will my hon. Friend carefully consider providing more aid there, where the situation is every bit as bad as in Bosnia—albeit much less covered by the media?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My hon. Friend is right to say that the region does not receive so much media coverage as Bosnia. However, he must concede that the assistance that we are giving this winter is substantial. British non-governmental organisations are beginning to establish operations in Azerbaijan, and we will certainly consider sympathetically any requests for humanitarian assistance that they may put forward.

Northern Ireland

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): With permission, I will make a statement about messages between the IRA leadership and the Government.

There has for some years been a means of communication by which messages could be conveyed indirectly between the Government and the IRA leadership. Clearly, such a chain could only function if its secrecy was respected on both sides.

At the end of February this year, a message was received from the IRA leadership. It said:

"The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close. We wish to have an unannounced ceasefire in order to hold dialogue leading to peace. We cannot announce such a move as it will lead to confusion for the volunteers, because the press will misinterpret it as a surrender. We cannot meet Secretary of State's public renunciation of violence, but it would be given privately as long as we were sure that we were not being tricked".

That message came from Martin McGuinness. I have placed in the Library and in the Vote Office all consequent messages that Her Majesty's Government received and dispatched.

The Government had a duty to respond to that message. I will read to the House the substantive response that, after an intermediate exchange, we despatched on 19 March. The text published yesterday was no more than instructions as to how this was to be transmitted. The message was in these terms:

"1. The importance of what has been said, the wish to take it seriously, and the influence of events on the ground, have been acknowledged. All of those involved share a responsibility to work to end the conflict. No one has a monopoly of suffering. There is a need for a healing process.

2. It is essential that there should be no deception on either side, and also that no deception should, through any misunderstanding, be seen where it is not intended. It is also essential that both sides have a clear and realistic understanding of what it is possible to achieve, so that neither side can in the future claim that it has been tricked.

3. The position of the British Government on dealing with those who espouse violence is clearly understood. This is why the envisaged sequence of events is important. We note that what is being sought at this stage is advice, and that any dialogue would follow an unannounced halt to violent activity. We confirm that if violence had genuinely been brought to an end, whether or not that fact had been announced, then dialogue could take place.

4. It must be understood, though, that once a halt to activity became public, the British Government would have to acknowledge and defend its entry into dialogue. It would do so by pointing out that its agreement to exploratory dialogue about the possibility of an inclusive process had been given because—and only because—it had received a private assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end.

5. The British Government has made clear that:

— no political objective which is advocated by constitutional means alone could properly be excluded from discussion in the talks process;

— the commitment to return as much responsibility as possible to local politicians should be seen within a wider framework of stable relationships to be worked out with all concerned;

— new political arrangements would be designed to ensure that no legitimate group was excluded from eligibility to share in the exercise of this responsibility;

— in the event of a genuine and established ending of violence, the whole range of responses to it would inevitably be looked at afresh.

6. The British Government has no desire to inhibit or impede legitimate constitutional expression of any political opinion, or any input to the political process, and wants to see included in this process all main parties which have sufficiently shown they genuinely do not espouse violence. It has no blueprint. It wants an agreed accommodation, not an imposed settlement, arrived at through an inclusive process in which the parties are free agents.

7. The British Government does not have, and will not adopt, any prior objective of 'ending of partition'. The British Government cannot enter a talks process, or expect others to do so, with the purpose of achieving a predetermined outcome, whether the 'ending of partition' or anything else. It has accepted that the eventual outcome of such a process could be a united Ireland, but only on the basis of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

"Should this be the eventual outcome of a peaceful democratic process, the British Government would bring forward legislation to implement the will of the people here. But unless the people of Northern Ireland come to express such a view, the British Government will continue to uphold the union, seeking to ensure the good governance of Northern Ireland, in the interests of all its people, within the totality of relationships in these islands.

8. Evidence on the ground that any group had ceased violent activity would induce resulting reduction of security force activity. Were violence to end, the British Government's overall response in terms of security force activity on the ground would still have to take account of the overall threat. The threat posed by Republican and Loyalist groups which remained active would have to continue to be countered.

9. It is important to establish whether this provides a basis for the way forward. We are ready to answer specific questions or to give further explanation."

It is clear that that message was consistent with our declared policy: namely, that if such people wanted to enter into talks or negotiations with the Government they first had genuinely to end violence—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—not just temporarily, but for good. If they did, and showed sufficiently that they meant it, we would not want, for our part, to continue to exclude them from political talks. That remains our policy.

The IRA sent a reply on 10 May which did not constitute the unequivocal assurance of a genuine end to violence on which we had insisted. Clearly, a temporary ceasefire would not do.

Substantive contact was resumed on 2 November. The IRA sent the following message:

"This problem cannot be solved by the Reynolds Spring situation, although they're part of it. You appear to have rejected the Hume Adams situation though they too are part of it.

Every day all the main players are looking for singular solutions. It can't be solved singularly. We offered the 10 May. You've rejected it. Now we can't even have dialogue to work out how a total end to all violence can come about. We believe that the country could be at the point of no return. In plain language please tell us through the link as a matter of urgency when you will open dialogue in the event of a total end to hostilities. We believe that if all the documents involved are put on the table—including your 9 paragrapher and our 10th May that we have the basis of an understanding."

Our reply was despatched on 5 November:

"1. Your message of 2 November is taken as being of the greatest importance and significance. The answer to the specific question you raise is given in paragraph 4 below.

2. We hold to what was said jointly and in public by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in Brussels on 29 October. A copy of the Statement is annexed. There can be no departure from what is said there and in particular its statement that there could be no secret agreements or understandings between Governments and organisations supporting violence as a price for its cessation and its call on them to renounce for good the use of, or support for, violence. There can also be no departure from the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

3. It is the public and consistent position of the British Government that any dialogue could only follow a permanent end to violent activity.

4. You ask about the sequence of events in the event of a total end to hostilities. If, as you have offered, you were to give us an unequivocal assurance that violence has indeed been brought to

a permanent end, and that accordingly Sinn Fein is now committed to political progress by peaceful and democratic means alone, we will make clear publicly our commitment to enter exploratory dialogue with you. Our public statement will make clear that, provided your private assurance is promptly confirmed publicly after our public statement and that events on the ground are fully consistent with this, a first meeting for exploratory dialogue will take place within a week of Parliament's return in January.

5. Exploratory dialogue will have the following purposes:

(i) to explore the basis upon which Sinn Fein would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process to which the British Government is committed but without anticipating the negotiations within that process;

(ii) to exchange views on how Sinn Fein would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;

(iii) to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

6. The attached Annex summarises the sequence of events and provides answers to the procedural questions concerning exploratory dialogue which have been raised.

7. If, in advance of our public statement, any public statement is made on your behalf which appears to us inconsistent with this basis for proceeding it would not be possible for us then to proceed.

8. If we receive the necessary assurance, which you have offered, that violence has been brought to an end, we shall assume that you are assenting to the basis for proceeding explained in this note and its attachment."

Hon. Members will appreciate from what I have read out, and from the other messages when they have had time to study them, that our main objective has been to reinforce and spell out in private our publicly stated positions.

It is for the IRA and its supporters to explain why they have failed to deliver the promised ending of violence. They should do so at once. Murder in Northern Ireland is no more tolerable than murder anywhere else in the United Kingdom. We must never lose sight of the fact that it is the terrorists who must answer for the deaths, destruction and misery of the past 25 years. It lies therefore with the IRA, and with it alone, to end their inhuman crimes. It is for them and those who support and justify them to explain why they have wickedly failed to do that.

I promise the House and the people of Northern Ireland that, for our part, we shall not cease our efforts to bring violence to a permanent end. As my right hon Friend told the House on 18 November:

"if we do not succeed on this occasion, we must ... keep exploring again and again that opportunity for peace."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 28.]

Peace, properly attained, is a prize worth risks.

If a genuine end to violence is promised, the way would still be open for Sinn Fein to enter the political arena after a sufficient interval to demonstrate that they mean it. Our message of 5 November spelt that out again. The key to peace is in the hands of the IRA.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that the House is grateful for his explanation of events over the past few months, and welcomes the opportunity to study carefully his statement and the accompanying documents which are now available in the Vote Office?

Any sensible British Government must not, in the words of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition, be afraid to take risks for peace. Risks are necessary if the peace process is to be brought to a successful conclusion. We hope that the Government's recent mishandling of these matters will not deter them from believing that risk-taking is essential if progress is to be achieved. It is, in our view, essential to explore the sincerity of the claims of the Republican movement that it wishes to be brought into the political process and to contribute to an end to the violence. This the Secretary of State has sought to do.

We know that the Government have said that all parties must make concessions if the peace process and the ambition of a constitutional settlement are to be accomplished. The Government have rightly said that concessions must be forthcoming from the Government of the Republic and from the Republican movement. The Government must also recognise that they too must make concessions if those ambitions are to be realised.

Moreover, the Government must call upon the Ulster Unionists to play their part in achieving peace and settled democratic government in these islands. That requires the Government to address two fundamental issues which the Ulster Unionists have refused consistently to address. First, we need an institutionalised Irish dimension in the government of Northern Ireland which the nationalists in Ireland could feel addresses their aspirations, just as article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement rightly recognises and protects the constitutional status of the majority in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, we need institutions of government which allow both communities to share power and responsibility in Northern Ireland. Any new agreement between the British and Irish Governments and the parties in Northern Ireland must meet the aspirations of northern nationalists for institutions of Government with which they feel they can identify and which connect them with the Republic of Ireland.

If the Government intend to demonstrate their sincerity and show that they are prepared to take risks for peace, we expect to hear from the Government about concrete proposals which will satisfy the aspirations, needs and interests of both communities. I will remind the Secretary of State of the words of the Prime Minister:

"No party and no organisation can exercise a veto on progress."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 28.]

Provided that the Government hold firmly to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the need for an Irish dimension and institutions which share power and responsibility in Northern Ireland, they should not be inhibited in the search for peace and a settlement which would be acceptable to all the peoples of these islands.

The Opposition trust that it has been thinking of that nature which has motivated the Government's interactions with the Republicans, and that is why we seek to make no party advantage today. The pursuit of peace is more important than anything else. We understand that 3 December is a date which remains open for both Governments to meet, if they wish. We hope that such a summit can take place.

We believe that the Prime Minister is right to say that the best opportunity for peace exists now. That opportunity must be grasped. We trust that the Government's courage will not now be dissipated, despite the criticism which they are likely to encounter later this afternoon. The pursuit of peace is more important than anything else.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his initial words in welcoming the statement. It is with the IRA, and with it alone, that the key to peace lies. It is for the IRA to decide whether it brings to an end violence that should never have been begun.

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not follow him in the observations which followed his opening remarks. They seem to me to be related not so much to a statement about messages between the IRA and the Government, as to the agenda for those constitutional political talks which took place last year between the four main constitutional parties and the two Governments, and which have resumed under a different format under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram).

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the summit. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach will be discussing together, over the next few days, the date for the next summit meeting. I cannot conclude without observing that I shall base my reaction to the hon. Gentleman's denial of any desire to take party advantage on the fact that no such advantage offers itself to him.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I hope that the Secretary of State will agree that, if Mr. Adams feels that he ought to have a spokesman in the House, he need look no further than the Opposition spokesman. It remains for those who sit beside and behind that hon. Gentleman to decide whether he speaks for them.

When the Secretary of State came to the Northern Ireland Office, did he consider dismantling the links with the various paramilitary bodies, which links have existed since 1973 under successive Governments and 10 Secretaries of State? Were those links necessary to distribute what are called the bomb warning recognised code words, on a weekly or monthly basis? Finally, were those links used a year ago to convey the existence of the 51-point contingency plan—described by the former security Minister, the hon. Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) this morning—to deal with an extended ceasefire over last Christmas?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question relates to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The hon. Gentleman speaks for himself. Perhaps that occasionally gets him into some difficulty—*[Interruption.]* No doubt the hon. Gentleman speaks for his party as well, but I would not wish to follow further the right hon. Gentleman's point. As to the second and third part of the right hon. Gentleman's question, the answer is no in each case.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Why has the Secretary of State not taken up the point that has aggravated and exacerbated the situation in Northern Ireland? It is not a matter of whether there is a channel conveying messages to the provisional IRA or whether the Government have had contacts in the past, or have in the present, but that those statements have been denied by the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State has rubbished any suggestion of such talks. He has rubbished anyone who dared, at a press conference, to put questions on that to him. When we met him and the Prime Minister in the past week, he rubbished the suggestion again and said that there was no such thing. The people of Northern Ireland today demand that the Secretary of State explains why he issued falsehoods himself, got officials to issue falsehoods and got Downing street to back up those falsehoods.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is being as restrained as he can be at this moment. However, falsehoods mean one thing to the Chair—lies. I would be obliged if he could rephrase what he is saying.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I would like to ask the Secretary of State a question that everyone in Northern Ireland is asking. Even if the message that he got in February, and to which he responded, said that the conflict was over, surely he would have known after one exchange that the conflict was not over. What has happened? Those talks were going on, but we had Warrington. The talks were going on while the bombing was going on in this city. Even when the bombing took place in the Shankill road, the lines were still open. Surely the Secretary of State cannot think that, after his behaviour, he can have any trust with the Northern Ireland people. If he wants a settlement, the only honourable thing that he can do is resign.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I really must seek a withdrawal from the hon. Gentleman of the word "falsehood". I am sure that he has tried to couch his words very carefully this afternoon, but I ask him to reflect for a moment while I am speaking so that he may withdraw and allow proper order in our exchanges and our questions. Dr. Paisley, I am sure that you will oblige.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Because of the seriousness of the situation, I cannot oblige you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would reflect. It is very important to me and to the House that he is able to question the Secretary of State. I do not want to have to use the powers that are given to me by Standing Order at this time. I would ask him to reflect in all sincerity. I want him to be in the House to hear the exchanges. I ask him, as a long-standing Member of the House, senior statesman and parliamentarian, to oblige the House and the Chair by withdrawing the word "falsehood". I should be most obliged if he would do so.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I would like to stay in the House, but there are far too many issues in Northern Ireland that weigh on me at this time. The people of Northern Ireland would say to me, "Why did not you stand by what you said outside the House?", and I stand by what I said. It was a falsehood: it was worse, it was a lie.

Madam Speaker: In accordance with the power given me by Standing Order No. 42, I order the hon. Member to withdraw immediately from the House for the remainder of this day's sitting. *[Interruption.]* I am not naming him; I am using the Standing Order that is open to me, which is No. 42 and which requires the hon. Gentleman to withdraw from the precincts of the House for the remainder of this day's sitting.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: There is no point of order at this stage. I am dealing with a Standing Order.

Dr. Paisley, I should be obliged if you would see that the order that I have just given you is carried out. Dr. Paisley, I require you to leave the precincts of the House for the remainder of the day's sitting. In that case, I name Dr. Ian Paisley.

Motion made, and Question put,

That Rev. Ian Paisley be suspended from the service of the House.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 25.

Division No. 5] **[3.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Arbuthnot, James
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bayley, Hugh
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blair, Tony
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eggar, Tim
Etherington, Bill
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forth, Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Maria
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Gunnell, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
McGrady, Eddie
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Mallon, Seamus
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Ottaway, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rogers, Allan
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Short, Clare
Sims, Roger
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winnick, David
Wood, Timothy
Worthington, Tony
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Clapham, Michael
Cohen, Harry
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Livingstone, Ken
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*

Trimble, David
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wicks, Malcolm

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Robinson and
Rev. William McCrea.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Madam Speaker: In compliance with the order that the House has just made, I have to direct the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) to withdraw.

The hon. Member withdrew accordingly.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the Secretary of State accept from our party that he was right to enter into these deliberations? Had he not done so, it would have been a dereliction of duty on his part.

At this important and sensitive time, the controversy surrounding these deliberations should not be allowed to hide the real challenge that faces us all: the challenge of creating peace in the island of Ireland—a peace that will affect all sections of the community, and a peace that will last.

Will the Secretary of State also note that I fully support his statement that the Government hold to the views expressed by the two Prime Ministers in Brussels? Will he further accept that it is not enough just to hold to those views, and that the two Prime Ministers must honour them and act upon them, recognising that time is of the essence? If they do not, the day and the opportunity may be lost, and that will mean more lives lost in the north of Ireland.

I ask the Secretary of State with all the power at my command to impress on the Prime Minister the fact that, unless he takes this opportunity and moves with the Irish Government to solve this problem and create peace now, there will be a backlash in the north of Ireland. It will not be a physical backlash; it will be a backlash of despair that will engulf us all for many years to come.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Naturally I welcome what the hon. Gentleman said at the outset. He asked that there be no diversion from the search for peace. I can readily assure him on behalf of the Government that there will be no diversion from their continuing efforts to secure a permanent ending to the violence. In my experience the people of Northern Ireland do not ask for peace at any price—it has to be peace properly attained.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. He is committed, as are the Government, to doing everything proper to bring an end to terrorism. The exchanges that I have described show that to be the case. We will not negotiate with terrorists in advance of a demonstrated cessation of violence. If it is clear that violence has been brought to an end, then a party such as Sinn Fein would no longer be subject to a continued exclusion from the political process—once it had shown that it was for real that it no longer espoused or justified the cause of violence. I repeat: it is for the terrorists alone to decide whether and when they will bring violence to an end.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The Secretary of State has made a detailed and thorough statement to the House. Many hon. Members will congratulate the Government on their courage in having initiated this process. It requires great courage, and any Government would be open to the charge of being damned if they did and damned if they didn't. It is not surprising that the Government find themselves in that position today. The Government should not be deflected from the task of finding a fair and lasting settlement. Will the Secretary of State reaffirm his commitment to placing the Government's plan before all the parties in Northern Ireland should the present process stall? The Government should not see themselves as spectators or umpires but should continue the process on which they have embarked, which requires imagination and courage, and which the whole House should welcome.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. May I gently correct him? He implied that this exchange, which began with the message in February of this year, was initiated by the Government. That was not the case.

I reaffirm the Government's commitment to carrying forward the process of political talks embarked upon by my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke). I was fortunate enough to take over in April of last year, when, because of his infinite patience and perceptiveness, all the procedural matters had been cleared out of the way. We want to see that process continue.

The process has been resumed since September of this year, with the considerable assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I reiterate that, at an appropriate stage, we will put forward our own proposals about what is most likely to secure an overall agreement, which is an essential prerequisite to any lasting accommodation.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): There is undoubtedly grave concern in Northern Ireland, and it would be wrong for the House to be blind to that concern. I regard the Prime Minister as a man of integrity, who is genuinely seeking peace and political progress in Ulster, as is the Secretary of State. Will they give an assurance that, despite these contacts, there will be no let-up in the battle against the terrorists; that there will be no amnesty for terrorists who have been convicted; and that terrorists who have committed offences will be pursued by the police?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for everything that the right hon. Gentleman has said. There will be no let-up in the campaign to bring an end to the violence that should never have begun, should never have continued and should not be perpetrated now. The security forces, the Royal Ulster Constabulary with the Army in support, are securing substantial successes, not all of which can be made public, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. That effort will continue, without the slightest rebate by reason of any other approaches that may be made to the Government.

It is necessary that no opportunity should be lost to secure a proper means by which this campaign of violence can be brought to an end. There will be no amnesty. There are no political prisoners in the United Kingdom. Those who are inmates of the prisons in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales are there because they have been convicted of criminal offences. That is why everyone must remember that there will be no let-up whatever in the Government's efforts, by all lawful means open to them, to bring the campaign of violence to an end.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that, after the Hume-Adams talks—which were widely welcomed—the Mayhew-McGuinness exchanges

will be seen as very important and comparable in character? Is he also aware that the desire for peace is widespread in Britain as well? Are not the British people entitled to hear for themselves what comes from Sinn Fein, rather than relying on what the Secretary of State chooses to tell us through the publication of limited documents in his possession?

The Secretary of State will know that I wrote to the Prime Minister about this matter last night. Is it not time for a lifting of the exclusion order placed on Gerry Adams, so that all Members of Parliament may hear what he has been saying, and for a lifting of the Sinn Fein ban? Given its enormous importance, this is not a matter that can be left to private, secret discussions and exchanges; it concerns the whole country, and the whole country is entitled to know all the arguments used in the pursuit of peace, which must be the objective of all.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the exclusion order is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I can only express my personal view: I do not think that the country would have understood if the opportunity to make an exclusion order against Mr. Adams had been left unused recently, when it became relevant.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that this is not the first such approach from such sources? Is he aware that it was his absolute duty to pursue those sources to establish whether it was possible to bring an end to the appalling violence from which the whole of the United Kingdom has suffered—as, indeed, has the whole island of Ireland? Is he also aware that his statement—which makes it clear that there can be no negotiations with people who perpetrate violence—is absolutely right? It might have been in the better interests of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) to read the papers before making his allegations.

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that he was absolutely right to seek, in every way that he could, to preserve the confidentiality of such approaches? The House need only reflect on the problems that are now following from the premature disclosure of perfectly proper approaches, and the problems that may be caused—not least, I suggest, to certain Republican leaders in Belfast.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. We had no doubt that it was our duty to respond in the way we did, remembering always that actions, not words, would be the ultimate test.

As the documents make clear, we have at no stage offered to negotiate in advance of a permanent ending of violence. That must be right. I am not conscious of having given any reply to the press—during the daily doorsteppings that are the lot of a Minister in Northern Ireland—that was not justified and justifiable by the facts.

It has always been known perfectly clearly that the British Government have never authorised anyone to enter into talks or negotiations on their behalf. There is only one context in which there is public interest in talking and having contact with Sinn Fein or the IRA: the context of public anxiety that the Government might do a deal with them before they had given up violence. That is the anxiety that has been expressed, and it has always been addressed in every answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and myself.

Confidentiality is, of course, of vital importance. I very much agree with the latter remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King): I believe that all who have been responsible for breaking the confidentiality of this channel of communication—whose value was rightly emphasised a few moments ago by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux)—will have a lot to answer for.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that the people of Warrington and my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) and I bow to no one in our desire to pursue the quest for peace? Does he also accept, however, that there was a feeling of outrage and revulsion in Warrington at the fact that talks with Sinn Fein actually took place two days—[HON. MEMBERS: "Not talks."] Contacts, then; I do not mind. Let me say to hon. Members who are shouting that this is too serious a matter for the people of Warrington for me to engage in a discussion of whether they were talks or contacts. Let us call them contacts.

There were contacts on 22 March—two days after the bombing in Warrington as a result of which two small boys died and 56 people were injured, and while one of the boys was still fighting for his life. Can the Secretary of State tell me how that squares with the statement that the conflict was over and, in view of the Warrington incident, why that meeting went ahead?

May I emphasise to the Secretary of State that those of us who want peace and want an end to the killings and the violence also want to know just what is going on and would like from the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister more honesty, less hypocrisy and more frankness with the House?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I readily appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern for the feelings of his constituents in Warrington. He will know that we met in his constituency at the launching of the Warrington project a month or two ago. The hon. Gentleman speaks of a sense of outrage that there should have been any contact with Sinn Fein after the Warrington bombing. I think that the House will attach much importance to the fact, which I have already made clear, that the response was sent by the British Government before then. It was delivered, through the channel of communication that I have mentioned, afterwards.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Parry, the father of one of the two boys who were murdered on that occasion, has spoken movingly about his own feelings towards the policy that the Government have followed. I respectfully endorse what Mr. Parry has publicly said.

The hon. Gentleman rightly asked how Warrington and subsequent outrages square with the assertion that the conflict is at an end. Plainly, they do not. Such outrages are totally inexcusable. When the hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to read the bundle, he will see that the Government have repeatedly said in response to the IRA leadership that it is conduct, behaviour and events on the ground that will determine whether any credence can be placed on what that leadership has suggested.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will my right hon. and learned Friend take note of the widespread feeling that in this business he has acted entirely correctly and wholly honourably, and has very great support? Will he take this opportunity to assure the House that the search for peace will never slide into the search for appeasement, and that

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland remains absolute so long as that is the democratically expressed wish of the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: On the last point, I readily and warmly give that assertion to my hon. Friend who takes so close an interest in these matters. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his Blackpool speech in October, the Government will always stand behind the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. That could not be more clearly expressed and could scarcely have been more frequently expressed than it has been this autumn.

My hon. Friend asks whether I will make sure that the search for peace does not degenerate into appeasement. Yes—quite unequivocally—is the answer to that. It is made abundantly clear in the bundle of documents that there is no suggestion of any price, inducement or bargain being offered to these people to do what it is their common duty to humanity to achieve here and now.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware of the real question that needs to be answered, not only here but outside? The Government have involved themselves in a peace initiative which most people want, and from listening to some views in the House, it seems that more people want that initiative to continue than was the case several weeks ago. We should all be pleased about that, but that is not the issue.

The issue is that, in this democracy, everybody has been taught to believe Ministers when they say at the Dispatch Box and outside on behalf of Parliament and the Government that they are doing one thing. But behind the people's back they are doing another, and that raises the question of honour and resignation. I did not hear the Secretary of State mention the word "apology" in connection with this mess. There was no reference at all to anyone's stomach turning.

The question that he has to answer—it will hang round his head for a long time—is whether anybody can again trust the Secretary of State or the Prime Minister. The problem that they have to face rather than the question of the peace initiative is whether they will ever be believed again. The Secretary of State should do the honourable thing and resign.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There is no question of resigning by reason of any of the efforts that I or my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have made to secure by proper means peace in Northern Ireland. I am aware of the Opposition point. I repeat that the Government's policy is perfectly clear and has always been expressed as the fact that nobody has been authorised and nobody will be authorised to enter into talks or discussions with people who are responsible for violence or who justify the use of violence.

That has been made perfectly clear in all my responses. I have looked through all the transcripts that are available to me. It was well expressed in "The Week in Politics" on 24 October on which I was interviewed by Mr. Jim Dougal. Referring to the disgraceful Shankill episode, Mr. Dougal asked:

"What does this do to the attitude of the Government to a party like Sinn Fein?

I replied:

"The attitude of the Government to a party like Sinn Fein is quite clear and it does nothing to it whatsoever. We will not discuss for political purposes with a party that brings a bomb and a bullet to the aid of its political viewpoint."

After further material, I said:

"To do that would be to undermine those who practise constitutional politics and it would be to feed the appetites of those who get their way by bombs."

It is perfectly clear from everything that I have said that that is the British Government's position, and nothing has taken place that conflicts with that policy.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): The Secretary of State will bear in mind the fact that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) spoke about the backlash of despair. Unfortunately, there is already a backlash of despair in Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State said that the Government entered into these negotiations in February. *[Interruption.]* They were in the context that channels of communication were open. Responses were given in February because of a contact from Sinn Fein that the conflict was over.

Even if one accepts that the Government had to respond to that—and that is a matter for another occasion—the Warrington bomb came after that. Did that not convince the Government that the conflict was not over? Then the London bomb came. Did the Government need more convincing that the conflict was not over? Then there was the Shankill bomb. Did the Government need more convincing that this contact from Sinn Fein and the IRA was rubbish? How many more bombs must go off before the Government accept that Sinn Fein and the IRA have been playing them along?

I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said—and he said that the fight against terrorism would continue unabated. The question that needs to be answered is, how can that stand side by side with the fact that one of the leading terrorists in Northern Ireland is Martin McGuinness? Two programmes were put out on the airwaves, but Martin McGuinness was never questioned. He was never arrested. Why not? How could he be questioned or arrested when he was that channel of communication?

I appreciate that the issue is delicate. The House may play around with words, and some may agree on whether it is a matter of talks, authorisation for talks or negotiations. However, this House was not under any illusion on any occasion on which the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box—no contacts had been made.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I must remind him and the House that we are not in debate; we are questioning a statement by the Secretary of State. Will the hon. Gentleman now put his question so that I have the opportunity to call as many as possible of the other hon. Members who have been standing?

Mr. Benn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have already had to deal with one hon. Member who breached the order of the House. The hon. Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) said that someone was a terrorist, but he has not been convicted of that. The hon. Gentleman used the privileges of the House to condemn somebody—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am listening very carefully to every word that is uttered in these exchanges. The hon.

Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) is not out of order, other than for the fact that I hope that he will now ask his questions so that the Secretary of State can respond.

Rev. William McCrea: No matter how we play with words, there were contacts with the IRA behind the backs of the people of Northern Ireland. They were not told about them. Sinn Fein knew about them, the British Government knew about them, Dublin says it knew about them and America says it knew about them—but the people of Northern Ireland, whose lives are at stake, did not know about them. There is a deficit of belief between the people of Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State. How will the right hon. and learned Gentleman correct that?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's comments bit by bit. His first remark was that the Government had entered into negotiations. I do not know where he has been this afternoon, but he could not have heard the central point of what I said to the House—that there have been no negotiations, none have been offered and there will be none unless and until the IRA gives up violence and Sinn Fein gives up justifying it.

The hon. Gentleman said that the question whether it was right for the Government to reply to the initial message was for another occasion. It is not—it is for this occasion. It is very much a technique of those from his Benches who criticise the Government to make assertions outside the House that they are not prepared to make here. They have said that it was disgraceful that we replied to that message, and that is a matter for this occasion. I say to the House—and to the hon. Gentleman in particular—that it would have been culpable in the extreme if we had not replied.

The hon. Gentleman then asked why Martin McGuinness had not been arrested. I must tell him—as a Northern Ireland Member, he should know this perfectly well—that the prosecuting authorities are independent of Government—*[Interruption.]* His hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) laughs. I shall have something to say about him in a moment. He may laugh, but as I know very well, it is a fact that the prosecuting authorities in Northern Ireland are independent. People cannot be brought to trial unless there are people willing to take the risks inherent in Northern Ireland of giving evidence in court.

Next, the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster said that the people of Northern Ireland were not told about the messages that I have described, and then said that that had put me in a position where there could be no trust. I do not believe that for one minute. The Government have said consistently, and I have repeated many times, that nobody has been authorised to undertake talks or negotiations on behalf of the Government. I made it absolutely clear that was always in the context of political negotiations. That is what people such as the hon. Gentleman rightly mind about—whether some price or inducement is being offered for an ending of violence. That would be profoundly wrong. None has ever been offered, and none will be offered.

I invite the hon. Gentleman, in the light of his public remarks about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, to consider what contribution he has made to stability and confidence. What contribution has he made by apparently handing covertly to a journalist—as we understand the hon. Gentleman did—the document that I mentioned? The hon. Gentleman might care to say where he got it and how he got it. Rather than tell my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he met him, "I have this document. It is a worrying document. What do you say about it?", we understand that the hon. Gentleman slid it to a journalist. Why did he do that?

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Taking account of the folly of anyone believing that the word of the Provisional IRA can ever be taken at face value, and that any evasion and equivocation by members of the Government Front Bench only presents republican terrorists with a propaganda victory, can the House take some comfort from the fact that right hon. and hon. Members would not have any official confirmation of the rumours that have been circulating since May or June if the IRA's political demands had not been rejected by the Government? May we continue to rely on assurances by the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister that the democratic process will never be subverted in favour of terrorist demands?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman has an unmatched record of resistance to terrorist demands and to the threats and violence that terrorists offer so many people in Northern Ireland. I give him the assurance that he seeks, without equivocation.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that political demands made by the IRA and by Sinn Fein on the Government in advance of any ending of violence were rejected out of hand. Contrary to all the rumours now being sedulously put about on behalf of Sinn Fein, that has been the case. That is why there came to be considerable interest in what talks, contacts or whatever had been taking place. That, and that alone, was the context. That is the context in which I have answered all the questions put to me.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Despite a few of the things said in the House, does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that many people in the House and outside it congratulate him on, and do not criticise him for, his efforts in pursuing a proper peace in Northern Ireland? Will he proceed undaunted, notwithstanding recent events? In doing so, will he realise that those who oppose him and who make life difficult for the Government in this regard will increasingly be perceived to be opposing peace as well?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and take heart from his remarks. I know that he is speaking not only for those on the Government Benches but for those on the Labour Benches and throughout the House. I believe that the House is absolutely at one, that there must be no surrender to terrorist demands, and equally that there must be no relenting in all proper searches for ways to bring violence to an end.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that, while in 25 years there has not been the slightest indication that the British people or the House would surrender to terrorism, there is an overwhelming wish on the mainland, no less in Northern Ireland, for any steps that could lead to a negotiated settlement? The father of one of the children killed at Warrington bravely said that steps leading to peace should be taken, if that could possibly be done, and that concessions must be made by all—by the majority and minority communities in Northern Ireland.

[Mr. David Winnick]

While one acknowledges some of the problems that have undoubtedly arisen during the past few days, can the Secretary of State tell the House today that no steps will be taken to stop the summit that is to take place in Dublin between the British and Irish Prime Ministers?

Is there not a strong argument now for every possible step to be taken by both Governments, to see whether there is a possibility of an honourable agreement in Northern Ireland, recognising that Northern Ireland would remain a part of the United Kingdom but also—as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) said—that the legitimate aspirations of the nationalist community must be pursued, as the majority recognises, by peaceful means?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman always takes a courageous line in matters connected with Northern Ireland affairs. As to his first point, I acknowledge that there is an overpowering demand among the everyday people of Northern Ireland for an end to violence. However, they do not want peace at any price.

Recently, I attended a service for the association that represents disabled police officers, and I attended a memorial service for those who lost their lives in the prison service. The mothers, widows and other relations of those who have suffered hideous injuries or death say, "We want peace, but we do not want it at any price." It is terribly important to remember that, and it is never out of the Government's mind.

The hon. Gentleman asked that no steps be taken to frustrate the Dublin summit. I told the House that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach will be discussing over the next few days the date of the summit. On "The Frost Programme" recently, the Taoiseach said—I speak from memory rather than quoting his words exactly—that any solution emanating from one side alone could have no chance of success.

That certainly represents the British Government's view. We are at one in wanting violence to come to an end, but it must come to an end before there can be any negotiations or exploratory talks as to how parties may enter the constitutional talks process—from which they exclude themselves by perpetrating or justifying violence at present.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): While those who have no responsibility in these matters can indulge in the semantic differences between communications, talks and negotiations, is it not the case that those who have that responsibility must deal with human life and limb, and with the wanton destruction of property? When this froth of mostly artificial rage has died down, will not the IRA leadership be left exposed for its utter cynicism in saying that it could stop the killing, but asking for some way of doing that while saving face?

Will my right hon. and learned Friend make it clear to the IRA leadership that there is no way that it can save face for its actions over the years? As long as my right hon. and learned Friend pursues with vigour and honour the path that he has chosen to try to bring the IRA to a peaceful means of discussing solutions, he will have the backing of every right-thinking person in this country and of most right hon. and hon. Members.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Cynicism is seen as a very strong suit of the IRA and of Sinn Fein, and especially of those who express regret for the entirely foreseeable and intended consequences of the violence that they perpetrate. That is extremely hard to bear for the hard-pressed people of Northern Ireland. Of course duties are placed upon those who have responsibility for every life in Northern Ireland, and they must face up to them. Others do not have the disciplines that responsibility imposes.

Yesterday, I watched my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on "The Frost Programme", in which the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) also participated. My hon. Friend asked the hon. Member for Belfast, East—whose face was on the screen, transmitted from Northern Ireland—what the Government should have done in the face of the message. Should they have done nothing, or should they have responded? Answer came there none from the hon. Member for Belfast, East. But those with responsibility for lives in Northern Ireland must make up their minds—and they must take proper risks.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Can the Secretary of State confirm that those contacts did not just start with this particular round but, in the words of Lord Gowrie, contacts with the IRA were instrumental in bringing the hunger strike to a close, and certainly contacts were still continuing between Sinn Fein and officials at the Northern Ireland Office in 1983 when the Greater London council delegation met Gerry Adams for the first time?

Does the Secretary of State agree that part of his problem with the public and media response to this news is not that talks or contacts have been taking place, but that successive Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, and the former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, have roundly condemned anyone who went openly, and in front of the public, and discussed with the leadership of Sinn Fein? They were condemned for doing openly what the Government have been doing behind the backs of the British people and the people of Northern Ireland.

Does the Secretary of State also agree that most people outside the House will not be terribly concerned, because this is more of a parliamentary point. People outside the House will be amazed, however, given the terms that Martin McGuinness used in his contacts with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and they will ask, "Why did not the British Government have more imagination in seizing the opportunity? Where is the imagination in their response that is shown by people like Rabin or de Klerk?" Why is imagination so lacking on the Conservative Benches? Is it because the Conservatives rely on the votes of the Ulster Unionists?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I think that what the hon. Gentleman would describe as imagination, most of the people of our country would describe as appeasement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—feeding those who, in a democracy, know that they cannot attain their political objectives by the ballot box and therefore bring bombs and bullets to the conference table, to the discussions, to fortify their case. That is what I think that the hon. Gentleman would have described as an imaginative response, but I and, I think, most people in our country would describe it as a disgraceful response.

I believe that the Government have made an entirely proper, and certainly understood, distinction—that once one has shown oneself qualified to become a constitutional political party, one may take one's place in the political arena. As long as one shows oneself not to be able to accept the disciplines of democratic and constitutional politics, one excludes oneself.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Does the Secretary of State recall that he took part in BBC "Breakfast Time" on 16 November and that during that programme he made three denials? First, he denied that there were contacts through emissaries between the Government and the Provisional IRA or Sinn Fein. He also denied that there were talks between the Government and the IRA, and he denied that there were negotiations between the Government and the IRA. Do not the papers that the Secretary of State has selected to put in the Library today indicate that such contacts did take place? If there were no talks, why was his emissary sent off to do the job with speaking notes?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that he needs more than the confidence of his colleagues in the House to do his job and to do it well; that he needs the confidence of the people of Northern Ireland, and that he does not have it any more?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have heard the hon. Gentleman proclaiming that for some time. I walk about as much as I can in the streets of Northern Ireland to talk to people, and I seem to get a reasonable and—I am very grateful for it—friendly reception. The hon. Gentleman speaks of BBC "Breakfast Time." It is certainly true that I took part in BBC breakfast television on 16 November. I was asked this question:

"Let's look further at what Gerry Adams was saying last night."

As I have already said, and I think the House has recognised, Gerry Adams has been putting it about that we have been negotiating. The question continued:

"Has there been contact between people who could be regarded as emissaries or representatives of the Government?"

I said:

"No, there hasn't. There has been no negotiating with Sinn Fein; no official, as I see is alleged"

has been

"talking to Sinn Fein on behalf of the British Government. We have always made it perfectly clear that there is going to be no negotiating with anybody who perpetrates or justifies the use of violence. That's been our public policy, and it is our private policy and we have stuck to it."

The question was asked:

"You choose your words, I am sure, very carefully. You say no negotiating, but perhaps there have been exploratory talks at some level?"

I replied:

"There has been no talking whatsoever about what is to be a price, if there is to be any price for the giving up of violence or anything of that sort, which is what is alleged, nothing of that kind at all. We have always said that there is to be no bargaining whatsoever with people who espouse, who perpetrate violence, and that's absolutely the case. Nobody on the part of the British Government has done that or anything like it."

I stand by that. I made it perfectly clear what I was replying to, and I stand by that answer. I do not make any apology to the hon. Gentleman or to the House for, as the questioner put it, choosing my words carefully. Of course I was not going to volunteer that there was a channel of communication, which was one whose value has been maintained for, as has been clear, many years—20 years.

Supposing the time were to come when the IRA were to say, however belatedly, that the conflict was over and that they needed advice only as to how it was to be tied up, am I to have supposed that the public would have been better served if there had been no such channel—if there had been no means by which the IRA could send a message? If that is what the hon. Gentleman is saying, I do not think that the House is with him. This stuff about "Of course there have been talks—how could there be a speaking note otherwise?" is a lot of rubbish.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I ask the Secretary of State to take comfort from the fact that the people of Northern Ireland—at least in my constituency, which he knows is roughly half and half Unionist and Nationalist and which genuinely reflects the ordinary people of Northern Ireland—want him to continue the peace process. They do not want him to be deflected by the rituals of the House or the deliberate diversions of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) but to concentrate on the core issue of pursuit of peace.

Alongside that, in parallel to it, are the inter-party talks. I ask the Secretary of State to accelerate those, so that they may run in parallel with the peace initiative. Perhaps at those talks he can advise and, one hopes, convince the members of the Unionist parties that there is nothing—nothing at all—to fear in peace. That would create a new dimension for us all.

I ask the Secretary of State to convey to his right hon. colleague the Prime Minister the fact that a lot rests on his shoulders and that, although the Secretary of State terminated his statement with the words

"The key to peace is in the hands of the IRA",

it is a combination lock and the Prime Minister holds the other key to that process.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know how closely in touch he is with the opinions of his constituents because I visited his constituency with him not long ago. Of course there is a desire for peace and I will not repeat what I have said about that and the qualification that the people of Northern Ireland place upon it.

There is no need to urge me or my right hon. Friend to press on with the political talks. Those are very important and much progress is being made, albeit in a different format from last year. I believe that the hon. Gentleman would acknowledge that the Unionist parties played a valuable part in that process, as he did himself and as did his party, and that much progress was made towards contingent agreement.

I therefore think that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has heard what the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, needs no encouragement in the direction that the hon. Gentleman urged. However, in our search for peace, it is no good looking for a solution to the problems that emanates only from one quarter. It must again be brought to the attention of the House that both Governments, at the end of the Brussels summit on 29 October, said that there could be no question of the Government's accepting and endorsing the report of the Hume-Adams dialogue that had been given to the Taoiseach, although not to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): At the beginning of today, some people in the media were making much of an apparent difference of evidence between the Provisional

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

IRA and the Government. Having seen the evidence and heard the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, people here and outside—in Northern Ireland, in the Republic and in Great Britain—will think that he is to be trusted and supported, and that what he has done is right.

Can I go further and say to those who are not here—the torturers and murderers, and those who make women into widows and children into orphans—that they still have the responsibility, which they appeared to show in February, that they realise that the past 20 years and the 3,000 lives have not got anywhere near their aims, and they will not get near their aims? The sooner they bring an end to violence, get into talks and become constitutional parties, the better it will be for everyone.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The message that my hon. Friend has given to those outside, especially those who use or justify terrorism, is an important one. It comes with great authority because of his record of service in Northern Ireland and continuing interest thereafter. I am grateful for what he said at the beginning of his question. I have watched with admiration his contributions to various programmes, and I am extremely grateful for his support.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): In his statement, the Secretary of State used the terms "Sinn Fein" and "IRA" as though they were interchangeable and simply different faces of the same creature. If that is so, is he treating all the papers that he published today as coming from and being directed at the same organisation? Can he give an assurance that all the papers and contacts, with the reports of the messengers, have been published? Since the roots of this lie further back than February, will he publish all the papers from at least 1990 until the present time?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not propose to accede to the hon. Gentleman's last request. I agree that there is a distinction to be made between Sinn Fein and the IRA. Sinn Fein is a political party. In many instances, members of Sinn Fein are spokespeople for the IRA. But the two organisations are not the same, although there is a substantial overlap.

The bundle of documents that I have published include the messages that we received—they were mostly orally transmitted, as is clear from the beginning—from Martin McGuinness and others. We think it right to characterise that as messages coming from the leadership of the IRA, and replies consequential of the first message in February have been sent through the chain of communication to the same people.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many people will not be surprised, nor wish to have been told, that private indirect communication links have existed for some time? Does he agree that, if eventually we are to get formal negotiations started on the conditions laid down by the Government, the violence should have come to an end? It is almost inconceivable for those negotiations to open without some preliminary discussions of that sort earlier.

Finally, will he tell the House what he meant when he said at the beginning of his statement that the links have existed for some time? Is it true that the links have existed for many years, and if so, how many?

Mr. Molyneaux: About 20 years.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: As the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) saays, the links have existed for some 20 years, and they have shown their value. I recognise what my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said about the great value of the opportunity to pass communications in each direction if we are ever to reach a stage at which negotiations can take place.

I believe that that was rightly expressed in the leading article in *The Sunday Times* yesterday, which said that the time for negotiations has not yet arrived. That time can arrive only when an end of violence has genuinely occurred, but before that, there must be a means by which the two sides can pass messages one to the other, and do it in secret.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does the Secretary of State accept that, following the exchanges that have occurred this afternoon and the publication of documents yesterday, the majority of my constituents in Birmingham will basically say, "Thank God someone was searching for peace"? Searching for peace does not mean that one is soft on terrorism. That has clearly come across this afternoon, and I say thank God for that too.

A couple of weeks ago in my constituency, two local councillors from Northern Ireland told me that the people of Northern Ireland are afraid that the House of Commons is not interested—every time there is a debate or questions asked about Northern Ireland, the benches are green. The exchanges and the attendance this afternoon will signal to the people of Northern Ireland that the House of Commons, while it is not the place to negotiate, wants not peace at any price but peace that is honourably sought by all parties.

If we can still, in the words of one of the leaders in the newspaper this morning, hear the sound of silence of the Armalites for the foreseeable future, will the prospective exploratory meeting that was promised in the November exchange to start the week after we return in January still take place?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I shall deal with the last part first. I am not interested in ceasefires, with their implicit threat of a resumption, unless something is yielded in the meantime. There must be an assertion that violence is at an end, and that must be made perfectly clear.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman says about the need for people in Northern Ireland to believe that the House of Commons is concerned about them. Today, I entirely recognise that it is abundantly clear for all to see the concern that exists. Perhaps I will be forgiven if I go back to what I said towards the end of my statement. I quote:

> "Murder in Northern Ireland is no more tolerable that murder anywhere else in the United Kingdom. We must never lose sight of the fact that it is the terrorists who must answer for the deaths, destruction and misery over the past 25 years."

We must never allow ourselves to become inured to what might sometimes be suspected—that there is a tolerable level of murder and violence. There is no acceptable level of violence. I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about the message that goes forth from the House today.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I see those hon. Members who are standing and I have a note of their names. I ask now for

brisk questions and brisk answers so that I can call all those hon. Members who are currently standing.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I endorse what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House. As a member of the British-Irish parliamentary body, I must say that, far from apologising, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister should be not proud—that is the wrong word—but glad that this has now been revealed through one circumstance or another, because this is the way forward, and the opportunity is great.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend—I entirely accept that he is speaking theoretically at this stage—indicate possibly and putatively what might be the scenario leading to the next stage of possible peace talks developing?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Speaking briskly, that must depend on how the IRA behaves. We have made clear what is an absolute requirement by way of precondition. It is for the IRA to say and show whether that will happen. As to the rest of the question, I believe that what we have said in the bundle of documents provides an answer.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The way forward in Northern Ireland is to ensure that there is trust in our Government within the community, irrespective of which party forms that Government in the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State dismisses too lightly the reality that there is little trust in the Government in Northern Ireland at present.

When people heard him say on that BBC television programme on 16 November that there were no contacts, and then we saw the revelations this weekend, people lost trust and confidence. Younger people then move towards the loyalist paramilitaries. That trend is becoming more dangerous, and should not be ignored by this Parliament. Will the Secretary of State urge the Government to try to restore greater confidence among the majority Unionist community by reaching policy decisions which will gain their support? Secondly, are the Government in contact, through intermediaries or otherwise, with the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association or the Ulster Freedom Fighters?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I note what the hon. Gentleman says about the breakfast programme. I have read the question that I was asked, and the reply that I gave. I am not going to describe the character of the chain of communication, but I am entirely satisfied that what I said was accurate. I believe that I am entirely justified in saying that.

Naturally, I recognise the importance of trust, but that trust would not have taken a turn for the better if it were known that I had quite unnecessarily volunteered the existence of a chain of communication. That chain, at that time, was being used for a process which offered the possibility—it is not for me to say whether it was a probability—of ending the violence which has lasted for 25 years. I would have wantonly destroyed that chain by destroying its secrecy.

I entirely agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of trust. As for contact with the organisations to which the hon. Gentleman referred, the situation is precisely as I have described it. There will be no negotiations with them, and there is no similar chain or channel of communication with them, as has been the case for so long with the leadership of the IRA.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his statement, for which I greatly admire him? Is it not immensely sad that he should be criticised most strongly by those who potentially have the most to gain?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Briskly, I am grateful. Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Why should hon. Members and the public be denied the full information on the peace debate while the Government are secretly negotiating with Sinn Fein? At the same time, the Government are condemning those people such as myself who wanted to urge on the peace process by entering into negotiations with that very body. Is it not time, since the process is now in the open, that the absurd restrictions in which actors mimic the voices of the representatives of Sinn Fein should be removed? Is that a card which the Secretary of State is holding in his negotiations?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have watched the hon. Gentleman pointing his finger at Conservative Members for all the time that we have been in the House together. That does not make more sensible a question that is based upon a false premise, which is that we have been negotiating with Sinn Fein. That is absolutely wrong.

The hon. Gentleman's point about whether the broadcasting restrictions should remain is a separate matter, and that is for the Secretary of State for National Heritage to decide. I will point to out to the hon. Gentleman that much tougher restrictions have been in place in the Republic for longer.

Mr. Winston Churchill (Davyhulme): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members will feel that he and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister have acted with honour and responsibility in the matter? Furthermore, is it not the case that they were quite right to respond as they did to the remarkable message from the IRA of last February? No blame can be attached to them for the fact that they were less than frank with the House in pursuing the initiatives for peace, with which we wish them well.

Given the Government's prompt and fulsome response earlier this year and more recently, is it not clear that the burden of responsibility for the continuation of carnage on both sides of the water rests squarely with the provisional IRA? The IRA could have peace tomorrow if it was to set aside the Armalite and put away the bomb. Is that not the next step on the agenda?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend, of course, is absolutely right, and that is the crucially important point. We are in a democracy, and those people know perfectly well that they cannot get their way by the democratic process. Therefore, they bring bombs and bullets to give force to their argument. They must never be appeased, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am grateful to him for what he has said.

I take issue gently with his assertion that we have been less than frank to the House. We have not volunteered—it would have been wanton to do so—the existence of a secret chain of communication that has a value which is

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

recognised by all hon. Members. That chain would have been destroyed had we volunteered that it was in existence and that it was being used currently for the purposes which the House now knows about.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): The Secretary of State will be aware of the warm reception which he received earlier this year in my constituency. I must say with some regret that many of those people who welcomed him warmly have a deep sense of betrayal and bitterness with regard to the recent disclosures.

Has the Secretary of State, on reflection, been too economical with the truth with regard to the contacts with the IRA and with Sinn Fein? What assurance can he give which would enable me to encourage my constituents to welcome him warmly should he visit us again? Will the Secretary of State restate the conditions under which the meeting that is scheduled for January might go ahead?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman reminds me of the welcome that I received when I went to his constituency. I am glad that some of the welcome was for me. I thought that it was more for the Prime Minister, who was also present. I look forward to visiting his constituency again.

The hon. Gentleman said that I had been economical with the truth. The House will know that he means that I have been dishonest with the people in Northern Ireland. I have not, and it would be better if the hon. Gentleman said so.

Mr. Skinner: He would have been thrown out if he had.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I agree that certain restraints are imposed upon the clarity of the utterances which adhere to Ulster Members. I accept that.

I have already said why I reject that charge. In the light of Madam Speaker's ruling, I am not going to take time to say it all again. Time has elapsed and the offer, which was made in circumstances which were perfectly clear and which were dependent upon a declaration that violence was at an end, no longer stands, because that declaration has not come. If it were to come, the matter would be reopened.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his endeavours in maintaining contact? I agree totally that, had he not done so, it would have been a great dereliction of his duties.

Does he agree that, while the IRA says it wishes to end conflict, those fine words are not matched by fine deeds? Murderous events have happened ever since. Therefore, will he continue with his endeavours to combat terrorism, with all the methods at his command? In whatever develops, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the fact that 65 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland voted for the Union with Great Britain in the previous general election?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend takes such an interest in Northern Ireland matters, and is such a frequent visitor, that she speaks with particular knowledge. She could perhaps slightly increase the strength of her case. I believe that 67 per cent. voted for one of the three parties which support the maintenance of the Union as an act of policy.

Sir James Kilfedder: There are four parties.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon. There are in fact four parties. I am getting into deeper and deeper water.

My hon. Friend speaks with great authority. The fine words, as she put it, of the IRA and the leadership of the IRA have not been matched, and perfectly inexcusable outrages have occurred. That is why I assure my hon. Friend that the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding, with the full support of the Government, will bear down as hard as is possible by all lawful means upon those who resort to violence.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It would have been preferable if the documents had been available to us at an earlier stage so that we could have studied them. However, I have already noticed two points. The document setting out the Government message of 17 July says:

"consideration was being given at the highest level to a far-reaching response."

What was that response, and was it delivered?

Secondly, there is reference to "unauthorised contacts" with Sinn Fein/IRA, in addition to authorised contact. I understand from the briefings given by the Northern Ireland Office to the press that that unauthorised contact included members of MI6, or the Secret Intelligence Service, during 1991 and 1992. Is that the same as the contact that Mr. McGuinness claims that he had with what he called a British Foreign Office official in the spring of 1990?

When did the unauthorised activity by the secret intelligence service begin, when did it end, what measures have been taken to bring the SIS under control, and what disciplinary action has been taken with regard to the officers who engaged in that unauthorised activity?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am not prepared to say more than I said at a press conference in Northern Ireland yesterday, which is that it has come to our notice that there were probably two instances over the past three or so years where unauthorised contact was made by somebody in an official position.

Mr. Peter Robinson: It was authorised.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It was unauthorised by the British Government. Nothing derived from that contact in each instance that affected any message subsequently sent in the manner that I have described to the House by the British Government to the leadership of the IRA. I am not prepared to say any more than that.

As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, a reply to the message of 10 May was not, in the event, sent, for the reasons that are set out in the document of 17 July.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. and learned Friend will be conscious of the deep desire in all parts of the House that his stewardship should be crowned with the success of a just and lasting peace that is not an accommodation of terrorism and that is fully in line with the principles of constitutional democratic government.

In the pursuit of that objective, for which most reasonable people will give him a wide degree of latitude and discretion, can he bear in mind the fact that, time and time again since 1969, successive Secretaries of State have realised that seeking to reduce the alienation of the violent

minority which constitutes the IRA/Sinn Fein should never be sought at the expense of alienating the Loyalist majority in the Province?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend eloquently expresses the hopes of all of us, but it is no good addressing the problem in a way that results in the transferring of violence from one end of the political spectrum to the other. That is what would happen in certain circumstances.

I readily acknowledge the need to reassure those who constitute the greater number of people living in Northern Ireland—those who wish to see the Union within the United Kingdom maintained—that the Government will continue always to stand behind the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. That is the fundamental reassurance they need, and it is one that has been given as authoritatively as possible. It is meant by the Government and every Minister.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Will the Secretary of State explain why he has refused to publish the exchanges between the Government and the Provisional movement in the period before 22 February 1993? In particular, will he give further consideration to whether he should publish the text of any message sent by the British Government immediately before that date?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I can assure the House that the message received in February, which begins the published body of messages, was not one that had been prompted by us or heralded. It would not be right to publish, to however far back I was asked to publish, all the records of the messages sent back and forth by that means of communication. It would not be in the public interest to do so. It might very well encroach upon intelligence matters that, as will be widely understood, should not be published. I shall give further consideration to the matter, but I do not hold out any expectation, or offer any commitment, that I would think it right to do so.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The House has always had a high regard for the integrity and judgment of my right hon. and learned Friend, and that has been clearly reflected this afternoon. Does he agree that the IRA is a criminal organisation, and one involved in the very worst form of crime—murder—and it should be dealt with only on that basis?

Does he also agree that, while it is legitimate to use the democratic process to campaign for a united Ireland, it would be a devastating day for democracy if the idea ever arose that a group that owed its power not to the ballot box but to the bullet could influence the future shape of political and constitutional arrangements?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My hon. Friend is right, and that is at the basis of the defence that is necessary for democracy. It is always expensive to defend democracy, but the country has had some experience of that, and knows that the price is always worth paying. The Provisional IRA resorts to criminal methods and therefore can be characterised as a criminal organisation, and it must never be enabled to influence constitutional development by resorting to violence. In thanks for the kind words with which my hon. Friend began, I bow towards him.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend is pleased to know that I appear to be the last Back Bencher rising to ask him a question in this marathon. Does he accept that it now appears, regrettably, that the whole business, from the first message in February from McGuinness to the statement made this morning by Adams, has been nothing more than a political ploy? There has never been any hope of the IRA giving up violence.

Does he accept that what happened arose entirely from Sinn Fein's desire to make political capital? Does he therefore agree that the extraordinary reaction—the hypercritical and naive reaction—of almost all the press, many politicians and some hon. Members today, criticising the Government, has played into the hands of the IRA, has given Sinn Fein its political capital and is giving comfort to those evil terrorists who are the enemies of the House, the United Kingdom and the people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It may prove to be the case that nothing will come, and that nothing ever would have come, from the message that we received in February. That was not an assumption that was open to us, in duty, to make. There was always hope that it would, but so far that hope has been dashed. It may be that it was nothing more than a political ploy. All must hope that that was not the case. It was not open to us to treat it on that basis.

The concluding part of my hon. Friend's question related to the way in which the Government's response has been addressed. Yesterday, at a press conference in Northern Ireland, I mildly observed that, from the tone of some of the questions addressed to me, it might be thought that it was not the IRA but the Government who had bombed the Shankill.

Points of Order

5.29 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your advice about the responsibility of Ministers to the House for their actions. How can I ensure that the Secretary of State for Scotland takes responsibility for what, in recent days, has been, by any account, a serious scandal reaching right into his office? Today's momentous statement arose directly from a leak to a newspaper yesterday, and it was right and proper that the House should have heard that statement and had the chance to question it, but revelations in Scottish newspapers at the weekend about the existence of certain documents and the statements of the former chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board are in many ways comparable in their seriousness.

It is four weeks since the general manager of the Greater Glasgow health board, the largest health authority—

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman make his point of order to me, please?

Mr. Robertson: The Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for the department that covers the Greater Glasgow health board. It is four weeks since the dismissal of the general manager, but we have not heard a word from the Secretary of State on the matter. It is three weeks since the Scottish Office re-employed the gentleman concerned, yet we have heard nothing. The revelations at the weekend, which as I said are comparable to those that led to the statement today, point directly to the complicity of Scottish Office Ministers in the termination of the employment of the general manager of the Greater Glasgow health board.

Surely hon. Members have a right to hear the Minister who is in charge of that department, who holds high office. There should not be a lengthy period of silence, with no opportunity for hon. Members to learn what events led to these accusations being made.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is aware that I do not give procedural advice across the Floor of the House; nor have I been told that a Minister is seeking to make a statement. The hon. Gentleman might seek the information that he requires from the Table Office. If he comes to see me, I might be able to help him on procedural matters, but I should have thought that he, as a long-standing Member of the House, would be aware of how to proceed with such matters in the House.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last week, the Secretary of State for National Heritage announced changes to the Broadcasting Act 1990 that would allow mergers and takeovers between large ITV companies. Those changes would raise serious issues and would transform the face of ITV. Hon. Members were not given an opportunity to express their views, because the Secretary of State did not make a statement.

I gather that the House will not debate the amending order before the new year. Despite that, Carlton Communications and Central Television announced today, in advance of Parliament discussing and determining the matter, that they will go ahead with their merger. The immortal words of the Carlton spokesman were that they did not feel that there was any need to hang around, because the vote will go through anyway. That is preposterous and unacceptable to the House. I should be grateful if you, Madam Speaker, would express your concern about the matter and tell us what you can do to protect and safeguard the rights of the House.

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Member is aware that an affirmative resolution is required to change the present legal position on mergers between television franchise holders. Talks being held outside do not, of course, affect the rights of the House, and whether a breach of the law has occurred is a matter for the courts. Hon. Members will have an opportunity to debate the matter in due course.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The proposed merger between Carlton and Central Television directly affects every hon. Member who represents a midlands constituency. Central Television is a midlands-owned company, with midlands-owned production facilities. Carlton is a London publishing company; it is not a producer.

Inevitably, genuine fears are being expressed by many people in the midlands that there will be an increase in the job losses that have already occurred among skilled production staff and that there will be no prospect of the midlands being a centre of television excellence because of the inevitable drift to the south, which is the purpose of the break-up of the industry. The consequence of the Secretary of State for National Heritage not having made a statement is that there will be a dribble of different proposed mergers and takeovers between now and Christmas and beyond, with no prospect of proper parliamentary scrutiny.

This matter affects hon. Members on both sides of the House and the many constituents whom we represent, and before the break-up of the regional television structure, which has served Britain well, there should be proper scrutiny of the proposal.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should raise these matters at business questions. He is seeking a statement in the House and answers from the Secretary of State, not an answer from me. I have dealt with the original point of order. He must now pursue the matter at business questions.

Orders of the Day

Sunday Trading Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I ask hon. Members, in the circumstances, to exercise restraint in their speeches. I have allowed an important statement to run so that each hon. Member who wished to ask a question could do so. I now seek hon. Members' co-operation by keeping speeches short so that each hon. Member may be called.

5.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

May I begin by expressing the hope that a day that has so far seen a good measure of agreement across the Floor of the House will continue in that vein—at least for today's stage of the Bill?

The Bill seeks to reform the law governing Sunday trading in England and Wales. This is a matter that touches directly right hon. and hon. Members and their constituents. It arouses passionate interest in the House and beyond. We can look forward to many interesting debates on the Bill as it makes its way through the House.

The Bill is, in many respects, unique. It contains three options for reform—regulation, deregulation and partial deregulation, as proposed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council. It is the essence of the Government's position in presenting the Bill that we shall argue neither for nor against any of the options for reform, although I make no secret of the fact that, as an individual Member of Parliament, I favour deregulation. As a result, I hope to be somewhat briefer in introducing the Bill than is usual.

The origin of the Government's policy lies with the report of the committee of inquiry into proposals to amend the Shops Act 1950, the Auld committee. As is well known, that committee came to the view that no system of regulation would be fair, simple and readily enforceable and the House endorsed the report's findings by a vote of 305 to 185. A Shops Bill was introduced in 1985 to give effect to that report's findings, but it failed to commend itself to the House, despite the fact that it had successfully completed its passage through the other place.

The Government then attempted to find consensus on the way forward—a search that proved ultimately fruitless. There was passionate support for options for reform but there were passionate antagonisms to each of the options, and there was little common ground.

When Parliament rejected the Government's Shops Bill in 1986, it set itself and the Government a rare problem. Few, if any, hon. Members believed that the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act made sense. Most hon. Members, if not all, wanted the muddle over Sunday trading to be resolved, but there was no obvious agreement about what should replace those provisions.

This Bill was devised to unravel that riddle. It does so in a unique way. It presents Parliament with a choice between the leading options for reform. Each option has been drafted by parliamentary counsel. Each reflects the policy aims of the campaigning group that supports it. Parliament can compare and contrast the options and, on a free vote, choose between them.

There is no doubt that reform is needed. Changes in retailing and leisure activities have put pressure on the Shops Act regime. As a result, the Sunday trading provisions of the 1950 Act are well past their sell-by date. Under the Act, milk and cream, including clotted cream, may be sold on Sundays but not dried milk or tinned cream unless it is tinned clotted cream. Fish and chips may be sold at a takeaway outlet other than a fish and chip shop, but fish and chip shops may sell takeaway food other than fish and chips. If Peter Piper was still in the habit of picking a peck of pickled peppers, he could not pick them from a shop on Sunday, although he could pick a peck of fresh peppers if he wanted to.

It is time that that muddle was sorted out. I have written to all hon. Members describing in detail the options for reform. My letter also contains information about general handling matters. The question for the House today is whether it agrees in principle that any one of the three options in the Bill should replace the existing provision on Sunday trading in the 1950 Act. It is not being asked to choose today between the three options for reform.

If the Bill secures a Second Reading, the House will be invited immediately to agree the motion on the Order Paper in my name and the name of my right hon. Friend the Lord President committing clauses 1 and 2 and schedule 4 to a Committee of the whole House. If agreed, that will have the effect, among other things, that clause 1 will be considered on the Floor of the House, ensuring that all hon. Members will be involved in the choice between the options.

So how is that choice to be made? Clause 1 enables the Secretary of State to bring into effect by order any one of the three options for reform. Deregulation would be achieved through repeals to the 1950 Act contained in clause 1. The substance of the other two options is contained in schedules 1 and 2.

Clearly, there will be a full debate in Committee of the whole House on the options' merits. To choose among the options, the Committee will vote on a series of amendments to clause 1, which will remove from clause 1 references to two of the three options for reform. So if any group of amendments secures a majority, clause 1 will be amended to refer to one option only. That option will then be the choice of the House.

The amendments would also remove the order-making power so that the chosen option and the rest of the Bill will ultimately be brought into force in the normal way, not through the affirmative resolution procedure.

It is not a question of which option gets the biggest vote. It is conceivable that only one option will be voted on if that were to secure a majority. Voting against earlier options is the only way in which hon. Members can seek to ensure that they can vote on their favourite option if it comes later in the order. Hon. Members cannot fudge the issue by abstaining in a vote without risking that their preferred option may fail by default.

When the Committee of the whole House has completed consideration of clause 1, the Standing Committee will consider in detail the chosen option and other provisions of the Bill in the normal way. It will also remove those schedules that are no longer introduced by clause 1. Schedule 4, which deals with employment rights, will also be taken in Committee of the whole House.

[Mr. Michael Howard]

The Government will give their supporters a free vote, both in choosing between the options and in dealing with the amendments to the opening provisions of whichever option wins. The Government have made available officials and counsel to the campaigning groups so that their policy aims can be best translated into draft clauses. But the Government neither endorse those policies nor intend to defend those models from attacks by opponents. It is for Parliament to test the options thoroughly. Within reason, the Government will provide time for this important debate to be properly undertaken, but they will not take sides in the debate.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): We all look forward to the opportunity of a free vote on this issue. However, from what the Secretary of State has just said, the order in which the vote on the options is taken is important. How will that be decided, and what does he recommend in relation to the order in which the vote is taken?

Mr. Howard: That is entirely a matter for the Chair. It would not be appropriate for me to make recommendations on such a matter.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the Secretary of State make it clear to the House whether his comments about the Government taking a neutral position throughout the conduct of the debate mean that they will do so throughout the whole debate or just the debate on the three clauses? Will they take a neutral position on all the issues from now until the Bill's accession, or will they wheel in the payroll vote or whip their people on other parts of the Bill?

Mr. Howard: It has never been the Government's position that there will be a free vote on every aspect of the Bill, as I shall now make clear. I should be astonished if that occasioned the hon. Gentleman the slightest surprise.

On the contents of the Bill, clause 1 introduces the three options for reform: deregulation; regulation, proposed jointly by the Keep Sunday Special campaign and the Retailers for Shops Act Reform; and partial deregulation, supported by the Shopping Hours Reform Council. Schedule 1 contains the regulatory model and schedule 2 contains partial deregulation. In brief, deregulation allows any shop to trade on Sundays, as in Scotland; regulation would require most shops to close other than on the four Sundays before Christmas, with exceptions for some types of shops; and partial deregulation would allow all small shops to trade at any hour on Sundays but restrict larger shops to six hours' trading.

Schedule 3 will be needed if either of the options short of deregulation wins Parliament's approval. It continues the special exemption for Jewish traders to trade on Sundays and also provides local authorities with enforcement powers. The rest of the Bill, other than schedule 4, contains technical and consequential provisions.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the principal scandal of the present legislation is the fact that it has been impossible to enforce it evenly and properly? Will he kindly explain how schedule 3 will deal with the problem of enforcement if the House opts for something other than total deregulation?

Mr. Howard: The provisions made for enforcement in schedule 3 are set out clearly, and my hon. Friend may be better qualified than many hon. Members to follow the detail of those provisions. To the extent that any of the three options chosen will be an improvement on the existing legislation, it will facilitate the problem of enforcement. But the greater the number of anomalies and the greater the number of questions that fall to be decided by the courts, the more difficult enforcement will inevitably be.

The Government's aims are straightforward: we want Parliament to choose one of those options and we want that option to reach the statute book. We want the option to work in practice and to command the respect throughout the country which the current regime sadly lacks.

The debate in Committee of the whole House will enable the broad options to be argued for and against, and the Standing Committee will no doubt fine tune whichever option for reform is chosen.

Although, as Home Secretary, I share the Government's view that it is better that the matter be resolved once and for all than that any one option should triumph, as an individual Member I shall vote for deregulation.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The Home Secretary will recall that last week there was criticism from within his Department of the Churches, which were described as being strangely silent about moral and ethical questions facing the country. He will also recall that this morning, in *The Times*, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of Westminster, the Chief Rabbi and the Moderator of the Free Churches gave a moral and ethical lead in arguing, very vocally, that Sundays should remain a special day. Will the Home Secretary reflect on how important it is to family life that the traditional value of people spending Sunday together will be lost if there is total deregulation, which he favours?

Mr. Howard: I treat, as I expect all hon. Members would, the observations of those religious leaders with the greatest respect. But on that matter, I did not find them wholly persuasive. There are many different ways in which family life can be strengthened. There are many ways in which families wish to spend Sundays together. Many families would prefer to spend Sundays shopping together than in pursuit of other activities.

I do not want to dwell on my reasons for supporting deregulation. However, it is noteworthy that Scotland, and some other countries, does not regulate Sunday trading. It would be difficult to argue that that has had any discernible impact on the character of Sunday in Scotland. Family life and church life seem to be as robust north of the border as they are anywhere else in Great Britain.

I believe that the law should intervene only where it serves a justifiable purpose in doing so—where failure to intervene would create a serious mischief. I believe that people should be able to spend Sunday as they wish. Many people want to shop on Sunday. Whether shops should open should be a matter for the conscience of individual shopkeepers and shoppers and not for the courts and criminal law.

I shall turn now to a point that was raised earlier. There is a distinction between the issue of which shops can open on Sundays, which cuts across party lines, and employee

rights. There will be a free vote on the choice between the options, but the Government have a clear employment policy and we shall defend that policy vigorously.

Clause 2 and schedule 4 to the Bill provide additional rights for shopworkers. If the House agrees, they will be considered by Committee of the whole House. The rights will apply whichever of the options for reform is chosen by Parliament.

When the Act comes into force, existing shopworkers will have the right not to be dismissed or suffer detriment through refusing to work on Sunday, and can surrender those rights only by agreeing in writing to work on Sunday. That reflects the fact that existing shopworkers are in a special position. They may have taken employment knowing that they could not be obliged to work on Sunday because, for the most part, the 1950 Act prohibited shops from opening.

I made clear when I published a draft Bill in July that the Government saw no case for making statutory provision for premium or double payment for Sunday shop work. We shall resist vigorously any attempt to introduce into schedule 4 a provision requiring premium or double pay. Such a provision would destroy jobs. Outlets Providing for Everyday Needs, which represents many small traders, has said that such a provision would

"bring death to hundreds of independent grocers and convenience stores."

It is absurd to attempt to establish a common benchmark in an industry where there are 240,000 different retail businesses varying from large multiples with turnovers of £500 million to single outlet retailers.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I have given way to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) once, so I shall give way to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness.

Mr. Hutton: I am grateful to the Home Secretary. My question relates to the impact and range of clause 2 and schedule 4 with which the Home Secretary is dealing. Is it a correct interpretation of the clause and the schedule that existing employees and prospective employees will enjoy a measure of employment protection, but that that employment protection will not be extended to job applicants—those who are seeking employment—and who may be confronted with an employer who says, "You will get employment with me only if you are prepared to work on a Sunday"?

Is that not a loophole in the clause and the schedule with which the Home Secretary should be concerned? If it is right to protect existing and future employees, is it not right also to protect job seekers in the same way?

Mr. Howard: We take the view that it is perfectly reasonable for employers to inquire at the time that employment is offered whether the employee or prospective employee is prepared to work on Sunday. It is possible, as the hon. Gentleman recognises and conceded in his question, for such employees subsequently to give notice that they did not wish to work on Sundays.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. and learned Friend has rightly suggested that the Government will resist an attempt to put premium pay on the face of the Bill, but he will be aware that the major groups that are presently trading on Sunday, which include Asda, Argyll, Tesco, Sainsbury, Boots and Kingfisher, all pay premium pay to their employees on Sundays. Does he agree that that will set the trend for the rest of the market should they open on Sundays?

Mr. Howard: I think that that will have an important influence on rates of pay. My hon. Friend is quite right in his assertion.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. and learned Friend clarify what he has just said, which was that an applicant, once he becomes an employee, could give notice that he did not wish to work on Sundays? Would not a contract have been signed? How will that work?

Mr. Howard: The Bill's provisions, in being statutory provisions, would override any contract and would make it possible for any future employees to give three months' notice that they were not prepared to work on Sundays.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but then I must press on, as I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way, because I hope that he will clarify a number of issues.

The Home Secretary has quite rightly been concerned with the number of people employed, and who are capable of being employed, by small businesses and small shops if there were a statutory duty to pay double or triple time. Is he not aware that many of us have had practical objections by small businesses and shopkeepers in our areas that the advantages now pursued by supermarkets and hypermarkets will put them at further disadvantage if deregulation of the two major sorts goes ahead? Is that not equally an important matter for the threat to their employees and their businesses?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman raises a different point. If he thinks about it, the implication of his point is an admission on his part that many people wish to shop in large stores on Sundays but do not have the opportunity to do so. That is the implication that is at the heart of the question that he has put to me. We think, or I think—I am expressing my personal view and not that of the Government—that if people wish to shop in large stores on Sundays, for the reasons that I gave earlier, people should have that opportunity.

Mr. Foulkes *rose—*

Mr. Howard: No; I must press on.

We believe, too, that a provision enabling all shopworkers to have a right to withdraw from a contractual obligation to work on Sundays is by and large unnecessary. We have received many representations on that matter during the summer. It is quite clear that many hon. Members are concerned that shopworkers may face changes in life that require them to reconsider their agreement to work on Sundays. That is why we have included the provision to which I have just referred, the additional right in schedule 4 to enable any shopworker to opt out of Sunday shop work on giving three months' notice to that effect.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Home Secretary give way on that point?

Mr. Howard: This must be the last time.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, as it is a very important point.

If the House agrees to total deregulation, that will mean that we will get universal opening in Scotland, which we do not have at the moment, contrary to what was said earlier. [Hon. Members: "Why not?"] Because it does not exist south of the border. There are multiples that do not open in Scotland because they do not open south of the border.

Surely the protection in the Bill, whether it be premium payments—and we can argue about that—or, importantly, the right to refuse to work on Sundays, should apply also to Scotland. Will it be possible to amend the Bill in Committee to enable that section to apply to Scotland?

Mr. Howard: The logic of the hon. Gentleman's question totally defeats me, but the answer to his question is no. I will not be the ultimate arbiter of whether an amendment is in order or not, but it is my understanding that it will not be possible to introduce an amendment of that kind to the Bill.

The Bill provides all the materials necessary for Parliament to design a Sunday trading regime to replace the existing muddle. The Government have forgone their privilege of presenting a single-option Bill to serve the wider interest of presenting a Bill that will resolve the Sunday trading issue once and for all.

I also recognise the hard work that the campaigning groups have done and the constructive spirit with which they have engaged in discussions with my officials so that the options in the Bill properly reflect their aims. The Bill owes a great debt to those groups.

This Bill provides Parliament with a unique opportunity to solve a problem that has dogged it for 40 years. Thirty Bills have failed to resolve the Sunday trading tangle. I believe that this Bill could resolve it once and for all. It is up to all hon. Members to ensure that it resolves the issue by choosing one of the options for reform in the Bill which will work and be accepted by the country.

If Parliament fails to make a choice between the options and does not resolve the issue, the country will find that failure difficult to comprehend or to forgive. We shall all have to bear responsibility for that failure. It is in the hope and belief that we shall live up to the responsibilities that are placed upon us that I commend the Bill to the House.

5.59 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): There is, at least, unanimity in the House on one point—the Shops Act 1950 is out of date and must be changed. The question is: what should the nature of the change be? Doubtless, strongly conflicting views will be expressed by hon. Members, and whatever option is chosen will then itself be the subject of amendment and debate.

I intend to offer my personal view of the options later, but I want to concentrate on employment protection. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has said that schedule 4, dealing with employment protection, will be taken on the Floor of the House so that the whole House can debate the issue, attributing to it the significance that it deserves. We would have preferred a free vote on this and on all aspects of the legislation, however.

It is correct to say that the 1950 Act requires change, partly because of the well-known anomalies and partly because the patterns of life and of working life have changed. The vast majority of women of working age work. Fewer women stay in the home full time. The range of products sold by shops has increased dramatically and, similarly, patterns of employment among shop workers have changed.

For the past few years at least, several of the smaller shops and smaller supermarkets have been open on a Sunday. Nevertheless, there has been a strong feeling in the country against turning Sunday into just any other day—and there has been an acknowledgement that, if customers are to enjoy greater freedom to shop, that freedom should not be exercised at the expense of the conditions of employment of shopworkers.

Until now, although there has been consensus on the need for change, there has been no consensus on what form that change should take. Partly because of that and partly for commercial reasons, for the past 18 months the law has been broken by default. Whatever view we take, it is plainly urgent to legislate because it is not right that laws, whether popular or not, should be changed merely by direct action by those to whom they apply.

According to some estimates, as much as 38 per cent. of shop capacity is already open on a Sunday and, according to the latest MORI polls, about 11 million people over the age of 15 have shopped on each of the past four Sundays—not to mention large numbers of people who shop in the DIYs and supermarkets that are illegally trading. Tens of thousands of people are employed in those shops. Indeed, a greater percentage of shopping capacity is open in England on a Sunday than is open in Scotland, even though the restrictions do not apply in the latter area.

Let us be clear about the matter of disagreement. No significant group is asking for limits on Sunday trading anywhere near as restrictive as those in the 1950 Act. The only question is to what extent the law should be liberalised, and on what conditions.

I offer three guiding principles that should inform our debate. First, although it will be and should be for each hon. Member to decide how to vote, I feel personally that it is sensible that our decisions should reflect mainstream public opinion—as far as it can be calculated.

Secondly, the reason why the 1950 Act fell into disrepute was that it sought to make distinctions which were out of date or which could not be logically justified. Whatever distinctions we make, it is important that the legislation be rational, not arbitrary, and capable of enforcement.

Thirdly, we should fully protect the rights of those who work on Sundays in order that we may shop then. For me and for many of my colleagues, employee protection must go hand in hand with the freedom to shop. The two issues are not distinct; such rights are an inalienable part of a better shopping regime. I mentioned that we should take account of public opinion, so I should point out that the view of the public—whatever their ideas about the options—as expressed in poll after poll is that the two issues are inextricably linked.

I understand, of course, that there is always the problem of enforcing in practice rights to protection given in theory. Ultimately, the only cast-iron way to ensure that there is no abuse of employment protection for Sunday workers is to ban Sunday working altogether, but that is not sought by anyone. We are, therefore, left inevitably with the task of

how to legislate for employee protection, while recognising the limits of what legislation can do. It is precisely for those reasons that large numbers of shopworkers want to and do belong to a trade union. That right must be given to every employee to exercise as a matter of free will.

I should like to give my view of the options before returning to employee protection. First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and others who have worked so hard to put these options together. Whatever our disagreements about the options chosen, I believe that my hon. Friend has signally left his mark on the legislation—particularly on the provisions for the protection of shopworkers against exploitation. Such measures and changes as have been included in the legislation, which has changed greatly since its early drafts, are in no small way due to the work of my hon. Friend, of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) and of others.

I agree with many of the motivating ideas behind Keep Sunday Special. I certainly believe that Sunday should be a special day. In fact, many people already work on a Sunday, yet for most people Sunday is a day that is special and apart from any other. In the end, however, my view is that the Keep Sunday Special proposals—although not the sentiments behind them—do not offer us a workable solution. I have arrived at that view with reluctance, but I have concluded that the KSS proposals do not conform to the principles that I have set out: in particular, the distinctions that they make are not capable of legal enforcement.

Mr. Alton: Why not?

Mr. Blair: If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, I will readily give way to him. Each of us makes our own judgment on the proposals before us—

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Just to be clear about this: is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government's carefully thought out proposals, carefully drafted and introduced as a sensible legal option, are not

Mr. Blair: Yes, I am saying that. I do not believe that they are capable of rational, legal enforcement. I do not say that the drafting is wrong; the distinctions that they seek to make are wrong. For example, it is difficult to argue that video shops, but not record or book shops, should be allowed to open on a Sunday or that people can buy car radios from motor accessory shops but cannot buy anything from antique or handicraft shops. It is not logical to be able to buy a power drill but not a suit of clothing. Such distinctions are difficult to make and, in any case, under the KSS proposals the four Sundays before Christmas will enjoy complete deregulation. Such is the problem of trying to marry up the public's desire to shop with the desire to keep Sunday special. My view—I do not seek to impose it on anyone—is that the balance in these proposals is not right.

Mr. Alton: The hon. Gentleman will know that, in the Committee that considered the Shops (Amendment) Bill, which was before the House last year, his hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) extensively put forward the Keep Sunday Special proposals, with the support of hon. Members from both sides of the House. The arguments were aired there, and the majority of the members of the Standing Committee agreed that they were considered, well thought out, practical and enforceable. I urge the hon. Gentleman to look at the *Hansard* transcript of those Committee sittings before categorically stating that those proposals, which have been put before the House, cannot be implemented.

Mr. Blair: I have studied the *Hansard* transcript. In the end, it is a matter of whether one is persuaded. I am not. The danger is that we may replace one set of distinctions that have brought the law into disrepute with another. That is my view; I have given it, and it is for other hon. Members to air their views.

Whatever view one takes of the options, it is important to remember that the options will be discussed and subject to amendment, so it may be that some of the problems will be lessened or cured. Each one of us will have to choose an option, but my option is not that one.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): My hon. Friend makes a very important point. He is an Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson—who attends the Committee stages of many Bills—and surely he is aware that the Government, having proposed a Bill, will sometimes amend it in Committee to the point where it becomes unrecognisable as the Bill that was debated in the House on Second Reading.

My hon. Friend readily admitted that any option offered to the House at this stage could be amended in Committee, and for him to discount any particular option on the basis on which it has been presented is totally wrong and misguided.

Mr. Blair: That is precisely the point that I was making—the options are open to amendment. I am simply expressing my view of the options as they are now.

Mr. Foulkes: I enjoy these free voting arrangements. Will my hon. Friend maintain his support for the option if he does not get his way on workers' protection?

Mr. Blair: I have said that workers' protection is essential. I believe that we will succeed on workers' protection, and I will come to that point in a moment.

There are further considerations to bear in mind. There will inevitably be an impact on the local environment if there is complete deregulation and the large shops have all-day opening. The Auld committee—when it dismissed the problem that there would be an impact on the local environment if all shops were open all day—said that it believed that there was an inevitable trend to move shops out of town. That has not happened to the degree that the committee anticipated. Many very large superstores remain in the centre of towns, and the impact that the proposals will have on the local environment is another matter that we should take into account.

I believe that public have two objectives, which can be summarised as gaining greater freedom to shop and preserving something of the special nature of Sunday as a day of rest and worship. Those two objectives can sometimes come into conflict, and for that reason some limitations on the opening hours of the larger shops would accord with that public sentiment.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about employees' rights, but consumers' rights are long-term as well as short-term. The top four main supermarket food retailers—which are behind total deregulation and the Shopping Hours Reform Council—control 61 per cent. of

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

retailing. Is my hon. Friend not worried that we will get into a situation where the consumer is totally dominated by a small number of companies?

Mr. Blair: I accept that a degree of concentration has occurred, but one cannot ascribe that to Sunday opening. Over a period, many consumers have got into the practice of doing one day of shopping, and they use the supermarket chains to do that. Of course, that can have an impact on small shops, but it a practice that has developed quite apart from Sunday opening.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that small shopkeepers have already been penalised because large retailers are opening? Does he agree that that will cause much more hardship for small shopkeepers in the future?

Mr. Blair: It is a question of balance. People who use large stores do so because that is where they do their entire shopping. They use small shops for something different. If we restrict and shut down the large shops, those who now work in those shops will not get the opportunity to work. It is a balance both ways.

A report was issued by Mr. Deakin and Mr. Wilkinson of the Small Business Research Centre at Cambridge. They found that the majority of those who did not work on a Sunday did not want to do so. They made it clear that most of those who did work, did so for the pay it provided and that there will be many people who want to work on a Sunday and many who will not.

Mr. Deakin and Mr. Wilkinson paid particular attention to the dangers of deregulating without granting employee protection to future as well as existing employees. They showed that some 20 per cent. of current shopworkers had been working for less than two years and 60 per cent. had been working for less than five years. It is vital that we include future employees as well as existing ones in employment protection; otherwise, those refusing to work on a Sunday will simply find themselves replaced by those who are obliged to work. We also have to look carefully at the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) made about those applying for work.

I hope that the Minister, when he winds up, will confirm that schedule 4 will not only protect people from being dismissed for refusing to work on a Sunday but prevent them from suffering any detriment at all in their employment, including to their promotional prospects. The position of employees should be entirely neutral whether or not they wish to work on a Sunday.

We want to see premium rates for Sunday working. The Wages Councils Act 1979 used to specify double time for Sunday working. When the Auld committee looked at the problem some 10 years ago, it advocated deregulation on the basis that employment protection would exist, and on no other basis. Premium pay is supported not only by the partial deregulation option but by the Keep Sunday Special option and the Retailers for Shops Act Reform proposals. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House who have advocated either the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposals or the Keep Sunday Special campaign and RSAR proposals join us in ensuring that employees get the protection that they need in order not to suffer as a result of the introduction of any form of deregulation.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does my hon. Friend agree that if provision for premium payment is not included in the final Bill, many of those who work on Sundays now will be unwilling to work on Sundays? Many of those who work on Sundays do so only because of the premium payments that they can earn. Does my hon. Friend agree that it will be difficult to staff shops that wish to stay open on Sundays, except by force?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is right. The retention of the premium pay element is particularly important—in everyone's interest. As the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) pointed out earlier, many employers are committed to that.

There are elements of agreement between the two sides. It is agreed that certain significant small shops should open on Sundays, that some larger shops should open and that all shops should open for at least four out of the 52 Sundays in the year. There is wide agreement about the need to protect employees. The remaining difference concerns the range and nature of opening hours. That difference covers an important and wide spectrum, but it covers a spectrum: the argument is no longer conducted according to absolutes. No one is arguing for no Sunday opening; not even the Government now argue for no regulation, at least of employees' conditions.

We are searching for a way through the impasse—a method that works, that is capable of being enforced with sense and respect for the law and that treats employees fairly, a method that seeks to balance the public's twin objectives of greater freedom to shop and of keeping Sunday special. We believe that that is possible. The Bill should be given a Second Reading; after that, let us draw up a workable framework for the future on the Floor of the House, where such matters should be decided.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I reinforce Madam Speaker's plea for short speeches? Otherwise, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

6.21 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I warmly welcome the Government's initiative, and their imaginative action in introducing a Bill to enable us to reach a final decision on an issue that has eluded Parliament and the population for decades. Now, it seems to be within shouting distance of determination. I believe that our debates on the Bill can settle the legislative aspect, although they will not necessarily decide the real issue of Sunday trading.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the tremendous amount of helpful work that he has done for all who have sought to integrate their schemes in the overall package of the Bill. He has produced genuinely viable options. One of the really successful aspects of the Bill is the fact that every hon. Member can be confident that whatever option he chooses in the Lobbies will be viable and workable.

In an opinion given to the John Lewis Partnership, Anthony Scrivener, the eminent Queen's counsel, stated:

"There can be no objection to a statute on the grounds that it is elaborate or complicated if it in fact achieves its purpose. In my view there is no reason at all for rejecting this option"—

that is, the Keep Sunday Special/RSAR option—

"on the grounds of interpretation difficulties or difficulties in enforcement."

I emphasise that opinion for the benefit of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr Blair).

Mr Scrivener continued:

"Some of the perceived problems are misconceived: others are simply overstated."

He went on to say:

"Local Authorities, the courts, lawyers and even retailers are well used to having to deal with questions of the application of legislation to their activities and the legislation involves a consideration of definitions. Anyone familiar with food law or consumer law generally is well aware of such problems—they are commonplace. I cannot see any greater problems arising under this Bill than in numerous other existing Statutes which have proved to be effective. Ascertaining the meaning of such terms is common place."

I think that the hon. Member for Sedgefield has underestimated the viability of the Bill as now presented—with the help of the Home Office—in respect of the KSS/RSAR option.

Mr. Sheerman: The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have considerable experience of long hours of debate on Bills, including Criminal Justice Bills. Does he agree that if the criterion for the Sunday Trading Bill were applied to Criminal Justice Bills we would never have passed any? Admittedly, we would all have been relieved of a great burden, but we would never have tackled any of the difficult problems of law and order in our society.

Mr. Alison: I agree that any legislation involving any sort of discrimination—for instance, sex discrimination or immigration legislation—will require complex definitions, which nevertheless are in principle perfectly viable and which in most cases have produced effective legislation. I believe that, with the help of the Home Office team, we have now secured a regulatory option that is fully viable.

I must point out to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that in one sense the Government have slightly overstated the Bill—although, as I have said, I welcome it in principle. They argue that three options exist, but no one is so naive as to believe that. There are two options before us: the regulatory option associated with the Keep Sunday Special campaign and the RSAR, and the full deregulatory option contained in clause 1 of the Bill. Surely no one believes that the two hours per week which separate full deregulation from the option presented by the Shopping Hours Reform Council represent anything more than a fig leaf.

If I have a criticism to make of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, it relates to his use of the term "compromise scheme" to describe the proposals of the SHRC in a letter that he sent to all hon. Members on 19 November. The use of that phrase to define the council's two-hours option is almost disingenuous. It is like a judge passing sentence in court telling the defendant: "I have two options—to set you free, fully and unconditionally, or to sentence you to life imprisonment; I am going to compromise and sentence you to two hours community service." That is not a compromise. It is almost indistinguishable from total liberation and it is an abuse of language to describe it as a compromise.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire) *rose—*

Mr Alison: I am happy to give way to my old Committee sparring partner.

Mr Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend accept that his own proposals represent a compromise option? For instance, he says that the shops specified in that option should be closed because Sunday is a special day. He would argue that it is special because of the nature of people's lives, but also for religious reasons. Yet he then suggests the compromise that the four Sundays running up to Christmas should not fall into that category. Is that not the ultimate compromise?

Mr Alison: I cannot imagine why, but my hon. Friend has suddenly brought religion into the argument. I have certainly not deployed that argument in my speech, and I do not consider compromise relevant to the context of a Bill which distinguishes full deregulation from the very full regulatory scheme that the KSSC and RSAR are trying to introduce. Anything in between could be called a compromise if it were in any meaningful sense a regulatory scheme, but the Shopping Hours Reform Council scheme really is not a compromise and it is an abuse of language to imagine that it is.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I must challenge my right hon. Friend's assertion that the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposals do not constitute a sensible compromise between the other two options. My right hon. Friend ridicules the proposal on the basis of two hours per week—assuming, it would seem, that the shops which will be allowed to open for six hours on Sunday would otherwise be open for eight. Does he accept that, under the Keep Sunday Special proposal, a small food shop—a corner shop or whatever—could open from 6 am until midnight while the big shops would be restricted to six hours? That strikes me as significantly different from complete deregulation, which would allow the big shops to open for those same hours—from 6 am until midnight.

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend must bear in mind the fact that, both under the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposals and under the Keep Sunday Special/RSAR proposals, the small category of small shops to which he referred will be free to open as often as they like and for as long as they like, so in that respect the two schemes are on all fours. The difference lies in the provision for large shops. Under the KSS proposals, large shops will not be able to open except on the four Sundays before Christmas, whereas under the SHRC's liberalising deregulatory proposal they will be able to open, with only a two-hour limitation in respect of normal eight-hour opening hours. Moreover, as soon as the regulatory framework is abandoned, those opening hours will almost certainly expand to the full eight hours.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield argued that it was necessary and desirable to keep Sunday special—even though he would not embrace or advocate the full KSS scheme. He talked about premium pay. He wants a scheme whereby Sunday can be kept special to some extent, with an associated framework of premium pay for those who have to work on Sunday. I ask him to reflect on the necessary argument that the less Sunday is kept special and the more shops open on Sundays, the more impossible it becomes to argue rationally for premium pay.

If we have the full deregulatory framework or the full SHRC framework, with six hours leading in a short space of time to full eight-hour opening, the time will rapidly come when insurance companies, travel agencies, building

[Mr. Alison]

societies, banks, small property and house agencies—any kind of business with a high street presence or deployment—will follow suit. All such business are perfectly free to open now and if the high street is busy on Sunday because all the shops are open, they will open, too.

Why should there not be a progressive development with all forms of employment operating on Sundays? The whole idea of Sunday being a special day will long since have been abandoned in favour of normal retail activity. Why should that not spread to all other forms of employment?

I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will accept that if that happens the case for premium Sunday pay entirely disappears. Sunday will become a day like any other day. Employers do not pay premium pay on Wednesday or Thursday or Friday because some people take their day off on that day. Why should Sunday be a special day? Why should nurses or those in the emergency services get premium pay on a Sunday if it is no longer a special day but a day on which all businesses are open, as will almost certainly be the case once there is a complete free-for-all on the retail side?

I warn the hon. Member for Sedgefield of what is likely to happen by drawing his attention to the phenomenon of Good Friday opening. We have some interesting statistics. In 1976, when the first of a series of analyses and monitoring operations were carried out, 80 per cent. of all retail premises closed on Good Friday—only 20 per cent. of shops opened on Good Friday. By 1986, 10 years later, 40 per cent. of all retail shops opened on Good Friday. Another three years on, in 1989, 60 per cent. of all retail outlets opened on Good Friday. In 1993, 100 per cent. of shops opened on Good Friday.

If we are completely to liberalise all retail trading on Sundays—that applies to the full deregulatory framework as well as to the limited fig leaf of two hours for the major stores—why should the trend not spread to all other forms of employment, in much the same way as Good Friday opening has spread?

Mr. Fabricant: It has not happened in Scotland.

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend says that it has not happened in Scotland. I will come to that point in a moment. I ask the hon. Member for Sedgefield to bear in mind that as the trend develops and the Good Friday pattern is followed, the argument for premium pay on Sunday will disappear. There can be premium pay only if Sunday is a special day, and Sunday will be a special day only if there is a framework of strict limitation on the shops that can open on Sunday. There is only one option that holds out that prospect.

Mr. Blair: I would not normally respond, but the right hon. Gentleman has directed so much of his speech to me that I feel that I should. It is precisely to ensure that we designate Sunday a special day that we argue in favour of premium pay and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will support us when we table amendments on that issue.

Many of the points that the right hon. Gentleman is making could equally be made in relation to his own proposal. The distinctions that he is making have to be justified. He says that we are keeping Sunday special if we tell people that they can buy food in a small shop but not in a large shop. I cannot understand what is his basis for making those distinctions. Unless the basis can be made rational we are in danger of legislating for the same type of folly as we have at the moment.

Mr. Alison: I do not want to bore the House or the hon. Gentleman by cantering over old ground, but I must point out that the essential difference between the options before us is that, under the Keep Sunday Special/RSAR proposals, the very large shops are virtually disbarred from opening—except on the four Sundays before Christmas—and only the smaller shops, as defined in a way that is perfectly statutorily manageable and feasible, will be able to open. A great gulf will be fixed between the great supermarket stores that are taking all the business out of the high street and the town centre and the small businesses that they are putting out of action. The fact that the large stores will be disbarred will be a special feature of Sunday. That is how Sunday will be kept special, as it would not under the full deregulatory option.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) mentioned Scotland. When the John Lewis Partnership carried out a survey in Edinburgh only a few weeks ago, it discovered an interesting phenomenon: 100 per cent. of the large out-of-town supermarkets and very large stores around Edinburgh were opening on the Sunday in question, whereas only 25 per cent. of the Edinburgh city centre shops were open. We are talking about the familiar doughnut with the hole in the middle. All the opening will take place in the large supermarket premises on the perimeters of cities while the small and medium-sized shops—the hole in the doughnut—will be driven out of business.

If there is a restricted regulatory framework in England, the Scots will rapidly seek its help for the problem that is looming in Scotland. The Scottish solution is no solution. I repeat that we need the KSS regulatory framework if Sunday is to be kept special and if there is to be any chance of premium pay retaining effectiveness and reality on the English social and economic scene.

6.39 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): We have been told that the occupant of the Chair will decide when the options are to be called. To avoid any confusion about when the options are to be debated or voted on, may we be told when options 1, 2 and 3 are to be called and in what order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): When I know the date for Committee, I shall be better able to help the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it correct that amendments will have to be tabled in Committee so that hon. Members can choose which options to delete? Someone will have to move those amendments. If the Government table amendments to allow hon. Members to decide, is it not for the Government to decide the order of those amendments? Is it not a procedural fact that the Chairman will have no option but to take them in the order in which they are tabled?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is for the Chair to view all amendments and the Government are free to table whatever amendments they wish. However, we have not yet given the Bill its Second Reading.

Mr. Powell: In view of your last sentence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I shall get on with my speech.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr Blair) for his kind remarks about my efforts and those of my colleagues. I thank the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr Alison) for his efforts and his devotion to trying to change the law on Sunday trading. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield about free votes. Why will there not be a free vote on Second Reading? Conservative Members are on a three-line Whip, but Opposition Members are on a one-liner, which means that we may vote as we please. I hope that for the other debates on the Bill there will be a free vote.

The Home Secretary openly declared that he supports total deregulation. His predecessor, who is now the Chancellor of the Exchequer, is a total deregulator. Above all, the Prime Minister is a total deregulator. Does that mean that we can take heart from the Keep Sunday Special/Retailers for Shops Act Reform group of options, and that we shall be supported by Conservative Members because the Government back total deregulation? I look forward to the result.

Mr. Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend agree that those members of the Cabinet who support total deregulation are going for a double whammy? They hope to get through the Shopping Hours Reform Council proposals, which are the most deregulatory. They will then bring in the Whips to make sure that there are no concessions on Sunday working. As I say, the Government are going for a double whammy, and when the first proposals are concluded we shall not be able to stop them.

Mr. Powell: I agree, but I do not know what my hon. Friend means by a double whammy. Perhaps he will explain it to me later. I accept that the Government may use diversions, especially as they have now declared their intention.

I recall the debate on Sunday trading in 1985-86. At that time the Government had a majority of well over 100 and there was talk in the Chamber and elsewhere of their Bill being pushed through. The Lords agreed to it, and when the Bill returned to this Chamber I was the home affairs Whip. To my amazement, Conservative Members were prepared to vote against the wishes of their Whips and, as a result, the Bill was defeated by 14 votes.

Some of the people who voted against that Bill are still in the House. When we have discussed the matter with some of the new faces, I am sure that the House will once again reject total deregulation and will probably reject partial deregulation. I look forward to the vote on those matters.

Discussions have continued since 1986 and there have been attempts to introduce private Members' Bills. I was fortunate, if one can call it that, to be No. 3 in the ballot immediately after the last election and I chose to promote the Shops (Amendment) Bill. Perhaps it was not a wise move because there was much work involved and there was a good deal of criticism, even from some of my Front-Bench colleagues. They spoke about unacceptable Bills, but there was advice from the Clerks and from the Home Office. I do not know whether the new shop unit was set up deliberately to confuse or to assist the hon. Members who debated my Bill.

On 14 May my Bill hit the rocks. There were a number of reasons for that. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) is in her place, so I shall mention that in Committee on my Bill she tabled 122 amendments, most of which were called. On Friday 14 May she tabled 99 amendments and 30 new clauses. I thank the right hon. Lady for that because it meant that the House could decide whether to have the three options instead of the amendments and the new clauses that she had tabled. On 14 May there was a tremendous amount of support for my option, which was to keep Sunday special.

There is no need for the Government to waste time on the current Bill and there is no need for the three options. On 14 May they could have adopted my Bill. The RASA and Keep Sunday Special proposals provide ample opportunity for reasonable shopping and most of the anomalies in the Shops Act 1950 could be avoided. I console myself with the fact that the Government would not have acted at all on Sunday trading if it had not been for the agitation of those of us who campaigned for a new Act to replace the 1950 Act.

We have always been promised a free vote and the Prime Minister has reiterated that during Prime Minister's Question Time. The Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr Lloyd), who is in his place, also promised a free vote, and on numerous occasions the Home Secretary promised a free vote on every issue. However, we have never been promised a free vote on employment protection. Indeed, it surprised most of us when we found that employment protection was included in the Bill, in any shape or form. Of course, the main reason for its inclusion is the combination of the two options suggested by Keep Sunday Special and the RSAR group.

I ask the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield to look closely at what the Government are offering. They should also read a document dated 26 November that I received today in my post bag. It is a report on Sunday trading and employment protection by S. F. Deakin, a fellow of Peterhouse and lecturer in law at the university of Cambridge, and K. D. Ewing, professor of public law at King's college, university of London. It details why the proposals on employment protection included in the Bill cannot possibly work.

Because of the time factor, I shall refer only briefly to the statement issued by Sainsbury on Tuesday 23 November, which the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) mentioned last week during Home Office questions. An article in *The Independent* stated:

> "J. Sainsbury, one of the country's largest supermarket chains, was at the centre of a Sunday trading storm last night after the leak of a memorandum which warned managers that a willingness to work on Sundays could affect promotion... The memo, from Colin Harvey, retail sales manager, warns that Sunday working will become 'a way of life' if the Sunday Trading Bill succeeds. Mr. Harvey says reluctance to work on Sundays will not affect Sainsbury's assessment of an employee's potential, but he adds: 'Willingness to work on Sundays will obviously be one, although clearly not the only, factor that we have to take into account when making appointments to such stores."

I am sure that that will be the position with all supermarket chains.

I have worked behind a shop counter and as a manager of a shop. I have been a member of USDAW since I was 16—which is one or two years ago! Therefore, I can say quite frankly that there is no way in which we can protect the promotion prospects of workers if they fail to work on Sundays.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Has the hon. Gentleman received the letter dated 24 November

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

from the chairman and chief executive of Sainsbury disowning the employee to whom the hon. Gentleman referred? I wrote to the chairman of Sainsbury, saying,

"Do I take it that you will now be reviewing his career development?"

The two are at odds, so in which one should we put our faith?

Mr. Powell: I agree with the hon. Lady.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I have a memorandum issued by the joint managing director of Sainsbury in an attempt to clarify that very point. I do not wish to bore the House by reading the whole memorandum as I believe all hon. Members have received a copy. The joint managing director said:

"I now wish to state categorically that the Board's policy in this matter is that a manager's willingness to work on Sundays will not be a consideration in making managerial appointments."

Mr. Powell: I must continue with what I have to say, which is even more important than the point made by my hon. Friend.

I was overjoyed when RSAR and Keep Sunday Special agreed to combine their options. I am sure that all hon. Members will be pleased at their attempt to produce a realistic Bill which will be acceptable and workable and which covers the wishes of most hon. Members. I must put on record the fact that the agreement was reached to avoid the House being confused by four options. For some reason the three options that were included in all the options that we discussed for some considerable time overnight became four options.

The RSAR group referred to the four major issues. The first was the size of the shop, which would be between 1,500 and 3,000 sq ft. That was agreed in the Committee on my Bill. The second was the extent to which garden centres should open, which was also agreed in the Committee on my Bill. The third major issue was the question of employment protection. The fourth, which we put to RSAR, was a compromise solution for Sunday opening on four Sundays before Christmas.

When the matter was debated in Committee on my Bill, that fourth issue proved to be a stumbling block. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden tabled an amendment to allow opening on six Sundays before Christmas. The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) tabled an amendment specifying three Sundays before Christmas. I tabled a probing amendment suggesting four Sundays before Christmas. The matter was debated for two hours, and the principle of Sunday opening for four Sundays before Christmas was overwhelmingly established. However, when it came to the vote each and every option was rejected, including that suggested by the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden. That is why the issue was so delicate when we discussed it with the RSAR group. I am glad that opening for four Sundays before Christmas is now one of the options in the Bill.

As the right hon. Member for Selby said, in effect there are only two options, not three. One option is total deregulation—or deregulation that is practically total—and the other is to keep Sunday special as suggested by Keep Sunday Special. Those are the options that are really on offer to the House. If the Government were prepared simply to put those two alternatives before the House, we would know where we were going with the Bill. Insisting on the three options makes matters complicated. Indeed, when the Home Secretary explained the procedure for voting, I wanted to intervene to ask him to repeat what he had said because it was obvious that even he was becoming confused. However, with your direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in all probability we will have some idea of the procedure for voting. I repeat: there should be two options, not three.

We should all remember the protections that the Government have stripped away from trade unionists since 1979. I say to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and to trade union leaders—especially those who have campaigned side by side with Keep Sunday Special since 1976—to examine the debate that eventually led to the abolition of the wages councils. We must also remember the Government's views on the social chapter and their general attitude towards workers' protection. We must then ask ourselves why, at this late hour, they have included schedule 4 to the Bill.

It is the Government's last stand to compensate their financial backers for the hundreds of thousands of pounds that they have paid into Tory party funds. It is a reward for the further sell-out of workers— [Hon. Members: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish. How long will all the promises for worker protection that were forced out of the Government without mention of double-time payments last? How workable is what is on offer? I remind all those who oppose the proposals that it did not take the Government long to abolish wages councils, and it will take them even less time to abolish that which they are promising today.

The major campaign waged by Usdaw is the only option demanding not only full worker protection for those who decline to work Sundays but double time for all hours worked. That is a Keep Sunday Special proposal, which was backed and funded by USDAW until October 19. On 5 May 1993, an USDAW executive council spokesperson, speaking at the union's annual delegate meeting at Blackpool, said:

"I can give this ADM, on behalf of the Executive Council, an absolute assurance that we will go on campaigning, we will go on lobbying, we will go on working with our friends and allies, and we will go on tackling our opponents. This issue is too important for this union to be swept aside by the rantings of the Shopping Hours Reform Council and the profit-only entrepreneurs who have no interest in the trade in the general but interest only in profit in general.

That is why we have spent so much time in the Executive Council statement to ADM looking at the principal proposals for reform that are currently being put forward. Everyone will understand why the Executive Council and this union can have no truck with the Shopping Hours Reform Council. Their proposals are only one small step away from a total free-for-all. The only protection they offer our people is a tinpot code of practice that is not worth the paper it is written on. Some of their own supporters, like Woolworth until recent date, are already trampling over the code of practice in any event. Actually to argue that a code of practice would be useful to shopworkers when one of the main proponents of that policy is in actual fact breaking that code of practice, shows how bankrupt and how sinister that particular offer is.

And there are some deeply suspicious links between the people to run and back the Shopping Hours Reform Council. We have to be concerned that because of the publicity given by this union to their insidious propaganda, and because of our attacks on Tory-orientated Shopping Hours Reform Council officers, they have now tried to buy a Trojan horse into the Labour Party. They have appointed a leading Labour person, Margaret Jay . . .

There are some very good points but also some unresolved problems about the REST proposals. So we intend to develop our relationship with the Keep Sunday Special Campaign, pursue our concerns with them, and we have every confidence that on all

those issues that we see as being of critical importance, provided they embrace the concept of keeping Sunday special, they will give us a favourable hearing."

USDAW's executive council pledged unqualified support for the REST and Keep Sunday Special proposals. I hope that the House understands why I was compelled to make that statement.

Only yesterday, I received a letter from an employee of Woolworth, stating that he was asked by his manager to sign the new terms and conditions of employment for Woolworth's retail staff. They include the sentence:

"You may be required to work evening, Sundays, public holidays or following reasonable notice."

He was unwilling to sign unless he could strike out the reference to Sunday working, and was told that unless he signed he could consider himself dismissed. That is happening before the Bill has received its Second Reading or all the options in respect of the comprehensive employment protection that we have always demanded have been considered.

I doubt that the protection on offer will be acceptable to the House. It is vital that debate is not curtailed. Earlier, the House was, rightly, presented with a long statement on Northern Ireland, but it served to reduce the speeches that right hon. and hon. Members can make to this important debate. Given that, and the number of issues that right hon. and hon. Members want to raise, I shall resume my place—but I had much more to say.

7.6 pm

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): I begin by congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and his colleagues. I know only too well from my own experience of working at the Home Office the long discussions and negotiations that were the forerunner of the Bill. This is the right and proper way to take this contentious matter forward.

I much enjoyed the opportunity to serve on the Committee that considered the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). It was an interesting experience and, for no reason to do with the number of amendments that I tabled, one of the most interesting aspects was the number of concessions that were made—often before amendments came before the Committee. As time went on, we found ourselves in more agreement, due to the concessions made to those of us who opposed the heavy regulatory provisions contained in the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

Interestingly, that debate continues. The proposal that the four Sundays before Christmas should be totally deregulated differs from the hon. Gentleman's Bill. He rightly pointed out that we voted down that proposal, so clearly we are still on shifting sands in respect of the Keep Sunday Special and RSAR proposals. Were that the will of the House, the Committee stage will be most interesting, for I suspect that a number of amendments will necessarily be tabled to try to ease any proposed restrictions.

I took the approach of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) seriously in my own constituency. I not only listened carefully to the views of Churches and constituents, but called a meeting of local retailers only last week. It covered the spectrum of small retailers and large stores, including representatives of large stores that are not in favour of total deregulation. Nevertheless, at the end of that meeting, there was general agreement that close attention should be paid to customers in reaching our conclusions on the Bill.

This evening, I shall make it perfectly plain that I support total deregulation. It is exceedingly important that we make a decision for a Second Reading of the Bill this evening. Otherwise, we will be left with the Shops Act 1950, which most people in the House would agree is not workable in this day and age. Thus, it seems to me that we have to go that far at least.

It is equally important that we should endeavour to put a lasting measure on the statute book, and I have many worries about that. I do not necessarily agree with those people who have said that the issue is confined to two options only. That is a simplistic view. It is tempting to listen to and possibly to accept, but I do not accept it.

It is reasonable for the Government to come forward with a third option, which is not the strict and regulatory proposal from the Keep Sunday Special campaign and Retailers for Shops Act Reform groups, but a proposal for partial deregulation which would at least allow those of my colleagues who have some concerns about the concept of Sunday being different from the rest of the week, to feel easy and at rest with their own views and, at the same time, to take into account the strong arguments that will have been communicated to them by many of their constituents who wish to be able to exercise freedom of choice about whether or not they shop on a Sunday.

Mr. Lord: Is not the truth of the matter that those people who want total deregulation know that they cannot get it through the House of Commons in that form and that therefore partial deregulation, as it is called, has been devised in order for them to get what they want—total deregulation—by another route?

Dame Angela Rumbold: I would prefer to leave that issue to hon. Members, for them to demonstrate their views when we have an opportunity to vote on the options in Committee. I would not wish to predict how people will vote or how they are minded to represent their constituents.

Any measure that the House now puts on to the statute book should be logical and comprehensible, and I mean comprehensible to all the people who have to make it work. Even were we to accept the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), that whatever one puts on to the statute book can be made to work—I would not deny that at any stage—none the less we have an opportunity to exercise some restraint and caution on the subject as a legislative body.

It seems to me that what we put on to the statute book should be as unrestricted as possible, with as simple an approach as possible in terms of interpretation for those people who will be charged with the task of interpretation. Thus, I would argue that a simple measure which allows deregulation on Sunday would be the best option that the House could obtain, simply because it will not involve a large amount of enforcement or interpretation. I understand the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby that that might not be the will of the House. We shall have to see how that goes.

Another general principle that we should consider carefully is enforcement. Should we put a more restrictive option on to the statute book, local authorities will be charged with the responsibility of enforcing that measure. Local authorities have already made it plain that they are

[Dame Angela Rumbold]

not especially happy or content to accept a new responsibility of that nature. They—and I agree with them—have said that they would now feel more comfortable with total deregulation, simply because it will be expensive and onerous for them to enforce and to monitor what would flow from a regulation along the lines of, for example, the Keep Sunday Special option.

Simply and swiftly—because I believe that this is a Second Reading of the principle and not a debate on the various options, so I do not want to get into detailed argument about the various options now—I shall make a few simple points about my reasons for wishing to support the change.

I do not think that it is in debate that there are considerable differences between the 1950s and the 1990s. I have argued that before on the Floor of the House. It is therefore important that we acknowledge that people who live in the country today have totally different aspirations about what happens on Sundays as well as on other days of the week, and also about what they may or may not purchase at any given time in a shop. Many things that people purchase today were not available to them in the 1950s; many facilities are available to them today that were not available to them then.

I think it is a quite sustainable argument that, in some cases, retailers have wrongly offered people the opportunity to exercise their choice. None the less, people have exercised that choice where it has been available to them, and today about two thirds of the population are in favour of the general proposition that there should be an opportunity to shop on Sunday. Every week, at least 5 million people are said to visit a supermarket on Sunday. That is a substantial number, and I suspect that most Members of Parliament would be reluctant to ignore the views and wishes of their constituents to that extent.

A substantial number of people who are employed on a Sunday would be deeply disappointed were the House to make a choice which restricted or limited their opportunities to work. Again, the situation in the 1990s is totally different from that in earlier decades.

In the 1990s, and especially most recently, large numbers of women have found that it has been extremely convenient to work at weekends and to look after their small children during the week. That has been possible for them simply because opportunities have been offered to them in retailing work that were not available to them in the past. Sadly, not all but some of those jobs would not be available were we to impose a stricter regime than currently exists, albeit outside the law. I therefore believe that we have to pay some attention to the wishes and needs of our constituents in terms of how they work and how they obtain their income.

I have already argued that local councils will have to implement and enforce whatever legislation we pass. The more complex that legislation is, the more difficult it is for one to assure oneself, and for local councils to assure themselves, that some shops are not breaching the new legislation. That will inevitably involve cases coming to court for interpretation. There will be a great deal of bureaucracy, and a considerable amount of money will be spent, most of it ending up in the lawyers' pockets—not, I dare say, something that we necessarily ought to wish to see.

My final argument—

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dame Angela Rumbold: I would like to make my final argument, if I may, because I do not want to take up the time of the House.

People argue passionately—and with a great deal of earnest belief, I am sure—that total deregulation would overnight, or perhaps not overnight but over a period, totally change Sunday as we know it. I do not believe that there is any evidence for that assumption. Indeed, we have evidence from north of the border, in Scotland, where there has been total deregulation for a long time, that Sunday is as special there as it is or is not in the southern part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alton: May I draw to the hon. Lady's attention a letter that was sent today by Bishop David Sheppard, the Bishop of Liverpool, who refers to the Scottish experience? He says that the Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland gave evidence to the Home Secretary:

> "It made absolutely clear that they believe that the experiment in Scotland was not a success and was no model to be followed elsewhere."

Dame Angela Rumbold: If that is the belief of the Churches, it is not necessarily the experience of all the people. It is almost impossible to believe the serious and sweeping statement, which we would ultimately expect to hear in the country as a result of total deregulation, that every day of the week is exactly the same, one as another. I do not believe that that will happen, and that people want to change their habits to that extent. I simply believe that what happens at present outside the law would in many senses be much better encapsulated in a total deregulation measure. I do not necessarily think that that would encourage or substantially increase the amount of shopping that would take place as a result.

Certainly, nothing that we will do on this measure will prevent people from going out with their families on Sunday to enjoy themselves at whatever event they wish to take, or prevent them from going to church. Indeed, if we were to talk on a religious basis—the reasons for keeping Sunday special—and bring the Churches into the argument, it is entirely a matter for the Churches to attract a larger number of people to worship, and I wish that were the case. But it still would not prevent people from going beyond that into the world around them and enjoying themselves by either shopping or participating in any other leisure activity.

Thus, I do not see that there is a great argument that, simply by deregulating shopping hours, we will make a specific difference to Sunday. As I said at the beginning—my constituents are well aware of this—I support total deregulation, and I shall argue for it in detail on another occasion.

7.21 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The final point of the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) that Sundays would remain special despite total deregulation was comprehensively answered by the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), who talked about what happened to the special nature of

Good Friday when shopping practices were changed. The right hon. Lady's predictions are less reliable than the lessons of history.

In this debate, one is at some risk of getting bogged down in arguments about anomalies that exist under the present law, or which might exist under putative alternatives, and overlooking the fundamental deep and important question which originally led to Sunday trade being restricted. It reflects not the changes of a few decades, to which the right hon. Lady referred, but the wisdom of at least two millennia—that people need a day of rest for mental, spiritual and physical reasons.

It is not the view only of modern doctors, psychiatrists, personnel managers and many people involved in trade and commerce, and the professions. Throughout the ages, people have shared the view that without rest we cannot enjoy the fruits of our labour. Even the slaves of ancient Egypt and Rome were given a day of rest. If we cannot rest, we no longer work to live but live to work. The trends of the society in which we live have tended to lose sight of that. We have been told that God did not go to a supermarket on the seventh day.

We may ask why we require a common day of rest. To put it simply, in our society it is possible to provide for one. Sunday is a valuable and still powerful social tradition. It is a wise institution. As we all take the same day to rest, we appreciate not only our own rest but that of other people. People who want to shop or work on Sundays believe that they do so for no reason other than convenience, but we must remember that one person's convenience is another's labour; we can become so enamoured of the need for convenience that we forget that a balance must be struck between getting what we want when we want it and having someone provide it for us.

In the light of what the Home Secretary said, I am not confident that that balance will be properly struck. The protections for those employed on Sunday—and some people will always necessarily be employed on Sunday —would be safeguarded if the Bill proceeded through the House in its present form. For all the anomalies that exist, and those that would exist if regulation were retained, some degree of protection for those in employment and those seeking employment in the retail sector would be secured by maintaining the proposals advanced by the Keep Sunday Special organisation and the RSAR.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is a little too trusting if he believes that the interests of workers employed in the retail trade can be secured by transitory assurances from transient Home Secretaries about employment protection. The Home Secretary is committed to total deregulation and has made his preferences abundantly clear not only in this area but in many others. He believes that regulation is an intrusion on private choice and freedom of decision-making and he vigorously resisted the social chapter. It is therefore a little strange to hear the hon. Member for Sedgefield buying the arguments of the Home Secretary with such enthusiasm; it seems a little out of character.

It seems indisputable that the law needs changing. The Shops Act 1950 used concepts similar to the wartime reserved trades to proscribe non-essential trading. Clearly, it was flawed, and it was recognised as such early in its life. The momentum for its reform began almost as soon as it came into force. My research assistant is a bright young man called Charles Cohen whose grandfather was involved in a leading case which became known as the kipper case —the case of Newbury *v.* Cohen (Smoked Salmon) Ltd. in 1956.

In that case, it was held that it would be illegal to sell kippers on a Sunday if they had to be cooked before being eaten but not if cooking was unnecessary. The defence case consisted of a raw kipper sandwich that was presented to the judge. As it was decided that the sandwich was edible, and the clerk of the court enjoyed it, the case was dismissed. Such anomalies will undoubtedly continue wherever one chooses to draw the line. It is a counsel of perfection to imagine that we can produce an anomaly-free law to regulate this area.

Mr. Lord: Is not the hon. Gentleman getting to the nub of the argument there? If we want to keep Sunday special, we can do so even if it is a little difficult. If we do not, we simply wash our hands of it and say that it is impossible to produce such regulations and so the only sensible thing is total deregulation. That is a fallacious argument, and I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Maclennan: I am extremely grateful for the support of the hon. Gentleman. The other argument used by the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden was that many were voting with their feet, and that many millions of people were going to the shops. Certainly, if shops are available and open on Sunday there is no doubt that their convenience is sufficient to attract people.

There are some people for whom the non-availability of shops on Sunday can definitely provide genuine hardship. I acknowledge that. There are numbers of single mothers, for example, who are working on other days and who find it difficult to get to the shops on those days. Those people have genuine problems and genuine needs. We have to strike a balance.

Excluding, for the purposes of the debate, all arguments about religious norms, we must consider where the balance of public interest lies. The argument cannot be confined just to what happens to those shop workers who have to remain in their places to serve those who want the convenience of shopping on Sunday. We must recognise that there are many activities associated with the fact that the shops are open which would also have to multiply. We would expect greater policing and greater shopping inspection to take place. We would also expect, if shops are to become more universally open, much more refuse collection on Sundays.

We would expect also to see a substantial increase in the volume of traffic, and I wish to comment on that. I believe that, on Sunday, people in cities, or people who are trying to leave cities to enjoy a day of leisure and recreation in the countryside, will face increasing unpleasantness. I do not know whether it is expected that public transport will take up the additional traffic engendered by the new Sunday shopping habits following total deregulation, but I doubt it. There will be a sea of cars on the road, and queues will stretch out into the suburbs and the countryside. Of course, there is the option to stay at home, but the quality of life will not be enhanced if that additional traffic is engendered.

Mr. Luff: It is not just the freedom of shoppers that we must bear in mind. The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the freedom of those people on whose lives traffic has a major impact. The hon. Gentleman's words will be particularly welcome to those who live near major supermarkets located in residential areas and who, even if

[Mr. Luff]

they choose to stay at home, will have the imposition of cars and lorries thundering past their homes on not six but seven days a week.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I was drawing attention to those people who perhaps do not want to shop at all but who are not unaffected by the activity of those who do. I was talking also about the balance of convenience.

The nature of Sunday has already changed, in advance of the proposed change of law, so that Sunday is a much less restful day than many who are concerned about the health of the nation would wish.

Mr. Alton: May I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend? Within my constituency, in the Allerton road area, a law-breaking branch of Woolworth's has made life intolerable for those living in the terraced streets alongside. Despite petitions been to Kingfisher, the owners of the chain, no action has been taken. My hon. Friend is right to state that the lives of people who live around the massive supermarkets and hypermarkets could be made miserable.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with my hon. Friend, as is so often the case.

There is a further point. If one is to judge the matter in terms of consumer advantage, one must look at more than just the availability of goods on a counter on a particular day of the week. One must look at the long-term effect of shopping and retailing patterns.

From the avalanche of briefings that have landed on my desk from shops of varying sizes, I have observed that no one expects the proposal to have a neutral effect on the shops. It is clear that most of those in the retail business consider the volume of trade to be constant. The proposal will mean a rearrangement of the business between the companies concerned.

Most of those concerned about the matter believe that total deregulation, or deregulation of the type advocated by the Shopping Hours Reform Council, would result in some loss of that total volume to the small businesses because small shops tend to provide what might be regarded as goods which it is necessary to acquire, including things which may be needed in the event of a medical or other emergency on a Sunday. Changes in those trends would be highly disadvantageous. I cannot in conscience vote for a measure which will damage small corner shops, which shops are at some risk of being lost in any event because of the trends in shopping habits.

It is not just the smaller shops which expect that their market share would be adversely affected by the proposed changes. The multiples, which provide a great deal of liveliness in the centres of the shopping districts of our towns and cities, also believe that. I hold no brief for any particular type of shop—I believe that they all have something to offer—but one cannot suggest that the impact of the proposed change would be neutral.

One has to acknowledge that firms such as the John Lewis Partnership have been profoundly sensible about the prospects for their businesses if the changes were made. I noticed that one statement from the group said:

"In the event of deregulation, the public would end up paying more for their retail service to cover the additional costs incurred. And since Sunday would in time become one of the two busiest days of the week, shops that wished to remain closed would do so only at a cost. We should have to reckon that we would, against our will, be obliged to open on Sundays; not necessarily everywhere, not at once, but pretty generally in due course."

The additional cost of shopping is certainly a factor that one would want to take into account. It is not something that manifests itself under the present anomalous law because the shops have to bear in mind the prices available in other shops, but that becomes less true if one sector of the market vastly increases its market share.

I listened to the Home Secretary's speech and I would have greatly enjoyed it if he had felt able to give a more personal view about the matter. He was absolutely candid about his headline view of total deregulation legislation, but what led him to that position? Whether he felt that he was defending consumer interests, or whether he was defending the principle of the free market for seven days a week was less clear.

Mr. Howard: Surely the hon. Gentleman would not want to put a false antithesis before the House. The free market is the best protection for the consumer.

Mr. Maclennan: The Home Secretary has confirmed his reputation as a man who deals in slogans. That intervention was quite helpful. I know that he and his colleagues intend to have a bonfire of regulations and we all look forward to the impact of that on consumer safety, on consumer standards and on many of the other measures passed, with the protection of the consumer in mind, by his Government and Governments of very different hues.

The Minister whose views on this most closely agree with mine is of equal or perhaps of even greater seniority than the Home Secretary—the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay of Clashfern. He and his wife happen to be constituents of mine and he has viewed those matters with great wisdom—the wisdom of ages. I share his judgment that it would be folly for England and Wales to follow the path of Scotland.

It is a misrepresentation to suggest that we would be moving to the Scottish pattern if we legislated in the manner recommended by the Home Secretary. Shopping patterns in Scotland are very different from those in England. Only 25 per cent. of the shops in Scotland are open on Sunday, under a legal regime, whereas even today, under the existing laws, some 38 per cent. of the shops in England and Wales are open on a Sunday. A London economist has predicted that 65 per cent. of English and Welsh food retailers would open in a completely deregulated Sunday market.

There are several reasons for the differences. First, Scotland is much less densely populated and the incidence of car ownership is lower, which means that shopping involves greater travel and expense and thus there is much less convenience, relatively, in Sunday shopping. There is much higher church attendance on Sunday and there is apparently more emphasis on family life on Sundays. I cannot account for that difference of practice, but it is recognisable and the law must be judged against that background.

The large multiples do not have a significant presence in Scotland while they dominate the scene in England. There are 651 hypermarkets in England and Wales and only 49 in Scotland. Scottish retailers face relatively lower fixed costs, most notably the cost of property, but relatively higher marginal costs, in energy and wages, than in England, which means that longer hours are less profitable.

Costs would rise notably for retailers if they had to maintain shop opening seven days a week. Costs will not be reduced by the need to make premium payments to those who work on Sundays. They are more likely to be taken account of in rising prices for those who shop, so even on the narrow question of consumer interest the case for an extension of shopping hours on Sundays does not seem to be made.

Having said that, I do not put forward the alternative as the last word in sense. It is a patent compromise. It does not rest on an absolute principle. It is impossible to defend a proposal that advocates four open shopping Sundays before Christmas as founded on a solid bedrock of principle. It is a compromise designed to meet the interests of the groups involved—which have applied themselves most carefully to the problem—around which we can find it easy to unite.

Whatever we may do with the Bill, it will not become like the laws of the Medes and the Persians. It will not necessarily remain unchanged for another 40 or 50 years. It can be amended to take account of changing social attitudes and economic practices. It seems to me good enough for today and certainly a great deal better for today than the free-for-all that has the support of the Home Secretary.

7.44 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I warmly welcome the Bill. For too long the anomalies of the Shops Act 1950 have been allowed to create confusion. I do not intend to debate the generalities of Sunday trading. I am mindful of Madam Speaker's plea for brief speeches, so I shall restrict myself to one issue—what will happen to garden centres as a result of the Bill in whichever form it becomes law.

I represent a constituency with a long horticultural history. I am chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench horticulture committee, and I also have the honour to be the parliamentary consultant for the Horticultural Trades Association.

The law allows garden centres to open on Sunday for the sale of certain specified gardening goods. There is no doubt about the importance that trading on a Sunday has for garden centres, both large and small. The annual turnover of horticultural retailing between the years 1991 and 1992 was some £800 million, of which 40 per cent. was earned on Sundays. That means that Sunday trading was worth some £320 million to the industry in those years. That not only represents a significant amount of economic activity but creates many thousands of jobs for people who actively seek to work on a Sunday through their own free choice.

As garden centres have grown in number and popularity from the 1970s, they have developed into a wholly different entity. They have become a leisure venue for many people. The range of products that they sell has expanded greatly and now include such items as pottery, books, pet food, and—important at the moment—Christmas decorations.

By selling that wider range of goods, many garden centres are breaking the law, but many local authorities have turned a blind eye to the sale of goods unauthorised under the 1950 Act. However, some have acted to prevent certain garden centres from trading to their full potential on Sundays. I think that everyone believes that garden centres should open on Sundays. I have had many conversations with the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) on that point and I believe that we are agreed on it.

What people find hard to accept is why items that they have come to expect garden centres to sell should be on sale for six days in the week but not on the seventh. It all seems artificially restrictive, especially as Sunday is the day when most people visit garden centres. It is important that, with the Bill, we sort out the situation once and for all.

The millions of people who visit garden centres each Sunday, and the thousands who work in them, need to be reassured that what they do, they do legitimately. The legislation that we introduce must be sufficiently comprehensive and flexible to accommodate current and future anomalies. I am concerned that one of the options —regulation—will adversely affect many larger garden centres and lead to great practical difficulties. Garden centre shops would have to be arranged not according to what is best from a commercial point of view but rather to meet the administrative needs resulting from the necessity to cordon off certain goods each Sunday. That is an unnecessary restriction on their trade at a time when we are trying to reduce burdens on our businesses.

The House will select its preferred option, but no matter which the House chooses, there are three specific technical issues relating to garden centres that I would wish to be addressed. It is important to recognise that a number of businesses such as garden centres have been trading legitimately on Sundays for many years. They have adopted trading practices that best suit their business. Any new legislation should not adversely affect such companies. If it did, that would be a retrograde step. Even those options that are viewed as deregulation for many shops may lead to more regulation for garden centres.

I have three concerns about extra regulation on garden centres. The first relates to restrictions on the hours of opening. Garden centres have a seasonal trade. The vast majority of their income is earned between Easter and June, when people are actively gardening. It is vital that, during those few months, garden centres seize every opportunity to maximise their income. They need to trade in as many daylight hours as possible. A restriction to six or eight hours on a Sunday—normally the busiest day of their week—would damage the industry. The busy months are counterbalanced by months such as January and February when trade is slack and there is less pressure to open for such long hours. The proposal to permit opening hours should be flexible enough to reflect the fact that certain businesses are seasonal and need to open for longer on certain Sundays.

My second concern is about the paying of premium wages for Sunday working. Under current legislation, most garden centres already open on Sundays, and have done so for many years. Staff recruitment has always been on the basis that the business operates seven days a week and that there will need to be some Sunday working. That is reflected in the wages and conditions offered to staff when they are employed. Therefore, the garden centre industry has already built into its system premium wages for Sunday working.

Profits at garden centres will not support the imposition of compulsory double time and time off in lieu of Sunday working. Introducing that for garden centres that have operated successfully on Sundays for many years would be

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a retrograde step and would inflict unnecessary extra costs. Rather than encouraging Sunday opening, in many instances it might force closure.

Mr. Miller: The hon. Lady said that garden centres have built the equivalent of premium rates into their terms and conditions, which—I hope that I am not putting words in her mouth—reflect a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. What are average earnings in the garden centre industry, and how do they compare with those of the other shops that have been referred to in the debate?

Mrs. Roe: I am not able to give the hon. Gentleman that detail because there is quite a lot of part-time work in garden centres. I shall provide him with the information, which I think he will find supports my point.

The final issue that I want to raise relates to the one that I have just mentioned. Provisions for opting out of Sunday working will also damage garden centres, which for many years have operated a successful system of employing staff to work on Sundays. Garden centres are normally small businesses that employ a few staff. Unlike larger retailers, they simply do not have the flexibility to cope with such a provision within a small operating team.

I do not think that there is much objection among the garden centre industry to giving existing staff the single opportunity to opt out on the passing of the Bill, but to allow the option to run indefinitely could certainly wreck managers' ability to plan and run their businesses efficiently.

I hope that the House will consider ensuring that small businesses are not penalised by being burdened by regulations appropriate to larger companies but inappropriate to smaller ones. I welcome the opportunity to consider the issue of Sunday trading, but I urge the House to ensure that we do not burden smaller businesses such as garden centres with more regulation at a time when the ethos of Government is to move towards deregulation.

Companies that have been successfully trading legitimately on Sundays should not be forced to close as a result of new regulations introduced under the Bill.

7.54 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I begin with a word, across the Floor, of appreciation to the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison). It was both helpful to the House and very timely for him to quote the lucid and incisive opinion of Anthony Scrivener QC, a distinguished former chairman of the Bar Council, on one of the options provided in the Bill. As the right hon. Gentleman said, Anthony Scrivener effectively demolished the claim that the Keep Sunday Special/Retailers for Shops Act Reform option presents any particular difficulties of interpretation or enforcement. Anyone who still believes that fallacious claim should hasten to read Anthony Scrivener's compellingly persuasive opinion.

One hon. Member has so far declared an interest in the debate and I want to inform the House of mine. I have the honour to be sponsored by the Co-operative Movement. In declaring that interest, I declare also my pride in being sponsored by a movement whose traditions are among the most admirable this country has to offer. The Co-operative Movement will celebrate its 150th anniversary next year and, as the anniversary approaches, I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House will congratulate the movement on its achievements worldwide. There are now 700 million co-operators across the world.

Today's debate is not mainly about how, but whether we should amend the Sunday trading law. It is not about the options for change the Bill offers, but whether we should proceed at all to amend the Shops Act 1950. The Bill offers the means of tackling a mess that gets messier every week and, for my part, I am in no doubt that we should amend the Act providing adequate safeguards for working people can be secured.

We should amend the Act in a way that respects the special nature of Sunday while allowing a reasonable range of activities to be pursued. I entirely agree with the letter in *The Times* today from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Chief Rabbi and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, and I offer no apology for making further reference to their letter. They write:

> "Commercial pressures already loom large enough in our society. Sunday affords space for the nurture of other values, pursuits and dimensions . . . we believe that the spiritual, psychological and physical health of our nation would be poorer if there were no longer one common day in the week which was substantially different from the rest."

I also agree with the Bishop of Manchester, who says in a letter I received from him today:

> "One person's freedom to shop means another person's obligation to work. Even if the legislation proposes safeguards against Sunday working, the creation of a commercial climate in which Sunday trading becomes a competitive necessity will mean unbearable pressure on individuals and organisations."

However, my principal reason for intervening on Second Reading is to comment very briefly on the deeply serious effects of illegal Sunday trading on law and order policies. Over recent years, a growing number of major companies have decided blatantly to ignore the Shops Act. There are people who believe that, but for the BBC's public service broadcasting role—such is the huge advertising revenue these companies dispose of—there would have been scant if any media coverage of their malfeasance. They have acted, and persist in acting, in straight defiance of the law. They have taken the law into their own hands by trading illegally, and make not the merest apology for law-breaking on a massive scale. They have been even luckier than Roger Levitt.

Their conduct debases the law and is grossly contemptuous of Parliament at a time when the Government say that law and order is their priority of priorities. The public reaction is that there is one law for the rich private multiple and another for their poor consumers, who may buy illegally but must not shoplift from the law-breaking retailer—even on a Sunday. How can parliamentarians, in any part of this House, who make the law and work to uphold the rule of law by discouraging crime, even think of condoning law breaking by major companies on the present scale?

What the Home Secretary must tell us unequivocally today is that, whichever option for reforming the Shops Act 1950 is approved by the House, it will be very strictly enforced. Otherwise, shall we not be wasting our time in debating the options in the Bill? We need to know also whether the Government have sought any undertaking from powerful law-breaking traders, such as Sainsbury and Safeway, that their stores will not open in defiance of the law if the joint KSS/RSAR option is approved by this House. Has any such undertaking been sought? That

question is of crucial importance to hon. and right hon. Members on both sides of the House and must be answered by the end of this debate.

Allegations in *The Sunday Times* of "price co-ordination" by Sainsbury, Safeway and others, and their attempts to stop the American cut-price food store, Costco, from opening in Thurrock, show how determined these chains are either to break the law or to buy access to it beyond the means of others, whenever it serves to protect or increase their market share. The only way to make them respect and obey the law is to introduce a system of fines for illegal trading that will make sure that crime does not pay. We should also deal firmly now with companies that obtained planning permission on the strict condition that they would not trade on Sundays and have since broken their undertakings.

In December 1992, the European Court of Justice made it clear that the British Parliament was free to legislate as it saw fit on the issue of Sunday trading. This decision was endorsed by the House of Lords in March this year when B and Q's claim that the Shops Acts 1950 was in breach of European law was firmly rejected. That decision makes it crystal clear that it is for this Parliament, not the big multiples or the European Court, to determine the law on Sunday trading, and for Ministers accountable to this Parliament to enforce what we determine.

Again, I most strongly emphasise that law and order is a fundamentally important issue in this debate. Not only is the Government's credibility at stake but also the reputation and respect for the authority of this House.

8.3 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and I echo his point about law and order. On Sunday trading, it seems as though there has been one rule for the big multiples and another for other people. We in the Conservative party are now making law and order a big issue, as we should, and this issue highlights the point. It would be a travesty if the major retailers were allowed to bully the House into changing legislation. That would set a bad precedent.

The Conservative party has coined the slogan "back to basics", with which I very much agree. What could be more basic than the traditional British Sunday? Keeping our Sunday as a different day of the week is essential for all sorts of reasons. We may not have time to go into all those reasons tonight, but we all know what we mean when we talk about the importance of keeping Sunday as a different day of the week. For some people it is a day for religion and going to church, and for others it is a day for family life or simply a day that breaks the rhythm of the week and gives people time to think and to rest from their ordinary labours.

Hon. Members may demand further definitions of Sunday and may nitpick about what we mean by a "traditional Sunday" but, if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we all know what we are talking about. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said that Sunday was not a new day of the week and that for the past 2,000 years, we had had such a break in our working week to rest and refresh ourselves. It is crucial that Britain keeps Sunday special.

The point that I wish to make strongly on Second Reading is that we shall have to choose between two separate options. The water has been muddied, accidentally or deliberately, by the third option of six hours' trading, described as "partial deregulation". My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) destroyed the idea that that could be a sensible, intelligent compromise. That option is no such thing; it is a fig leaf for total deregulation.

The House has before it two options: first, a framework to preserve our Sundays and, secondly, deregulation in one form or another. How can six hours' trading, from 10 am to 4 pm, which many big supermarkets enjoy now on Sundays, be described as a compromise? Those are the hours that they want to open and the hours that they will get if we are daft enough to fool ourselves into believing that that is a sensible compromise. So let us have no wishy-washy arguments about the matter. Either we want regulation to look after Sundays or we want deregulation in some form.

I have no doubt that if we decide to keep our Sundays special and to frame that in legislation it will be difficult to do so. A massive amount of effort has now gone into that attempt. I was lucky enough to be a member of the Standing Committee on the Shops (Amendment) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). We had a difficult time trying to thrash out a compromise that would work, but it can be done, and it has been done. No one who believes in keeping Sunday special can be entirely happy with our compromise. However, if one believes that it is worth marking Sunday out as different from a working day and if one wants regulations to do that, some compromises must be made. It is difficult to do, but not impossible.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who said that enforcement was impossible. Those who argue that enforcement is impossible and say that that is why they want total deregulation either fool themselves or have other reasons for putting forward that argument. They really want total deregulation and are using the argument that the other regulations cannot be enforced to support their position. I believe that a framework will be difficult but not impossible. If it is worth having, it is worth working for.

Although, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland said, whatever we decide is unlikely to be perfect, no legislation is perfect. A good example of how it is possible to distort legislation if one wants to do so is the argument that we often hear about girlie magazines and the Bible. Those who want to joke about the possibility of making enforceable regulations say that it is ridiculous that one can buy a girlie magazine but not a Bible on a Sunday. That is true. However, the people who framed the legislation said that one could buy newspapers but not books, for many other reasons, on a Sunday, and that is not stupid. The fact remains that a girlie magazine is a newspaper and a Bible is a book. That is how the argument can be stretched to its most ridiculous extent. That is the kind of argument that those opposed to keeping Sunday special are using to put forward their case and it is quite ridiculous.

I must make the point—it has been made more than once this evening—about the dominance of the large retailers. There is no doubt that if we have total deregulation on Sundays, the large supermarkets will grow at the expense of the smaller corner shops. Nobody denies that. Is not that a strange thing to be doing when times are difficult and when our smaller shops are struggling, while

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our large grocery retailers are one of the few sections of industry turning in massive and record profits? There is something rather strange about that balance. It is stranger still that when profits are so huge, the large retailers should want even more trading at the expense of the smaller shops, which will undoubtedly suffer.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) has said that we are no longer in the 1950s and that we are now in the 1990s. That is patently obvious and true. But some people would suggest that in terms of standards and the way in which we run our national life, the 1950s were not so bad in many areas, and that perhaps we should look backwards to some of those standards to see whether we have gone wrong on our way from the 1950s to the 1990s. I do not suggest that we should look backwards or that we should in any way be hidebound about such things, but I suggest that we may be wrong in thinking that we are always right in terms of deregulation and letting retail business in particular do exactly what it wants to do.

The supporters of Keep Sunday Special are often described as killjoys. That is nonsense, because more shops will be able to open under the proposed regulations than in the past. That is not entirely a false impression. If the regulatory system proposed by KSS comes about, we shall have open things that used to be open before all the lawbreaking started, plus sensible additions such as garden centres and DIY stores. The four Sundays before Christmas have already been mentioned. We need sensible regulations to keep Sunday a different day of the week.

We should think carefully before we finally pass total deregulation measures through the House of Commons. If we do that, it will be an irreversible decision. Having done that—having cast off all the regulations to allow Sunday to become just another day of the week—we shall never be able to put the clock back. I believe that we shall look back with sadness, and possibly with shame, in the years to come. I wonder what future generations will think about what we in the House of Commons have done. Most countries have some form of regulation. What a sad statement by our nation it would be if we consigned all our regulations for Sunday to the dustbin and the history books.

I started by talking about the slogan "back to basics". I believe very much that that is what we should be doing as a country. What better place to start than by preserving the basic traditions of the British Sunday?

8.12 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I believe that we are here this evening to discuss the general case for reform. That is what I would like to concentrate on.

As we all know, the present Shops Act goes back to 1950. It was largely a consolidating measure, based on original legislation that goes back to 1936. It fails to recognise the huge social changes in the way that we shop and work.

When the 1950 Act was passed, I was still a small baby. My mother did not work, and had the time to do the shopping every day. Forty-three years on, as a working mother of three teenage children, it would be quite impossible for me to meet my family's shopping needs on a daily basis.

That change in working and shopping patterns has not just happened overnight. It has been a gradual change as more women have sought paid work outside the home—some voluntarily and some forced to by necessity.

But for whatever reasons those changes have occurred, the fact is that they have occurred. The Shops Act 1950 is now out of date, unworkable and virtually impossible for local authorities to enforce. In 1950, there were no DIY shops, video shops or rental centres, and, I suspect, few if any supermarkets—certainly none on the scale that we have today.

In 1950, shops sold a relatively limited range of goods. It may have been possible then to believe that Sunday shopping could be regulated by a list of goods. But by doing so, the legislation has produced a list of test cases such as whether a kipper is a meal or refreshment, or whether marzipan and toffee apples are confectionery. If legislation based on the type of goods sold threw up anomalies in the 1950s, clearly it was bound to produce more and more as patterns of work and shopping, and indeed of retailing, have changed.

The list pretty well now stretches into infinity. One can sell fresh vegetables but not frozen; bottled water but not fruit juice; gin but not baby milk; cigarettes but not fresh meat. One can even sell mule fodder on a Sunday—it is specifically mentioned in the 1950 Act. I do not suppose that there is much demand for that these days.

It is a scandal that such a nonsensical piece of legislation should have been allowed to remain on the statute book for so long. It is important to remember that it is not Parliament that has to enforce it, but long-suffering local authorities up and down the country, with trading standards officers forced, probably, to work on a Sunday to ensure that no shopkeeper tries to boost his takings by attempting to sell the odd bag of frozen peas.

It is no wonder that the Association of District Councils, of which I have the honour of being vice-president, has said that securing a change to the Shops Act was one of its most important objectives. It went on to say that the overriding concern of district councils was being saddled with the onerous responsibility for a piece of legislation that has proved very difficult and costly to enforce.

Seldom has a statute been so frequently and regularly challenged. It does not enjoy the confidence of business, local authorities or the public, and is now almost untenable. Reform should be brought forward as soon as possible.

Although I know that we shall be dealing with various options in the Bill at a later stage, it is important to point out that the ADC would not wish the anomalies of the 1950 Act, which have been exploited with such vigour and ingenuity, to be replaced with a new set. The law must make entirely clear, without ambiguity, those shops that are permitted to open and those that are not.

For local authorities, the cost of enforcement will largely depend on the complexity of the model. The cost of enforcing the regulatory models will increase depending on the number of restrictions. Those hon. Members—from the Opposition or from Government—who care about local government will, I am sure, bear that in mind should they be tempted by the KSS-RSAR option, for behind the smiling and welcoming faces of Mr. Michael Schluter and

Marks and Spencer lies the reality of a situation that could prove to be as confusing and anomalous as the one that we seek to reform today.

I return to the case for reform. There are two rather special groups around whom the whole debate should revolve—the consumer and the shopworker. The most convincing case for change is that it is what people want. Polls over the past 10 years have shown consistent majority support by 2:1 for Sunday trading. A 1991 Gallup poll found that 44 per cent. of people wanted food supermarkets open; 43 per cent. DIY shops; 43 per cent. convenience stores; 37 per cent. garden centres; and between 20 and 30 per cent. for video, clothes, and book and record stores. How many of those even existed in 1950?

Mr. Sheerman: Did my hon. Friend see the very watchable "To Play The King", which is a serial on Sunday evening? There was an interesting part, which perhaps my hon. Friend should have watched carefully, where the character Sarah promised the Prime Minister that she could arrange any result he liked from any opinion poll that he liked to give her.

Ms Anderson: I cannot comment, because I did not happen to see the programme in question.

Mr. Fabricant: Is the hon. Lady aware that the television programme "To Play the King" is fiction? Is she aware that she is describing reality?

Ms Anderson: I could not possibly comment.

Many families find that the only day when they can go shopping together is Sunday. If the House will indulge me, I would like to read out a letter that I received only the other day from two constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Marsh, who live in Darwen, Lancashire:

"Dear Ms Anderson,

We strongly support Sunday shopping because we are busy working parents with two small children, and Sunday is the only day we can buy our weekly shopping and our children's needs, like nappies etc. It is also a very enjoyable day out for us which would otherwise be boring."

As the shopworkers' union USDAW has said, while we must all deplore lawbreaking in any form, we must also recognise that illegal Sunday trading has been taking place largely unchecked and on an increasingly widespread basis.

Large numbers of consumers have become accustomed to being able to shop freely on a Sunday. It would be difficult for Parliament now to legislate significantly to obstruct or curtail that activity, much less reverse it. Moreover, large numbers of retail employees have become used to working on Sundays. Many of them will have taken on financial commitments on the strength of the income that their Sunday working generates. It is simply not feasible for Parliament to deny such opportunities to working people, many of whom have come to rely on their Sunday earnings.

Only sensible reform of the 1950 Act can guarantee the continuation of these opportunities for working people. I believe that a new consensus has emerged on Sunday shopping—a consensus that crosses political party boundaries and embraces consumers, trade unions and local authorities. It is a consensus to which Members of this House must, and I hope will, respond tonight.

8.21 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am delighted to have caught the Chair's eye during this historic debate, for I have worked for 10 years since first I entered this House for reform of the outdated and ludicrous Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on introducing this Bill today.

Through two private Members' Bills, drafted for me by the Shopping Hours Reform Council, and recently as chairman of the all-party group for shopping hours reform, I have sought to bring sense to the present untenable situation. In so doing, I have tried to respond to the very first request—nay, demand—put to me by my local district council, Gillingham borough council, 10 years ago, when it exhorted me to sort out the Sunday trading mess.

That early instruction from Gillingham council mirrored the frustration felt by councillors and council officers throughout the country as they recognised their inability to perform their statutory task of enforcing the 1950 Act. They recognise that the Act has become irrelevant and is widely flouted by otherwise law-abiding citizens.

The shortcomings of the 1950 Act, itself a consolidation measure, have long been recognised. The anomalies are legendary; my right hon. and learned Friend mentioned some which have led to extraordinary court cases. I will not weary the House by repeating them, but it is worth noting that the option put up by the KSS and the RSAR merger would actually perpetuate some of those very anomalies.

For instance, a shop whose main trade was selling pornographic magazines could open, but a shop selling bibles and religious tracts could not, even if located in a church. A tobacconist could not open, but smokers' requisites could be sold from newsagents and convenience stores as long as they did not form too large a share of the business.

Large DIY shops could sell fire extinguishers for use in cars but not for use in the home. An art gallery could sell local scenes but not abstract art—unless the pictures were given local names. Programmes could be sold in concert halls, but not recordings of the works played. This seems a perpetuation of the sort of nonsense that has plagued us for 40 years.

I believe that the simple thrust for reform comes from the fact that the 1950 Act was designed to protect workers who did not want to work on Sundays, but in circumstances wholly different from today's. Only 26 per cent. of married women wanted to, or did, work in 1950. Now, 70 per cent. of them go to work, although most are still the main shoppers in the family. In 1950, few people had refrigerators, and almost none had a deep freeze. Shopping was therefore necessarily done several times a week.

Today, because most people have fridges and many families have freezers, shopping has become a once-a-week trip, frequently on a Saturday or Sunday because the principal shopper works during the week. Even the relaxation of the strict terms of the 1950 Act governing tourism related to the family seaside holiday of yesteryear, taken during the summer at a traditional resort. No account is taken of today's trend towards short breaks in non-traditional locations.

In 1950, shopworkers were almost all employed full time in small, single-commodity shops, many of which served a small catchment area of people who did not have

[Mr. James Couchman]

cars, whose income came into the household in the form of a weekly wage, and who therefore shopped frequently for modest purchases from several shops. The butcher, the baker, the grocer, the greengrocer, the sweetshop and the ironmonger were all likely to be small, owner-run shops with one or two shop assistants.

Today, many shopworkers are part-time employees working for only a fraction of the opening hours of large, multi-commodity supermarkets serving wide catchment areas in which live people who mostly arrive by car and who, being paid monthly, fill their trolleys with a variety of purchases at considerable cost.

In short, the 1950 Act is riddled with anomalies, irrelevant to today's employment, irksome to today's life style and impossible to enforce. I cannot believe that any hon. Member does not accept the urgent need to reform the Sunday trading provisions of the Act, if only to clarify the law and restore obedience to it. Each of us must be uncomfortable with a statute that has fallen into such disrepute.

An estimated 150,000 shops open on Sunday, almost all of them selling some goods prohibited by the 1950 Act. Those shops serve more than half the population—25 million people—regularly and at least once a month, and more than a quarter of the population every week. So shopping on Sunday is clearly popular. It follows that reforming the outdated law on Sunday shopping is likely to be popular too, and opinion polls confirm that large majorities favour reform—and not just reform, but liberal reform to allow more shops to open.

Although the House is today debating whether the Sunday trading provisions of the 1950 Act should be reformed without specifying the form that that reform should take, it is impossible not to consider what form it should take, or at least what the essential qualities of any reform should be. The perceptive analysis of the Bill offered by Queen's counsel—by David Vaughan, John Samuels, Gerald Barling, Nicholas Davidson—and by David Anderson for solicitors Hepherd Winstanley and Pugh seems to me to lay down an excellent set of parameters for successful reform.

First, is the reform morally acceptable: does it accord with the views of right-thinking persons? Is the reform socially desirable and acceptable? Will the reform prove to be durable? Is the reform territorially coherent? Will it remove or perpetuate the differences in trading law in different parts of the United Kingdom? Is the law likely to be regarded as economically fair to shopowners and shopworkers, full and part-time? Is the proposed reform logical and comprehensible to the citizen? Shopkeepers and shoppers do not want to have to consult a lawyer to discover what can and cannot be sold on a Sunday.

Is the proposed law easy to interpret? It is essential that any reform leads to a law that is easy for courts and local authorities to apply consistently. The past two years of confusion over the 1950 Act should warn us against passing a new law that could be bedevilled by as much controversy as the one being reformed.

Will the new law be treated with general respect? It is evident to all that the present law is widely disregarded and flouted. Whichever of the three options for reform that Parliament chooses to support, it must satisfy these questions positively for that reform to stand the test of time.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman honestly think that those questions have been adequately answered by this proposed legislation? For example, it omits Scotland. The scope of the Bill has been tightened to such an extent that there can be no amendments to it. It does not apply to Northern Ireland, yet I understand that one of the questions posed by the hon. Gentleman related to the United Kingdom. More specifically, when he refers to "right-thinking people", is it right to go against the Maker's instructions? Would it be possible to carry any insurance cover were we to break the instructions of the Maker?

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—I can refer to him as such, because he is a friend—for that intervention. I am not going to swap biblical quotations with him. The Bill contains sensible and reasonable proposals. If either the total or partial deregulation option were to find favour with the House, I would like to see it applied to the whole of the United Kingdom, although in Scotland it would be unnecessary. I would also like to see it applied to Northern Ireland, although I know that the hon. Gentleman would resist that.

The Sunday trading provisions of the 1950 Act have had a troubled history, and it would be a tragedy if the House chose an option which failed to command popular support. In that event, it would be a matter of weeks or months before pressure began to build up for a fresh reform that did appeal to the public.

Whatever reform Parliament chooses needs to be easy to apply. Local authorities and courts should not have too great a burden put upon them by the new law—there are more important tasks for them to undertake. In the event of infringement, penalties should not be disproportionate. At least one of the options proposed contemplates penalties which could bankrupt all but the largest retailers. That is quite unrealistic, and immediately throws that option into question.

That option fails to answer many of the other questions that I asked a few moments ago, and depends for its foundation on a series of 56 exemptions to a total ban, leaves me believing that Parliament has a duty to reform the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950—not by placing a new set of vexatious restrictions on the freedom of a willing seller and a willing buyer to do business on a Sunday, but by seeking to legitimise the present position. Either the total deregulation or the partial deregulation envisaged by the Shopping Hours Reform Council would fulfil that aspiration.

The public have, over the past two years, become used to being able to shop on Sundays. I believe that we cannot put the genie back in the bottle, and I shall be consistent and support the partial deregulation of the Shopping Hours Reform Council—an option which I believe will preserve the specialness of Sunday without imposing restrictions which are massively unpopular and which would catalyse contention and possible court action.

I will be in good company. I am encouraged by a letter from the deputy general secretary of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, Mr. Bill Connor, dated 23 November 1993, in which he says:

"First, on the question of trading hours and the options for reform which the Government is presenting to Parliament, we are

urging all Members of Parliament to vote in favour of option 2, which would basically permit all small shops to open on a Sunday and all larger ones to open for up to six hours."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I wonder whether USDAW has taken into account the fact that many shops will clearly be unlikely to observe the restrictions placed on them by the law. I have a letter from W. H. Smith:

"It is now certain that the Centre will be open for the last three Sundays before Christmas from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm.

In view of this I feel it is important to give you warning that you will be required to work all three Sundays . . . If, in the final resort, you are asked to work, you must."

That is when the law says that they cannot work. What are they going to do when the law says that they can but that there has to be some protection? What happens then.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend is wrong; there is currently no protection. This Bill envisages bringing in the sort of protection that will make it illegal for that firm to put that onerous burden on its workers who do not want to work on Sunday. She has totally missed the point.

I know that other hon. Members would like to speak. I will enthusiastically support the Second Reading of the Bill tonight. I look forward to supporting the partial deregulation option when the House debates clause 1 in Committee in the near future.

8.34 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It has been a great pleasure to participate in this debate. It is not often that one gets the chance to intervene on political friends and foe alike and to enjoy the freedom of the Back Benches. The way in which the debate has developed has been most instructive.

I have to declare an interest in this matter. I am sponsored by the Co-operative party—that is something that I am very proud of, as is my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchetster, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)—there is no financial bond involved in my voting for or against this measure. There is no whip on this matter in the Co-operative party; I am my own person on this issue.

I have long been in favour of Sunday trading reform. Like all the other speakers in the debate, I think that the Sunday trading laws are outdated and nonsense and that they need to be updated and changed.

I will take a slightly different tack from many of the points which have been made and which do not need repeating. This debate on Sunday trading is important, not only because of the specific issue before the House but because it begs some interesting questions about the way in which we organise our democracy and run our Parliament.

I have always believed in a measure of reform, and my constituents have consistently said to me that they want to be able to go to DIY centres, garden centres and small shops. That is my position on this matter and I shall support that option when we vote.

I have not had very many, what I call, free and independent spirits writing to me. We have all received letters, dictated by a manager, which say, "I must write to say that I am in favour of Sunday trading, otherwise the manager will be very displeased with me." There have been lots of those letters. None of us has been fooled by the endless requests made by the nice man or woman at the checkout who asks, "Will you sign our petition?" Following the great British tradition of good manners, people sign the petitions and do not think much about them. I do not think that they are worth the paper they are printed on. The petitions are well organised, but they all come from one direction.

I have had five genuine letters about Sunday trading. Let us get it into proportion. Some hon. Members would suggest that the whole world is demonstrating to be able to shop on Sundays. That is total nonsense and a myth. But why do we get the feeling that there is a great deal of activity and interest out there? I think it is because certain people are organising a campaign.

Mr. Fabricant: Does the hon. Gentleman not think that much of the interest might exist because 25 million people shop on Sundays? Are they not the ones who are showing an interest?

Mr. Sheerman: If I develop my argument, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied by the way in which I answer his point.

Many Opposition speakers have tried to define the essence of Sunday, although it is impossible to quantify. It is valuable to think in terms of the regenerative nature of a Sunday. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the shadow Home Secretary, should bear firmly in mind the fact that it is a very important day, the one day in the week for ordinary people to relax, to regenerate their spirit. That is meant in some slightly mystical way, not a religious way. It is a day for people to take a break from the traumas and pressures of other days. In that respect, both my hon. Friend and I have been involved in home affairs, and I think that the restful and recuperative nature of Sunday keeps the crime rate down.

I do not think that it is a simple case of retailers breaking the law; that is a disgraceful example. It should not be suggested that household names such as Sainsbury have been breaking the law ruthlessly for the sake of their profits. A quieter voice, however, suggests that if people are not allowed some rest—some opportunity to stay together as a family and to relax on one day a week—there will be a knock-on effect on criminality, and on the general way in which people face life.

Ms Janet Anderson: Do not some families regard shopping as a relaxation? If I can go shopping on a Sunday, my family go to help me. It is a much more pleasureable activity than shopping alone on a weekday.

Mr. Sheerman: I appreciate that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: May I answer one question before I begin on another?

I wonder what these people are doing. They must be working extremely hard if they cannot shop on a Saturday. When I return to my flat in the Barbican, I can go across to the local Safeway, which is open until 8 pm. An enormous amount of shopping time is now available. However, I do not want to pursue that point now; I want to return to the nature of consumerism.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) ever tried to shop with two small boys below counter height and a shopping bag in each hand? It is impossible to hold the children, who are off around the next corner before you can say knife. That is not my idea of relaxation.

Mr. Sheerman: I have been shopping with my four children, and have found it enjoyable. In that regard, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen. Not being a very modern man, I simply let them run riot; I think that it is the shop proprietor's responsibility to call them to order.

Some people object to the fact that most of our holidays have traditionally been driven by religion. Holidays followed the Church timetable, which itself followed the pattern of the seasons. A spiritual, agrarian tradition decided when we worked and when we rested. I accept that holidays—rightly—now follow a different pattern and have a different tone, reflecting the modern urban realities of the late 20th century, in which few people are tied to the land by occupation and far fewer would describe themselves as active members of any religion or creed.

I suggest, however, that a new religion now holds sway in Britain. Its name is consumerism. It is preached by its high priests, the successful retail bosses—the chairmen and chief executives of the big retail chains, the David Sainsburys of the high street. Those new high priests have a great deal of power.

In Britain, retailing power lies in the hands of a select few—a point that I have tried to bring to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield. That is more true of us than of any of our European neighbours or American counterparts. In food retailing alone, five companies control a massive share of the total market. The top three—Sainsbury, Tesco and Safeway—together account for more than 50 per cent. of the retail food market; the top four account for 61 per cent. Is that what we want, in terms of retailing diversity? I do not believe so. I believe that Sunday trading will increase the power of those few retailers and will be very damaging to society.

In any other society and under any other Government, that degree of power and that share of the market—the inflated profit margins and the lack of competition—would have led to accusations of monopoly, followed by investigation and a curb on at least the worst excesses of such market domination. In Britain, however, retail power has been allowed to grow to terrifying proportions. Increasingly, the retail monopolists are eager to win friends in government and other political parties and to influence political decision making. To achieve their aims, they have in turn aided and financed a huge expansion in the world of the political lobbyist: the lobbying of parliamentarians, civil servants, regulators in Europe and those in the United Kingdom has reached an unprecedented scale.

Any hon. Member present now would honestly admit that we have not seen such a movement in the political lobby during the time in which we have been in Parliament. A small group of monopoly retailers, ever hungry for higher profit and in the single-minded pursuit of increased market share, decided some time ago to launch an overall strategy. Let us picture the scene. They could afford the best—all the top lawyers, the posters, the public relations and the lobbyists. All were invited to talk about thow the market share of particular companies could be expanded. It was decided, as one of the strategies, that they must be able to use their fixed capital as often as possible, and that, over the next two or three years, they must target the ability to trade on Sundays.

Some of my hon. Friends have suggested that tens of thousands of pounds are involved. When the research into the campaign has been completed, it will be proved that millions are involved. Which Member of Parliament has not been inundated with glossy leaflets and telephone calls, and asked to participate in lavish entertainment? Champagne, oysters and caviare were available; it was only necessary to go along to Sainsbury, Tesco and Safeway and join in their campaigns.

Some of our opponents may laugh, but it is true, and there is a serious message behind it. Millions of pounds have been spent on persuading Members of Parliament to change their minds—on persuading them that the British people want not a peaceful Sunday, but a retailing Sunday.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for one hon. Member to accuse others of being corrupt—of being open to bribes of caviare offered in an attempt to make us think that we should vote in a particular way?

Madam Deputy Speaker I think that the hon. Gentleman is taking this a little too seriously.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) knows, as the House knows, that that kind of pressure—that kind of entertainment—does not work with independent-minded Members of Parliament. That is why those who organise it will not succeed in changing the law and giving it a non-regulatory framework.

The first piece of advice that the experts offered their paymasters was that, to be successful, the whole campaign should be fought in the name of the consumer and should purport to come from a genuine desire of the part of the British public not only to shop till they drop, but to do it on Sundays as well. During the campaign, intolerable pressure has been exerted on Members of Parliament by the band of monopoly retailers, through their lobbyists.

I believe, however, that some good may come of this. I believe that, after the debate is over and when we win our preferred option, an analysis will be made of what has gone on over the past two years. I think that there will be a general call for an examination of the political lobbying techniques that have been used over the period. I also believe that there will be a heightened awareness of what is going on in our democracy when large retailers—or interests with large amounts to spend—can mount a campaign of the size and power of the one that we have seen over the past weeks and months. Some good will come out of this campaign, but I tell the House most seriously that I believe that that is the only good that will come from it.

The issues in the debate are clear. I am sure that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members will support the Second Reading of the Bill. However, I beg the House to adopt a careful approach to the subsequent vote on the two choices. I agree with my hon. Friends on both sides of the House that there are only two choices. A characteristic of the campaign has been that the experts—the spin doctors—have said, "You must make yourselves look as though you are in the centre—as though yours is the compromise position." It was because of that that we saw the emergence of the total deregulation lobby, which I regard as absolutely phoney. Then we had the RSAR and Keep Sunday Special and—nicely positioned, as it thought—the Shopping Hours Reform Council.

By good footwork, we have marred the SHRC's ability to present its position as the compromise position. The genuine compromise on Sunday trading is the compromise that we offer, which would allow people to choose to shop

in DIY stores, garden centres and small shops. If that alternative is not chosen, we will see the end of Sunday as we know it—and, as has been said, we are talking not just about Sunday being special but about Sunday being precious. Once we have got rid of Sunday as we know it, it will never come back. We shall not have an oppportunity to debate a motion to the effect that we should bring back Sunday.

My hon. Friends and I and, on this issue, my good friends on the other side of the House are making common cause tonight because we want not only to highlight what is going on in British politics today but to take this opportunity to show the British public—our constituents, who have a view on the matter—that we are not beguiled by the big lobbyists or persuaded, as the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire suggested, by lavish entertainment. We owe our constituents our judgment, and our judgment must be that we want to keep Sunday special and we want to keep it precious. We owe that duty to our constituents, and when the options are voted on, next week or the week after, we will win the day.

8.52 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I must start by reminding the House that I have an interest, which is declared in the Register of Members' Interests, as a consultant to the Dixon group of companies.

I suspect that an analysis of today's *Hansard* will show that by far the longest speeches in the debate have been those made by the proponents of the Keep Sunday Special proposals. What one can read into that I do not know—unless it is that it takes longer to make a difficult case.

Before I deal with specific points, I want to refer to a peripheral matter which might, none the less, form the basis of an important sequel to this debate. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister is to wind up the debate because the matter to which I refer falls within his remit. I refer to the absurdities and anomalies in relation to Sunday betting under the betting, gaming and lotteries legislation.

My hon. Friend knows of my great interest in the racing industry. He will be aware that, earlier this year, the previous Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), gave the all-party committee on Racing and Bloodstock an undertaking that, once the Sunday trading issue had been resolved, he would seek to bring into line and liberalise the betting, gaming and lotteries legislation as it applies to Sundays. I hope that my hon. Friend will confirm that that remains his position and that, once this matter has been resolved—as I am sure that we all wish it to be—he will fulfil that undertaking.

The issue of Sunday trading gives rise to strong emotions, and we have heard some of them expressed this evening. There are strong feelings on both sides. Unlike the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I have been inundated with what I believe to be genuine letters on both sides of the argument in which strong points have been made.

In seeking to reform Sunday trading we must start with two fundamental criteria: first, we must be as fair as possible; and, secondly, any legislation must be enforceable. The latter point has been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the argument, but I shall refer to it again in a moment.

I started from the position that I wanted to keep Sunday special. That is a policy that I still maintain. I will not undertake political engagements on a Sunday because I value Sunday as the one day in the week that I spend with my family. I think that that is important, but I question whether I have the right or responsibility to impose my position on others. The position that I adopted was a matter of personal choice. I do not pretend to be a regular churchgoer—I am not—but Sunday is the one day of the week that I keep for myself.

Initially therefore, I looked at the KSS proposals in a favourable light—not least because KSS is based in Cambridge, in the constituency immediately adjoining my own. The more I looked at those proposals, the more I came to believe that they did not constitute the right way forward.

There are only two ways of regulating Sunday trading—if, that is, it is to be regulated at all. One can define the type of shop that can open or the type of product that can be sold, or one can specify the number of hours for which a shop can open. I emphasise that type of shop and type of product are closely related. The existing legislation is based on the products that may be sold; the KSS proposals refer to types of shop, but they are defined by the type of product that can be sold in those shops.

Many hon. Members have accused the large shops of breaking the law—and that has been a theme of many of the letters that I have received—but, in reality, virtually every shop that is open on Sundays is breaking the law. Any shop may open if it does not sell anything. That is how the law is framed at present—the type of product that can be sold is the basis of the existing legislation. Virtually every shop that is open on Sundays sells goods which, strictly speaking, are prohibited. We must be clear that it is not just the big shops that are breaking the law, although they are certainly breaking the letter of the law.

Part of the reason why the existing law has fallen into disrepute is that the definition of products in the 1950 Act is completely out of date. First, many of the products now on offer in shops had not even been dreamt of in 1950 and, secondly, people's behaviour and shopping habits and lifestyles have changed dramatically since then.

The type of shop approach—the KSS approach—gives rise to risks identical to those that have already completely destroyed the basis of the existing legislation. The KSS approach would create a lawyers' paradise. Take for example, the DIY shops. At present, the provision refers specifically to goods on sale which are

"wholly or mainly . . . Material and tools suitable for use in the construction, repair or decoration of the structure of dwellings."

I undertake a good deal of do-it-yourself work in my home and regularly visit the local DIY shop. Such shops sell tools, materials, hardware, tiles, lamps, lightshades, outdoor chairs, barbecue units, curtains and all manner of electrical items, because almost anything nowadays can be electrically operated.

How does one define those items? When an item is invented to help the DIY person, will it be classified as a DIY item? Who will decide? Such a decision will ultimately require case law. The Bill's provisions will be extremely difficult to enforce and ultra expensive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) spoke about the report containing the joint opinion of four QCs and David Anderson. They referred to the term "domestic cleaning materials" which also occurs in the Bill. They state:

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"Does it mean items reqired for the cleaning of the house and fittings and fixtures or does it extend to general cleaning in or about the house and thus include soaps, powders and liquids for the washing of dishes or clothes as opposed to those for the cleaning of floors and baths? Does it extend to brushes, dusters, mops and other items used in the process of domestic cleaning?" That is an example of how the law would quickly fall into the disrepute that attaches to the present law.

What happens if the DIY shop starts to stock more electrical items, either those that are currently available or those that may soon be invented? Beyond the lamps, lights and tools, it may stock camcorders and built-in ovens. Who can say that a built-in oven is not part of the structure of a building? Such items still fall within the defined primary activity.

Near my home but not in my constituency, in a small area in Newmarket adjoining a shared car park, there is a major DIY shop and a major store owned by Eastern Electricity. It is incredible that on a Sunday one can enter the DIY shop to buy electrical items while the Eastern Electricity store will be closed. That is not fair in anybody's judgment and it has to be addressed.

In terms of fairness, how do we define the principal activity? A small activity in a large store which does not hinder the principal activity argument may be the principal activity in a smaller store. I question the fairness of saying that one store can open to sell a particular product while another cannot. I used the example of purchasing curtains. Why should I be able to buy curtains in a big DIY store and not be able to buy them in a high street shop that specialises in curtains and other soft furnishings and furniture?

I understand the desire to protect Sunday trading and small shops. I represent a large rural constituency and to me village shops matter a great deal. My life has been spent in villages and in trying to defend their interests. However, I do not accept the argument that more liberal Sunday trading would destroy village shops. Such shops face immense pressures: the very existence of supermarkets has damaged them considerably. Our shopping behaviour has affected them dramatically and, dare I say it, rating valuation and the penal business rates levied on some village shops and post offices have had an effect.

In its report, the Rural Development Commission concluded that the best way to help is to improve competitiveness and commercial viability. The rural pressure group ACRE concluded that Sunday opening was not a key factor in the changes already affecting the whole question of the future of small shops.

Another aspect of Sunday trading relates to the workers who are involved. I welcome the White Paper changes on worker protection, which are entirely sensible. Many people who advocate the restrictive measures option in the Bill are applying double standards. We all accept that people in the emergency services work on Sundays, we expect them to do so, but how many of those who write to me pressing for keeping Sunday special appreciate that many other people work on Sundays?

A recent survey estimated that some 40 per cent. of the work force work regularly on Sundays. That applies not only to those in the emergency services but to people in the media—television and the press—although perhaps we do not worry too much about them. What about our electricity supply industry? People expect the television and the lights to work on a Sunday. The gas supply for heating and cooking and the water supply are all expected to operate. We forget that many factories work a seven-day rota shift and that for many people Sunday is part of the working pattern. One of the oldest industries in the world, the farming industry, has Sunday as a natural part of its working pattern.

All those are people who work regularly on Sundays. It is not something relatively unique to shopworkers; indeed, we could almost argue that it is the shopworkers who are unique in never having to work on Sundays, as the law stands.

I am a little concerned about complete deregulation, which would give the wrong signals about an end to Sunday as a particular day. That is why I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham, intend to support the proposals which were described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) as a minor compromise but which I believe to be a significant compromise between the two extremes. That compromise will retain a degree of regulation that is both enforceable and reasonably fair to everybody.

9.5 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I must tell the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) that I have not experienced the flood of public opinion to which he referred, with people knocking on my door or writing to me demanding the right to shop on Sundays. I have received 101 unsolicited letters on the issue, 78 of which were from people who supported either the Keep Sunday Special option or the RSAR option. Twenty came from people who supported the SHRC proposal, a large number of those being from employees writing on company notepaper. I received three letters from constituents urging me to support total deregulation.

I recognise that many people find it convenient to shop on Sundays, and do so. If that were not the case, none of the shops would open. However, I do not get the feeling that for those people it is a critical, life-or-death issue. It is not something about which they feel strongly enough to write to their Members of Parliament. I have not felt under any pressure from the public to support the deregulation of Sunday shopping.

However, I have felt under some pressure from managers of the companies in the SHRC group. I recently had a meeting, which it kindly organised, with the York managers of all the stores in the group. Perhaps the final factor that tilted me in favour of the RSAR proposal was that one of the managers of a large food superstore in my constituency, from within the SHRC group, said that if I did not support its proposal he would tell all his Sunday workers that I was putting them out of a job. I regret that threat. I realise that Sunday work is important to those workers, but the work of the draper's assistant, the shoemender's assistant and those in the small Spar store or corner shop are equally important.

Research shows quite clearly that if large stores open on a Sunday there will be a net loss of jobs in retailing. As a Member of Parliament, I cannot support one group of retail workers against another—I have to support the interests of all.

Mr. Couchman: If the hon. Gentleman supports the RSAR-KSS option, he is supporting one group of workers

against another. He is supporting the employees of small shopkeepers against the employees of large shopkeepers. He is being partial.

Mr. Bayley: Yes, I accept that; I am being partial. The House must make a choice and, faced with a choice between the interests of big business and those of small business, the interests of large retailers—as my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, the biggest of four control 61 per cent. of the market—against the interests of a range of shops that provide a great deal of diversity—the small, local businesses—I shall support the latter.

The debate is about the interests of big business versus the interests of the small trader. It is about the interests of out-of-town shopping centres against those of the high street. It is about the interests of big employers against the interests of employees. A vote for deregulation would be a vote for giving some large chain stores the freedom to increase their market share at the expense of small shops and businesses. It would be a vote for the hypermarket at the expense of the high street.

I have to make a choice, and in an historic city such as York that attracts may tourists, I want to maintain its city centre shops. They are an important part of the city—important to local people and to visitors. At the latest count, 79 shops in the centre of York were empty, partly because of extremely high business rates, partly because of high rents—which increased at the end of the 1980s—and partly because of the recession, but also partly because of increased pressure from Sunday opening in out-of-town shopping centres.

It is claimed that freedom to shop on Sundays is a matter of freedom of choice. For some shoppers, it is a matter of choice. Unrestricted Sunday shopping would give those with cars the choice of shopping at the supermarket on Sunday as well as on the other six days of the week, but their freedom would mean restricted choice for other shoppers—especially the elderly, who do not have cars and who may in some cases lose the opportunity to shop at a local store. They will lose the independence that is terribly important to them. They will have to become dependent on somebody else—a home help if they can get one, or a friend. Someone else will have to do their shopping for them.

It is claimed also that Sunday shopping would be a boon to working women—not to all, because 1·5 million working women are retail workers who would have to work on Sunday. It is hard to believe the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) that large numbers of working women cannot shop on the other six days a week, when the shops are open from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening. It will be true for some, but I do not believe that large numbers of working women work a 12-hour day, six days a week, and cannot get to the shops except on Sunday. Some of them may find it convenient to shop on Sunday, but that convenience may be at the expense of the ability of others else to shop at all.

It is hard to believe also that there is an overwhelming demand for Sunday shopping. I read in *The Daily Telegraph* on 20 November that Sainsbury does not intend to open many of the high street stores that are closed on Sundays now, because it does not see the demand.

I received a number of letters from small businesses in my constituency urging me to support their interests against those of the large stores. Stuart Watson, who manages a number of Spar stores, states that, since the large out-of-town shopping centres around York started trading on Sunday, his trade has dropped 30 per cent. He believes that if Sunday shopping is deregulated, thousands of small shops and tens of thousands of jobs will be lost.

Mr. Beresford, a shoe repairer, wrote:

"Everyone seems just to think about the big supermarkets with no thought for the small specialist retailer."

Mr. Woodhead, a baker, describes deregulation as

"a sledgehammer to crack a nut."

Maurice Vassie, an architectural ironmonger, wrote:

"It is ironic, though not surprising, that a Government which pontificates about family values should be so busily promoting a measure that will create tens of thousands of latch-key kids."

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman has just referred to an architectural ironmonger. I do not know the size of that store, but does he consider it fair that I could go into Texas or B & Q and buy architectural ironmongery, but I could not go into a specialist shop if it happened to be one of more than 3,000 sq ft?

Mr. Bayley: If it is a DIY store, all DIY stores would be able to open.

Michael Frampton, a jeweller in my constituency, sent me an article from the *Financial Times,* which said that Shopping Hours Reform Council directors

"have no objection to a statutory enforcement"

of the SHRC proposals, but he points out that they have not abided by the current statute law.

There are 2 million shopworkers whose future is being considered when we debate this measure, but it is not just that of the shopworkers; it is that of the other workers who will have to service shopping centres—street cleaners, the police and so on. Whichever option the House chooses, we must ensure that there is statutory protection, and double time payment—not just statutory protection of an enhanced rate, because that could simply be an enhanced rate of one penny a day.

In my meetings with local store managers, both from the SHRC and the RSAR, I have asked them specifically whether their stores would object to the Bill containing a stipulation that payment for Sunday working for those shopworkers who work on Sundays would be at double time. Not one of those store managers said that they would object. It is essential, to my mind, that double time should go into the Bill.

Finally, there are two other issues which I would like to be discussed in Committee. The first is the issue of car boot sales and Sunday markets. They are driving down quality and they are now competing with the food retailers, but trading standards officers find it impossible to enforce standards because one trader who is there one week selling dodgy meat, for example, is not there subsequently. Car boot sales and Sunday markets encourage crime; they are places where stolen goods change hands. They are also taking market share from large and small retailers.

Secondly, in Committee I would want the status of electrical goods shops to be reconsidered in relation to the RSAR proposal.

9.17 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I know that two other hon. Members wish to speak in the debate, so I shall be fairly brief, unlike some of my predecessors.

It is anathema, as we enter the year 2000—the third millennium—that we are discussing the question of

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

controlling whether shops should or should not open on a Sunday. It seems absolutely astonishing to me. Nevertheless, we are witnessing a move in the House towards reality. It was interesting that, as we heard from a previous speaker, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers has already come out in favour of trading on Sunday. I notice that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), who was so active and vituperative in relation to the private Member's Bill proposed by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), is not in her place and has been absent throughout the debate, despite being president—unless she has been deposed—of USDAW.

I have also noticed, during the debate, that the most incredible horror stories have been suggested by hon. Members who would like to keep Sunday special. They feel that if the deregulation option is chosen, or the option proposed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council, there would be a great difference to life in the United Kingdom, and in England and Wales in particular. Why do they take that view? In Scotland and indeed Ireland, where there has been total deregulation, a larger proportion of people regularly worship in church on a Sunday than in England and Wales where there is regulation. The situation in Scotland is interesting because it has stabilised. Only about 25 per cent. of the shops choose to open.

As the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) said, Sainsbury does not intend to open every shop, because there is no demand for it. However, there is certainly a demand for shopping on Sunday, as evidenced by 25 million people regularly shopping on Sundays. I have visited retail outlets such as Tesco and Safeway, and I have met shopworkers who do not want to work on a Sunday, but that is not a problem—there is no question of compulsion as the majority of shopworkers want to work on a Sunday and are queueing up to do so. Those who do not wish to work on a Sunday need not do so as there is no shortage of people willing to work on a Sunday for all sorts of reasons, and premium payments are but one of them.

The Retailers for Shops Act Reform have an amazing morality. They would like to keep Sundays special for all sorts of economic reasons. We have heard about those reasons today, and most of them are fallacious. One of the reasons that hon. Members have spoken about is that Sunday is the seventh day, and they made religious allusions. It is the utmost irony, then, that Sunday is a religious day, but that the four Sundays leading up to the birth of Christ are not, and they would have shops open then. Some hon. Members have accused the Shop Hours Reform Council's option of being some sort of strange compromise, but in fact RSAR's is the compromise.

The John Lewis Partnership is an interesting case. The company has been stringent in keeping all of its stores closed on a Sunday, at a cost of more than £1 million per week. One of the arguments that it gives for keeping shops closed on a Sunday, apart from not wanting to break the law, is that it would increase the cost of sales of goods. However, that it not the case. Research by London Economics shows that, far from leading to increased cost, deregulation would produce a saving for households. Under more regulatory schemes, the converse would happen.

I do not want to filibuster, as some of my colleagues have done. I recommend that hon. Members read the briefing provided by the Library on the Sunday Trading Bill as it contains all the details.

It seems that those hon. Members who say that people should not shop on Sundays are the same ones who do not go out and shop for themselves. They have wives to do it. Heaven forbid—they may even have servants to do it for them. Being a single man—I am still single despite the inaccurate caption in the *Evening Standard* today—I know that women and single men need to shop on a Sunday. Therefore, I commend to the House that we support Second Reading and support either deregulation or the Shopping Hours Reform Council's option.

9.22 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): My speech will be extremely brief, and I shall get straight to the salient point. I intervened on the Home Secretary to ask whether the Government would force Conservative members to vote a particular way on some parts of the Bill. Recently, I had a debate with a regional manager of Sainsbury's on that very point. He was shocked by my suggestion that the Government would not allow a genuine free vote on all aspects of the Bill. Earlier, however, the Home Secretary made it clear that I was right and the regional manager was wrong. Perhaps I should have told that Sainsbury's manager, "As in all trading arrangements, caveat emptor," if one is permitted to drift into Latin in the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made an extremely important point relating to employment protection. Undoubtedly, the Government have operated double standards in the context of this debate. Earlier this year, on 16 June, on the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, in the interests of companies of a specific size the Government set a totally arbitrary figure of 20 employees below which different regulations would apply. They cannot have it both ways. Either there is a mechanism for differentiating between small shops and the largest chains, or there is not. If the Government were consistent, they would at least look at column 912 of *Hansard* for 16 June and try to find a formula which would meet all the interests throughout the country on that point.

My intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who was talking about small local garden centres, illustrated precisely that point. Those small centres are often family businesses which could be protected by a formula devised in the same way as the Government suggested in earlier legislation. That is what the country is looking for, and in many ways it is what the House wants to see.

If the Government were prepared to allow a free vote, perhaps taking into account a formula derived from that in the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, a solution might be found which could satisfy a wide proportion of the population and virtually all hon. Members, except for the die-hards who do not believe in employment protection at all.

9.26 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): In the few moments which are available to me, I wish to stress what I consider to be the most important point. In framing the legislation, we must find a simple solution which can be easily understood.

I am sorry to find myself disagreeing with my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) who described the regulation proposal as "workable." That view was endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) and by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw (Mr. Morris). The name of Anthony Scrivener QC has been raised in support of that view. I am not interested in the views of learned silks who look at the problem from their eyrie in the Temple. I am interested in the extent to which the laws are understood by the shopkeepers in the back streets of Gloucester. While they are good at running small shops, they are not necessarily legal eagles, so my prime concern is that the solution should be straightforward.

The moment I see the words "wholly or mainly" in a set of proposals, I am reminded of the extent to which we over-complicate so much legislation. In relation to the tax, benefit and VAT systems, for example, we so often make things far more complicated than is needed. That is a fault which we would be well-advised to correct, if we can.

Regarding the proposals in the regulatory formula on specialist shops, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) drew attention to some of the anomalies which that would cause. They would be even greater than those which exist in the legislation which we are seeking to get rid of.

The anomalies include the fact that one would be able to buy toys and books at a newsagent, but not from a toys or book shop. One could buy meat or bread from a small supermarket but not from a butcher or baker. That seems to be impractical, confusing, unfair and virtually unenforceable.

We see similar problems with the size requirements, which appear both in the regulation and the partial deregulation proposals. I urge the House not to underestimate the difficulty of deciding when an outlet is less than 280 sq m and when it is more. This is a charter for lawyers and surveyors to get their teeth into, at the expense always of the shopkeepers.

One can think of all kinds of practical difficulties. For example, what if the lobby of a shop has a couple of trays of goods, or the storeroom of a shop has a couple of shelves which are in reach of the customer? Will they come within the 280 sq m requirement or not? Even if one could agree about those things, the design of shops does change and can be subject to constant evolution.

Another hon. Member mentioned the contrast between a do-it-yourself store of 270 sq m, which would be allowed to sell a lampshade, and a branch of precisely the same store down the road which is slightly over 280 sq m. The latter would have to cordon off not only its lampshades, but its smoke alarms and other things. That seems to be a recipe for maximum confusion.

I also think of the effect of the regulations on the business man himself. Whenever he starts to think about taking on a new line, he will have to have regard to whether it alters his "wholly or mainly" position, and if he considers an extension of his premises, he will have to have an eye to the size limit. There will also be the enforcement problems for the local authorities, which will incur enormous expenses checking on the size of the establishment, on the wholly or mainly provisions and on the stock being carried. It is a recipe for disputes and disagreements, and for plenty of work for solicitors and surveyors. It will lead to an even more complex situation than the one we are trying to get rid of.

I am much more attracted to the partial regulation formula, but it raises the question of how small shops should be treated. I place great value on the diversity of small shops, and the importance of them in the retailing network. Nothing should be done to tilt the balance against the interests of small shops.

I am somewhat concerned that the partial deregulation proposals will do precisely that, because they go too far in the direction of large shops, which would be permitted to open for six hours. I do not agree with that approach. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby that Sunday has a special character that is worth preserving, and one does not preserve that special character by making it a sort of low-key Saturday.

My formula would be a compromise, avoiding the complexities of the type of shop and the type of goods, of the size of the shop or the hours of opening. We can do without all that in the interests of having effective, low-cost enforcement and easy-to-understand laws. We could achieve a result that acknowledged the fact that some people wish to shop on Sundays and some people wish to work on Sundays by a simple formula along the lines of allowing all shops to open, whatever they are selling, for half of Sunday. I have a personal preference for Sunday afternoons, but there are arguments for Sunday morning.

That is a simple proposal that would be understood by everyone. It would not be a charter for lawyers or surveyors. It would be understood in the Temple as it would be understood in the high streets of Gloucester. I recommend it to the House.

9.31 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): The debate has been remarkably restrained compared to some of the knockabout exchanges of the past. None the less, there has been plenty of claim and counter-claim, as befits a debate about a fundamental change in our way of life, a change that some would seek to halt, some to endorse and some to encourage.

All the proposals in the Bill represent an extension of Sunday trading beyond that of the Shops Act 1950. Some of us would like to put the clock back, not to the absurd anomalies of the Act but to that kinder, gentler society, to a time when rampant commercialism did not hold sway and Governments did not promote competition and personal acquisitiveness as a politically correct way of life.

Let us be clear about the nature of today's debate. Of course there is a need to update the Act, but that would have been done a decade ago by a responsible Government. Today's debate has been conditioned less by the changes in society over the past 40 years than by an unprecedented orgy of law-breaking for commercial ends.

There are those, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who have argued that law-breakers should not be rewarded. I have great sympathy with that view, but unfortunately rewards have already been granted. The Government's failure to act

[Ms Joan Ruddock]

since the defeat of their 1985 Bill has enabled a new climate and a new market to be created. Today's debate is taking place against public opinion formed by the new circumstances and new experience of widespread Sunday trading. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said, that public opinion is one of the factors that has to inform our choice of options.

I cannot accept, however, that ordinary people have created the demand for Sunday trading. For many smaller family shops, it has been the struggle to stay in business during repeated recessions that has led to increasingly long hours and Sunday opening. For the larger supermarket chains and DIY stores—here I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman)—Sunday opening has been about carving out, maintaining or increasing market share.

I accept that there has been a consumer response to Sunday trading from workers and shoppers. That response undoubtedly stems from changes in the pattern of our working and domestic lives, which were so eloquently described by my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson).

Only a minority now work 9 to 5. A quarter of Britain's work force are part-timers, and 70 per cent. of married women work outside the home. Part-time work can be desirable and Sunday shopping can be convenient and pleasurable, but neither is entirely neutral in its impact on society. In general, part-time work attracts lower pay and more limited prospects. Sunday trading is acceptable to those who are shopping, but can be a nuisance to those who are not.

Most important, current levels of Sunday trading do not tell us how things would be under new Sunday trading laws. Complete deregulation would have an effect far beyond current trading levels, and clearly would endanger the special nature of Sunday.

Some hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) and the Home Secretary, have cited complete deregulation in Scotland as having had no significant effect on society north of the border. That has more to do with the good sense of the Scots and the ambient culture in Scotland than with the state of legislation.

Commercial pressures, population density and, consequently, potential profits are radically different in England than in Scotland. The proportion of outlets trading illegally on Sunday in England is already considerably higher than in Scotland. Furthermore, there is clear evidence that, because of the lack of employee protection in that completely deregulated society, wages and conditions for Scottish Sunday workers have worsened in recent years as Sunday trading has increased.

All extensions of Sunday trading in England, Scotland or Wales will impact on our local environment. Even where outlets are on industrial estates, experience in urban areas such as mine in south-east London is of long traffic queues along high streets and in residential areas.

For those reasons, and for many others, we believe that complete deregulation must be unacceptable to the House. We are, however, prepared to give a Second Reading to the Bill, acknowledging that the issue must now be settled. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield said, we desire an outcome that is logical, fair and enforceable.

We do so in the belief that Sunday is a special day. For most people, it is still the day when they are most likely to be able to spend leisure time with family and friends. In most social circles, the majority of people are still not required to work on a Sunday. In that respect, Sunday remains different from Monday to Saturday, and most people have developed a life style that takes account of that.

We believe that, although all aspects of the Bill will give rise to more Sunday trading there is a duty on the House, in recognising the special nature of Sunday, to attempt to find a formula that will in some way preserve that and at the same time be responsive to changing circumstances, the changing way of life and changing public opinion.

If some people are to be denied the opportunity to take advantage of a free Sunday and to act as others will do in their social and family circles, and if they are to be required to work for the convenience or pleasure of others, they must do so voluntarily and be rewarded appropriately for that sacrifice. The Opposition are united on that matter.

The Government have been forced to concede the strength of our argument, not least because they have done their arithmetic and know how hon. Members' votes are likely to be cast. For a Government who have systematically undermined rights at work, abolished wages councils and set their face against the social chapter, this must be a bitter pill.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Lady has stated her personal views, and I fully accept that they are not the views of the entire Opposition Front Bench. She says that she would like to control trading on Sundays and has now mentioned the social chapter. What would she say to the 150,000 shopworkers who would lose their jobs if, on top of bringing in the social chapter, we were to control trading on Sundays?

Ms Ruddock: Like all my colleagues, I have no doubt that introducing the social chapter would be to the advantage of our society, our workers and our businesses. If it is good enough for all the other members of the EC, their businesses, industries and workers, it is certainly good enough for British workers. The hon. Gentleman has been arguing in favour of deregulation or partial deregulation. He would be wise not to present himself as someone seeking to reduce the conditions and wages of British workers, as one could impute from what he has just said about the social chapter.

I am not expressing a personal view on the options in the Bill. I believe that Sunday should be a special day, and I try to act that out in my personal life. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield spelled out what we seek from the Bill, and I shall mention that in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) asked why, at this late hour, the Government had put schedule 4 into the Bill. It was simply because of our pressure, my hon. Friend's pressure and pressure by the campaign groups that the Government realised that that was the price they must pay to guarantee a Second Reading.

Even so, we shall go on to seek amendments to the schedule, not least in favour of premium pay. Contrary to what the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) said, we believe that special financial reward would give proper recognition to the continuing special nature of Sunday.

That premium payment—we shall propose double payment—will force employers to recognise that people who work voluntarily on Sunday are sacrificing family life and should be appropriately rewarded. That would be the case whether the KSS-RSAR option or the SHRC option were adopted.

We urge the Minister again to allow the House—perhaps he will comment on this in winding up—to decide that issue as all the other issues of the Bill. If it is a matter of conscience whether shops should open, equally it is a matter of conscience how workers who must staff those shops should be treated. A free vote on that issue is essential to the House expressing its view.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ruddock: I am about to finish. I will not give way at this stage, because it would take up the Minister's time.

I want to reiterate what the Labour party seeks from the Bill; that the choice that is made will be fair and enforceable, and, particularly and importantly, that it recognises the rights of shopworkers and the fact that there must be choice about Sunday working.

Much further debate is required. Choices have to be made. Amendments will be tabled, but, for the moment, we are content to give the Bill a Second Reading.

9.45 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): This has been an unavoidably short debate, but with the impressive increase in pace after 9.15 pm, I am glad to see that all those who wanted to speak just managed to do so.

However, the central issues of the Bill—the way in which Sunday is special, and how far the criminal law should prescribe which shops may open and what they may sell on a Sunday—will, if the Bill is read a Second time, and if the business motion is accepted, be continued in the Chamber on the first day in Committee.

During the debate this evening, we have listened to different recipes for Sunday espoused on both sides of the House. But I did not hear—although I was looking out for it—anyone argue that the Shops Act 1950 represents the best arrangement for Sunday shopping, and that it should be kept. Far from it. Every hon. Member who spoke wanted the law changed in one direction or another. There were many who backed one of the three options just as they stood. Quite a number would obviously like to fine-tune their preferred option in Committee.

I am confident that there is an overwhelming desire to sort out Sunday on both sides of the House, and a general agreement that the options give a real opportunity to do so properly. I hope, therefore, that whatever detailed changes hon. Members individually want to bring to our existing Sunday trading legislation, the House will overwhelmingly support the Second Reading of the Bill as the only realistic chance of reforming it at this present time. If we reject it, I do not believe that we shall be able to secure ourselves another chance for a considerable time to come.

It is not for me to argue for or against any of the options. They represent the aspirations of the different campaigning groups, not of the Government. It is for hon. Members to weigh and choose between them.

Although I shall do what I can to help the Committee examine in detail how the chosen option will work and the impact that any amendments tabled might have, I do not think that it would be right for me, as I would in the normal way—I hope that hon. Members who have spoken will not take it as a discourtesy—to try to answer the detailed points raised by hon. Members about the options and the way that they will work. They are neither mine nor the Government's, and there is not too much time before 10 o'clock.

A number of points have been raised on which I think it would be useful if I commented. First, I have been asked by several hon. Members about the voting of Conservative Members. On the options and on the way that the options will be dealt with in Committee, there will certainly be a free vote for everyone on the Government side of the House.

On schedule 4—employment matters—the Government will, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said, be expecting to whip in the normal way. That question was put to me by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). I pay tribute to him for the energy and determination that he has shown in his cause, but he was wrong to think that the Government would not have introduced a Bill on that issue had it not been for his efforts, although I accept that his Bill has strongly influenced the shape of part of the Government Bill.

Although the options are for the House to judge, the law protecting Sunday working is certainly a matter for the Government——

Mr. Alison: I am sorry to interrupt the Minister, but I should like clarification of one point before he moves on to employment protection. If the KSS option is chosen on the first day in Committee of the whole House and that is the option that then goes into Standing Committee, will the Government attempt to table Government amendments to the freely chosen option in Committee? If so, will there be a free vote on those Government amendments?

Mr. Lloyd: If that option is chosen on the first day of Committee on the Floor of the House, then I imagine that the Committee of Selection will select a Committee that reflects that decision. If I serve on that Committee—as the Minister in charge of the Bill, it seems to me that that is likely—I do not expect to introduce Government amendments. I will take the decision of the House as moral guidance on how the House wants to proceed.

If, as I dare say there will be, there are amendments in Committee, there will be a free vote on them. My role will be to advise the Committee on their significance and how they would work out in practice, but it would be for the Committee to decide on a free vote what to accept and what to reject.

As I said, the law protecting Sunday working is very much a matter for the Government. It is one on which virtually every speaker has had something to say. The Government accept that all shopworkers, including those taking up employment after the Bill becomes law, should be able to withdraw from Sunday work, subject to three months' notice.

As the House knows, because of what I have said on previous occasions, I am not convinced that extra formal protection is necessary in practice, as the retail trade has always been confident that it has more than enough volunteers for Sunday work. But it is clear that, whichever option they support, hon. Members believe such a statutory right to be an important ingredient of any successful

[Mr. Lloyd]

solution. As the whole exercise is designed to find the broadest acceptable set of arrangements, we have been happy to meet their concerns.

I therefore remind the House of the full package that we are offering. The new rights will apply to all current shopworkers, even if they have already signed a contract to do Sunday work. They will immediately have the right not to work on Sundays. All shopworkers will be able to opt out of Sunday working on giving three months' notice. That applies to new shopworkers or to shopworkers who agree in writing to work on Sundays.

To answer the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), schedule 4 will protect any employee declining to work on Sunday from dismissal and from any detriment short of that. The rights apply to all who work in or about a shop, and include managers, cleaners and warehouse staff. The rights apply if a shop is open for a period in 24 hours, starting at midnight on Saturday through to midnight on Sunday. They do not apply only to employees who work in the shop when it is open.

The new rights have no qualifying period of service and no upper age limit. Premium pay, however, is quite another matter. The Government are firmly opposed to such a proposal. Many large shops can afford premium pay and will pay it whether or not there is a statutory requirement to do so. Naturally, they would like their competitors to be compelled to pay it as well. The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), in an intervention, expressed her worry that, without premium pay, shops may not get the staff they need. If she is right, any shop that wants to open will have to pay premium pay. On the hon. Lady's argument, there is no need to legislate on premium pay if that is what we want to see.

Not all shops can afford premium payments. Many shops which have been legally trading on Sundays for years—newsagents and flower stalls, for example—may well not be able to afford premium pay rates. A requirement to pay them could drive such shops out of business. That would be quite wrong in principle, and it could lead to job losses. We have heard much today about small shops suffering at the hands of big shops; premium pay would give that statutory backing. The Government believe that statutory premium pay is wrong in principle. It would also be impossible to enforce.

Mr. Miller: I did offer the Minister a potential solution. Would he like to comment on it? I referred to the debate that took place on the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill. There the Government created an arbitrary differentiation between sizes of companies. According to the Government, that created a solution in that case. Why cannot a similar debate take place in the context of the Bill?

Mr. Lloyd: We could of course gerrymander the arrangements in favour of small shops.

Mr. Miller: So arrangements were gerrymandered in June?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course arrangements would be gerrymandered if one required larger shops to pay more than small shops, rather than leave it to negotiations between employees and employers and what they are able to afford.

There is another problem, which is that it would be impossible to enforce. The problem surrounding the 1950 Act shows that it is essential to have a law that can be easily enforced. If an employer is prepared to offer somebody a job in a shop on Sunday, and that person is happy to accept the rate offered, is it seriously proposed that there should be some system to check whether that person is getting a premium rate? Ask the local authorities whether they want to take on that responsibility, and I know what they will say.

Mr. Sheerman: Does not the same rule apply to people such as those in Sainsbury who are stopped in their promotions, and stopped in their tracks, because they refuse to work on Sundays?

Mr. Lloyd: Let me make it quite clear that nobody will be disadvantaged by not wishing to work on a Sunday. If any manager was so disadvantaged, he would have protection under schedule 4 of the Bill.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): But for how long?

Mr. Lloyd: For as long as the Act stays on the statute book.

Since the Government's Sunday Trading Bill was defeated in 1986, shopping habits have continued to change, the number of women working has continued to grow, the range of products on the market has continued to expand, and the structure of the retail trade has continued to evolve. The only factor that has remained absolutely static is the Sunday trading legislation—set in a mould that was antique even in 1950.

Public impatience with the Act has grown, on the part of shoppers, shopkeepers and local authorities, whether they want to liberalise or to regulate, but on a more coherent and up-to-date basis.

Despite strenuous efforts by my predecessors, my right hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) and for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), we found no common ground between the campaigning groups outside the House on which a broadly acceptable Bill could be based. That is why we have constructed a Bill containing all the main options, so that Parliament can examine, contrast and compare those options and select the one that it believes will put the law on a coherent and principled basis, commanding once again the support and respect of the community.

I am sure that the House will want to seize that opportunity by giving the Bill an overwhelming Second Reading tonight.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 311, Noes 26.

Division No. 6] **[10.00**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry

Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Clive
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harvey, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hutton, John
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S.
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sheerman, Barry
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Andrew F.
Boyce, Jimmy
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Corbyn, Jeremy
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Macdonald, Calum
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Marek, Dr John
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Trimble, David

Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That Clauses 1 and 2 and Schedule 4 be committed to a Committee of the whole House; That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee; That, when the provisions of the Bill considered respectively, by the Committee of the whole House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee. *—Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

SUNDAY TRADING BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified——

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Sunday Trading Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act. *—Mr. Mackay.*

European Investment Fund

10.13 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I beg to move,

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European Investment Fund) order 1993, which was laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.

The order's provenance will be well known to the House. It has been commented upon on a number of occasions, and the House will recall that the Edinburgh European Council in December last year at the conclusion of the British presidency agreed a package of measures to promote economic recovery in the European Community. One of those measures was a request that the Economic and Finance Council and the European investment bank

"give urgent and sympathetic consideration to the establishment of a European Investment Fund".

Work has now been undertaken and substantially completed, with agreement being reached on the precise role of the fund and on the draft statute which sets out its rules of operation. The Brussels European Council on 29 October was able to commit itself to bringing the fund into existence by the new year.

The order provides for the small amendment necessary for the treaty of Rome to be regarded as one of the Community treaties as defined in section 1(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. The amendment would add a new article—article 30—to the protocol on the statute of the European investment bank. If the amendment is ratified by all member states, that article will enable the board of governors of the bank to create the European investment fund by unanimous decision.

I come now to the fund itself and how it would operate. The new fund has its origins within the European investment bank, which is one of the Community's least-known, but most efficiently run bodies. It is under the new and illustrious British presidency of Sir Brian Unwin, Because of recent concerns, I visited the bank, and I can report that I did not see signs of extravagance; indeed, I found it to be an extremely professional and well-run organisation.

As the House will know, the bank's primary purpose is to provide medium and long-term loans to capital investment projects that further the economic development of the Community. It borrows the bulk of its funds on the capital markets and borrowers have to meet the full cost of loans. The bank is not allowed to subsidise. Because it has a triple-A credit rating and is non-profit-making, it is able to on-lend at very attractive rates. It now operates on a considerable scale throughout the Community and the United Kingdom is a major beneficiary.

The European investment fund will be an offshoot of the bank. Although the fund will be based at the bank's headquarters in Luxembourg, it will be staffed by bank personnel on secondment. Legally and financially, it will be entirely independent of the bank. There are two reasons for that. The first is operational. The fund will complement, not duplicate, the bank's function as a lender to European Community investment projects. It will not make loans, but rather provide guarantees and in due course take equity stakes in enterprises.

The fund's draft statute allows it to operate throughout the Community in support of two classes of undertakings. One will be small and medium-sized enterprises; the other

will be trans-European networks—projects to improve the links between the various member states' national transportation, telecommunication and energy networks.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Can my hon. Friend say clearly and precisely whether the order will enable a European fund to underwrite the losses of the channel tunnel, while domestic legislation—as my hon. Friend well knows—prevents us from doing so? There is concern that intra-Community transport could cover the channel tunnel, which some of us consider to be a great white elephant. Bearing in mind that the Government are not permitted under law to subsidise it, can my hon. Friend assure us that the European fund also will not be able to subsidise the channel tunnel project?

Mr. Nelson: The channel tunnel project would be eligible to apply for capital guarantees of the sort that I have mentioned. I understand my hon. Friend's proper concern that the fund might provide guarantees for loans that would effectively finance loss-making activities. The intention is not to subsidise losses, but to guarantee loans that are made available by other institutions.

If a loan is made available to Eurotunnel or one of the other organisations concerned with the project, it is unlikely to be made available specifically to write off an operating loss—although it inevitably forms part of the total capital of the organisation. A loan to that or any other project would be made on the basis of the viability of the project. The fund would enable a guarantee to be provided to the institution providing the loan. Therefore, the position is not quite as my hon. Friend suggested. I hope that he is clear on the point that the fund would not be used in that way, although projects of the sort that he mentioned might be eligible for guarantees of certain loans that had been obtained from other sources.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On the key issue of subsidising the channel tunnel, my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 prohibits the British Government from subsidising or financially supporting the tunnel with public funds. Will my hon. Friend confirm that nothing in the order is inconsistent with the 1987 provision or will allow Europe to do that which the British Government cannot do?

Mr. Nelson: I do not believe that the order is inconsistent with the 1987 Act. The ability of the fund to provide equity stakes—risk capital interest in businesses—is intended to be applied not to trans-European networks but to small and medium-sized enterprises. Certainly, the channel tunnel does not fit into that category. In any event, it is intended that the equity stakes will be provided only to funds that invest in a variety of such concerns.

The fund's other activities will deal entirely with the provision of guarantees against loans provided elsewhere. They will not break across domestic law. The purpose of the order is to import into domestic law the obligations and agreements made.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The Minister will be glad to know that I do not want to pursue the points raised by two Conservative Members, to which he gave detailed and fair answers. However, given the Minister's general remarks about the investment fund, its siting and the use of seconded personnel, can he give some idea of the likely scale of the enterprise involved, as and when the fund begins to take shape?

Mr. Nelson: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to respond to that point during my remarks.

I mentioned that there were two reasons for the fund's independent status. After it has been in existence for two years, its shareholders may allow it to take equity holdings. It will concentrate particularly on small to medium-sized enterprises, to strengthen their capital base. The fund would not take a holding in its own name but would require stakes in financial institutions that specialised in holding equity.

The second reason for the fund's independent status is legal and institutional. It is proposed that the fund will have an initial subscribed capital of 2 billion ecu, or around £1·5 billion, which will not be held entirely by the European investment bank. The bank will take a 40 per cent. stake, but it is envisaged that the remaining 60 per cent. will be divided equally between the Community itself—represented by the Commission—and those of the Community's private sector banking institutions that want to become members.

That participation by the private sector is most important. The fund would not attempt to provide guarantees directly to small to medium-sized enterprises in the member states; rather, it would enter into arrangements with local banks that knew those markets and that could then act as the fund's agent.

The fund will be run on a commercial basis and may pay dividends on its capital. As to the fund's guarantee operations, it is expected to have a gearing ratio of 3:1; therefore, a subscribed capital base of 2 billion ecu would allow it to give 6 billion ecu worth of guarantee cover. For reasons of prudence and to allow the maximum spread of support, the fund would not guarantee that more than 50 per cent. of the cost of any project was covered. If, for example, the average guarantee provided by the fund covered 25 per cent. of a project's cost, it could assist projects worth a total of 24 billion ecu, or around £18 billion—but that is very much the ceiling estimate of the fund's potential.

The concept of the European investment fund was given a big push by the initiative launched at Edinburgh last year under the United Kingdom presidency. If the treaty amendment is ratified by all member states, the fund will provide a useful addition to the Community's response to the key problems of unemployment and loss of competitiveness. Because the fund is targeted at small to medium-sized enterprises—the important engines of economic growth and employment in the Community—it will encourage private sector initiative and work with the grain of the enterprise culture, thereby helping to improve competitiveness and employment.

The fund will operate under the aegis of the European investment bank, which has a proven record of competence and efficiency. I commend the order to the House.

10.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): The Labour party supports the establishment of a European investment fund. It is a useful and potentially very beneficial innovation for which the Labour party has been calling. Indeed, we would like to see it built upon.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

Incidentally, the small piece of paper in the form of this order will, if passed this evening, amend the treaties that govern the European Communities. By a similar small piece of paper we could bring the social chapter into effect in this country, and that is precisely the mechanism for doing so which we pointed out during the debates on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. It would be no more difficult to extend those employment rights to British workers than it is to pass the order this evening, but that is a matter to which we shall return on other occasions.

In addition to welcoming this legislative step to help the European investment fund on its way, I shall ask several questions. First, why on earth has it taken so long to get this far? After all, the decision to set up a fund, as we have just heard, was taken as long ago as the Edinburgh summit on 11 and 12 December last year, and Commissioner Christophersen's letter, setting out in more detail the proposal for the establishment of the fund, was dated 15 January this year. What has been taking the time since then? Who is responsible for the delay?

After all, more than 18 million people are unemployed throughout Europe and the European economy—now, to many intents and purposes, the real macro-economy of all the member states—remains deeply in recession. Depressed private investment is one of the most disturbing aspects of that recession. In such circumstances, Opposition Members would have thought that a good deal more urgency could and should have been injected into the programme so that the fund could be up and running, generating jobs, improving infrastructure and stimulating recovery.

Secondly, how far has the establishment of the fund progressed? What other countries have yet to take the step to which we are giving effect tonight in amending the protocol? What progress has been made with setting up the interim board of shareholders of the fund? The European Commission said in April, in its report on the Edinburgh initiative about the interim board of shareholders:

"This Board will work on the further arrangements for the entry into force of the Fund . . . Most importantly, it will also begin discussions right away with project promoters, financial institutions and national/regional administrations on specific potential candidates for support."

I should be grateful if the Economic Secretary would tell us how far those consultations have progressed. I should also be grateful if he would tell us in reply who is on the interim board of shareholders, and what reports the Government have received about the progress of its discussions. In particular, because their participation is an important element of the concept of the fund, what third party shareholders have been consulted and what has been the outcome of those consultations? My final question on the subject of timing is, when do the Government expect that the fund will be up and running and giving the guarantees for loans which will enable projects to proceed?

My third category of questions is about what projects the Government—or other organisations, such as the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies—are encouraging to apply to the fund. What sort of projects do the Government have in mind? It would be helpful if the Economic Secretary would tell us the beneficiaries. The Labour party very much hopes and strongly urges that British private and public sector organisations, and the two together in partnership, are encouraged and assisted by the Government to apply to the fund and to take full advantage here in the United Kingdom of the opportunities that it offers. We cannot afford to be left behind in the take-up of funds as we have been with other sources of finance, such as the regional and social funds, and on occasion in the use of the European investment bank itself. We want Britain to obtain the full benefits of the opportunities which that type of European Community institutions have to offer.

Fourthly, I propose to ask about the financial accounting for the subscription of capital and expenditure from the fund. I should be grateful if the Economic Secretary could explain whether expenditure on the fund or its guarantees counts against the United Kingdom public sector borrowing requirement. If so, how is that recorded?

How do the Government see the role of the fund developing? I note that the Commission's explanatory memorandum says:

"The main objectives of the fund will be to contribute to the strengthening of the internal market and the furthering of economic and social cohesion. Major infrastructure projects in the framework of the transeuropean networks (TENs), as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in Community assisted areas, constitute the main targets of support of the EIF."

Will loan guarantees be used to hasten the progress of public-private partnerships on which to date the Government's words and reannouncements of the same schemes greatly exceed actual progress on the ground? Given that the front-end risk on such projects has been identified as one of the main factors inhibiting private sector involvement, could there not be a role for the European investment fund in providing guarantees to enable such schemes to get under way? Is there a need for the project task force, which the Labour party has advocated, to inject the requisite urgency to get things moving?

Given that small and medium-sized enterprises are intended to be among the prime beneficiaries of the European investment fund guarantees, does not that make it more important to consider how the interface between small businesses and the European investment fund will work? I note what the Economic Secretary said about the role of banks familiar with the markets in which small and medium-sized enterprises are extending their activities. What do the Government envisage as their role in bringing about that partnership between the domestic banking sector and small and medium-sized enterprises? It is not as though small and medium-sized enterprises do not have one or two complaints about the treatment that they receive from banks at present.

If those enterprises are to benefit from the fund, it is absolutely vital that their involvement with it is assisted. I would argue that that makes a strong case for regional development agencies in the English regions, as well as those in Scotland and Wales, to facilitate that involvement. I should be grateful if the Economic Secretary could tell us how he envisages the fund developing what is described in the Commission's summary as its "secondary business" —that of the limited provision of equity largely through financial intermediaries. Will that become a sort of Euro national enterprise board? If not, how does it differ?

The Commission's memorandum states:

"Other projects, for example in the areas of environmental protection and energy production, may become eligible later after decision of the Fund's ruling bodies."

Given the substantial contribution that environmental projects can make to generating jobs and improving the

quality of life, the sooner those projects can be brought on stream through the work of the European investment fund, the better. What is the Government's thinking on that?

Finally, what is the Government's position on the size of the fund? Once all the institutional and administrative machinery is in place, and assuming a good take-up of funds can be encouraged, is there not a strong case for expanding the size of the fund beyond the indicative levels given by the Economic Secretary so that it could be used in a more counter-cyclical way, as the Labour party has argued, to help to play a more significant role in lifting Europe as a whole out of the recession which condemns millions of our fellow citizens to unemployment and thereby diminishes the living standards of us all?

10.33 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I welcome the new initiative and facility for the European investment bank. The bank has long needed to be able to invest in equities, but it has not had that ability. The new facility to guarantee loans is also extremely welcome.

I should like to add two other points to the list of questions asked by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). First, it seems to me that the change requires a completely different managerial approach by the bank, which is traditionally a conservative bank and has operated, generally speaking, with Government guarantees and other means of securing its lending. An advance into equity lending will be quite foreign to most of its personnel, and they will need additional training. The bank will also need the injection of people with experience in the private sector so that it can make those equity investments on a sound basis.

There is another problem that I would be grateful if the Economic Secretary would explain to the House. How will the bank account to the nation states' Parliaments and to the European Parliament in Strasbourg? The new facility will require careful monitoring, and there should be careful arranged accounting procedures to the Parliaments and possibly to the Public Accounts Committee.

10.35 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I have another couple of questions to add. One Minister is known to have a little list, but the Economic Secretary has rather a long list of inquiries to answer, and I do not want to add to his burden, particularly as I know that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) intends to contribute to the in-tray of intrigue in a few moments' time.

I welcome the measure, which is further proof, were any needed, that after the Edinburgh summit and the British presidency, and the passage of the Maastricht treaty through Parliament early this year, those who argue in newspapers and the broadcasting media that Maastricht marked the end, the problem is over and the issue can be put to one side, are wrong. The Europe Community, now the European Union in its other respects, will continue to develop and it is important that it should do so.

As is always the way, we are having a late-night debate in a thinly attended Chamber, with only those of us who have a specific interest in European matters, but the measure is still another sign of the important political and economic steps that will have social implications across the Community as a whole. I have a plea to make as I welcome those developments: it is not the Minister's responsibility, but I hope that the business managers will consider allowing the House one day a week just for European issues, as they have such impact on domestic political and legislative matters that it is nonsensical to go in this way.

My first question concerns the future development of the Community. Clearly, the investment fund will be coming on stream after much discussion—that was acknowledged in the Queen's Speech—about the agreements on accession that will be concluded with the remaining Scandinavian countries and Austria. Given that it is impossible for any measure to anticipate everything that may or may not happen, but that it is a reasonable assumption that those countries will be joining the Community, it is important to know how the Minister sees any restructuring or rejigging of this which may need to take place to accommodate those developments.

Those of us who have had discussions with the representatives of the Scandinavian countries will know that they have specific anxieties and agendas that they are trying to pursue about the distinct geographic needs of their countries, which are different from, and contrast with, those of some of the existing member states. I suspect that the Scandinavians may look to the investment fund as being of use to them. To what extent has that been anticipated in the discussions?

My second question concerns our domestic banks. The Minister made some interesting references to personnel of the fund being on secondment and how in due course the fund will look to banks in member states—although perhaps this is less true of banks in this country than of those in other member states—which have regional expertise within member states and may be able to assist or facilitate projects. Will the Minister put a little more flesh on the bones of the attitude of domestic bankers and say what role they hope to play?

The order is welcome. Let us hope that it will make an important political, economic and social contribution to the well-being of the Community in turning itself into union in due course.

10.40 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) is right—I cannot add a chorus of praise for the order, although it has potential. We need to examine what that potential is and how it is to be exercised. There is some confusion about the nature of the fund and how it will be organised and run.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) is right to say that this is a relatively simple piece of paper, but I remind hon. Members and anyone who may be listening or who may read the debate that a single paper of this sort can authorise a complete treaty. This is not all that long. It is not called a treaty. It is rather confusingly called an Act. In the early days of this procedure, I arrived in the Chamber with a heap of treaties this high, which were being authorised by a single statutory instrument. At lease we have this opportunity to scrutinise, and if my questions to the Minister appear naive it is not for want of reading the literature that has been supplied to us.

It is a pity that the explanatory note is highly constitutional and does not tell us much about the fund. I understand that it is a fund, but not necessarily one that will give loans, although other hon. Members have suggested that it might. As I understand it, its purpose is to provide guarantees, thus stimulating activity that would not otherwise take place in the realm of trans-European networks and small and medium-sized enterprises. A gentleman in Denmark once said to me, "Mr. Spearing, in Denmark all our firms are small or medium-sized enterprises." There are volumes of Government-commissioned documents according that definition, which is pretty elastic to start with.

I am concerned because the explanatory note on the order does not take us far down that road, although the explanatory memorandum on the Commission document does. It makes it fairly clear. It says that the fund is for

"assuming and managing more specific risks without jeopardizing its credit standing and mainstream lending."

That refers to the European investment bank. I assume that the fund is not a fund from which we can borrow and earn income but is a form of guarantee. The explanatory memorandum later says that the fund will

"facilitate private infrastructure financing by providing a complement or alternative to recourse to government guarantees for infrastructure financing. The viability criterion will also be an essential ingredient in its approach to SMEs."

That confirms that it is a mechanism for creating guarantees that give confidence to those who subscribe capital, rather than for subscribing capital itself.

The Act is a mini-treaty, agreed in Brussels in March 1993 and awaiting ratification, of which this debate is part. Article A explains that, at present, the protocol of the European investment bank is not wide enough to fulfil that function. Paragraph 2 of new article 30 of the European investment bank statute says:

"The Board of Governors shall establish the Statute of the European Investment Fund by unanimous decision. The Statute shall define, in particular, its objectives, structure, capital, membership, financial resources, means of intervention and auditing arrangements, as well as the relationship between the organs of the Bank and those of the Fund."

So all is there to be decided. By what means will the statute be made known to the House and the public? The objectives exist in broad terms and will, I presume, be part of the statute setting up the fund.

On the mysterious question of membership, the explanatory memorandum says that membership will be tripartite: member states; the Commission—30 per cent.; and other private organisations. I assume that those private institutions mentioned in paragraph 4 can be banks or other funds already in the private sector within the Community. I presume that members, who are appointed in proportion to their risk, must manage the fund and decide to whom, and for what purposes, guarantees are to be made.

The knock-on effect appears to be considerable, because other parts of the memorandum say that we will not have to pay much to the fund. Britain's paid-up amount is relatively small and we therefore take a proportion of the risk, in proportion to our national sector. How can the Commission take a risk separate from that of member states?

This does not seem to be a fund in the normal sense of the word, unless it is a fund for guarantees. It appears to deal with insurance, akin to institutions in the City that take on risks. Is it not essentially a risk-bearing mechanism, to be controlled partly by the bank—the Minister mentioned our representative on it—but also by other persons, as yet unnamed, and representing world institutions that would take the risk? Can we know more about who they are likely to be? Will there be people from the United Kingdom? What qualifications will they have? How will those matters be reported? I presume that they will be reported first to the bank, then from the bank to member Governments, then from member Governments to the House—if they get that far.

I am less enamoured of this set-up than some of my hon. Friends, who may assume that it will have the effects that they hope, but I cannot see the connection. It may deal with large projects—the channel tunnel was mentioned earlier—and various small and medium-sized enterprises may benefit. I assume that they must put up a case, saying that they are part of the European single or internal market. I understand that another purpose of the fund is to stimulate the said market.

I am also a little worried about the extent to which this is not just a complement to Government guarantees but a replacement for them. Indeed, the explanatory memorandum said:

"The existence of the Fund will thus facilitate private infrastructure financing by providing a complement or alternative to recourse to government guarantees for infrastructure financing. The viability criterion will also be an essential element".

The question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East about the proportion of public sector borrowing is relevant here. Will decisions on financial guarantees for large projects be transferred away from Her Majesty's Government and handed to those who govern the running of the fund? I take it that that is what the memorandum means. If the Minister cannot answer that question now, I hope that he will tell the House the answer at some stage.

I close on a topical note. At a time of great unemployment and when there was a need for transport expansion and co-ordination in London, following the first world war, the House passed an Act known as the Trade Facilities Act 1921, which resulted in guarantees for the extension of the Northern line south of Clapham to Morden, and the western extension of the Central line, which was not actually built until after the next war. Could such guarantees be given now to British Rail or to any private firm by the Government without transgressing any European treaty? If not, and if this fund is the only way of assisting such networks, especially the channel tunnel, the House should know about it. If the Minister cannot reply tonight, I intend to table a written question on the subject tomorrow.

10.52 pm

Mr. Nelson: With the leave of the House, I should like to thank hon. Members for their highly pertinent questions this evening.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) made a number of points with which I will try to deal as expeditiously and frankly as possible. He asked why it had taken so long to bring the fund from its inception at the Edinburgh Council to where it is now. Actually, it has moved fairly speedily, given that all member states have to ratify the proposal. Only two have done so thus far, but all will have to ratify by the end of this year.

In the Edinburgh presidency conclusions, there was a specific request that "urgent" progress be made with implementation of the fund. But it was necessary first for the draft EIF statutes to be drawn up. It was also necessary for a draft Council decision under article 235 of the European Communities treaty on Community participation in the fund to be drawn up and submitted to the Scrutiny Committee—as indeed it was.

We are now approaching the point at which the EIF can be launched. We hope that it will be up and running in the early part of next year, but work is already under way to identify those who may be able to benefit from the guarantee resources which will constitute the early part of the fund's remit.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East asked what work was being done to identify the candidates. Preliminary work has certainly been done, but it was felt premature, before the fund's constitution had been set, for applications to be invited and candidates to be vetted. Nevertheless, in conjuction with work on the proposed statutes of the fund, some work has been done.

[Mr. Nelson]

I pay tribute to the president of the EIB, Sir Brian Unwin, who has worked hard in the member states, including this country, encouraging commercial banks to take up the opportunity of being shareholders in the EIF, and advertising more widely among the member states the opportunities that will arise once the fund is itself funded.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East asked who would be on the board. There will be a supervisory board. It is intended, I believe, that the president of the bank will be the chairman of that board, but the detailed composition will be a matter laid down in the statute of the fund after article 30 has been imported into the protocol to the treaty of Rome. It will then be up to the fund, in conjunction with the European investment bank, to determine the details of how the various constituent shareholders will be represented on the supervisory board and the working committees.

The hon. Gentleman asked what sort of projects would qualify. I know that this is of interest to hon. Members —particularly those who want industrial regeneration and the uptake of employment for their constituencies, especially through small to medium-sized enterprises. Earlier, I referred to energy, telecommunications and transport; they clearly fit the definition of trans-European networks. The range of small to medium-sized enterprises is much wider, but the fund is not intended to provide guarantees direct to such enterprises: that will be done through the medium of commercial banks. However, the European investment bank itself provides—and recently the European Communities have enhanced the resources for—capital lending to small to medium-sized enterprises. An additional facility of some 1 billion ecu is being provided for subsidised lending: I believe that the current proposal is around 3 per cent. on the interest rates paid by such enterprises. A lot is being done.

As for financial accountability, a report will be prepared. The various constituent shareholders of the Community and the commercial banks that take up their shareholdings, as well as the investment bank itself, will be recipients. It will be run in close conjunction with the investment bank; it will be subject to the European Court of Auditors, and statute will lay down in great detail the financial accounting and reporting procedures.

A number of hon. Members asked about the status of the contributions to the fund, its capitalisation and how it relates to our public sector borrowing requirement. The answer is that it does not—except in so far as we make a notional contribution through the total resources that we give to the European Community, part of which will go towards financing our shareholding through the Community. We are shareholders in the investment bank, but its shares in the fund will be bought by its own internal capital resources; that will not be a call on the taxpayer, here or elsewhere in the Community.

The Community's shareholding will be funded from Community resources. That was provided for in the Heads of Government conference in Edinburgh; no additional contribution is involved. The private-sector funds will not be a call on the Government. That is not to say that no liabilities are involved. In the past, the House has rightly been concerned about the fact that nothing is free. Contingent liabilities are potentially involved, with the guaranteeing of loans given to organisations. Those can go belly up: things can go wrong. If the guarantee is called, it is real money that must be paid out of the European investment fund to the lending institution.

It is intended that only 20 per cent. of the 2 billion ecu that will be the initial proposed ceiling of funding will be drawn down in initial subscriptions for capital to run, or pay for, the business. The remainder will be held as a call against default on those guarantees. If a number of those enterprises go wrong, the loan is called in and the guarantee is called, the funds will be there; but it will run on a very prudent basis, with only 20 per cent. initially being drawn down and the remainder being held against default.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East asked how the present proposals would interface with the private finance initiative. In answer to him, and perhaps to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), let me say that the intention is not that the fund should take over from existing guarantees that are provided or make up for shortfalls elsewhere. The intention of the European Community expressed at the Edinburgh summit was that here would be a positive sum gained—a recovery fund in addition to what was already provided at national level. I hope and believe that the fund would be reluctant simply to refinance liabilities that had already been entered into. We are talking about funding over and above existing provision—or rather new guarantees of funding for trans-European networks and small to medium-sized enterprises.

The hon. Member for Oxford, East asked whether the fund would become a Euro-national enterprise board. We all pray fervently that it will not, and I was interested that the hon. Gentleman seemed to be making the case against such a trend. The important point is that, even if, after two years, the fund takes direct investment interest, it is not intended that it should invest directly in the small to medium-sized enterprises concerned. Funding will be through the medium of private sector investment trusts or funds so that the commercial element of choice and backing is introduced. The fund will simply pump prime or add additional liquidity to the financing and sources of funding of small to medium-sized enterprises. I hope that the fund will not be a direct investment board but will greatly help the private sector to do the job that it should be doing in the regeneration of industry.

Provision will be made for the funds to be increased beyond the level of some £2 billion, but that is not intended to be an early aspiration: the organisation must walk before it runs.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) asked about equity investment and said that new expertise would be needed. I entirely agree, and that is an important point. There are some extremely able people at the European investment bank who have to make judgments about risk as well as debt financing, and they will be seconded to the organisation. Additional people will probably be employed, but it is intended to keep them to the minimum and to appoint only in specialist areas. Provision will be made largely by seconding existing effort from the European investment bank. My hon. Friend also asked how the fund would be accountable, and I hope that I have answered that.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) gave a welcome to the proposal—for which I thank him—and rightly pointed out the great social implications that it may have. He asked about the

implications of the accession of other countries, and, in doing so, made an extremely telling and important point. Very often, Euro-bodies—the European investment bank is a large and eminent one—end up with empire aspirations that go beyond their original remit. Instead of financing organisations within the Community—the purpose for which they were originally established—they start becoming emulators of world banks. So it is that the European investment bank is financing enterprises in the Caribbean, south America and eastern Europe. There are good arguments for that, and I have tried to test some of them, but we need to keep our eye on the ball and ensure that the overwhelming majority of hard-pressed taxpayers' funds and liabilities are directed within the Community and not allowed to escape it. So there are implications for relations with nearby and potential acceding countries.

I have answered the question about domestic banks and the interest that they have taken. Only one in the United Kingdom has shown an interest so far, and that is Nikko Securities, but it is hoped that more interest will be forthcoming. The Government have certainly supported Sir Brian Unwin in making information available to the banks concerning the opportunities that exist.

The hon. Member for Newham, South rightly made a number of points about procedure. It is not novel but it is slightly unusual that we should be proposing the change by way of an order rather than primary legislation, and the hon. Gentleman is right to test the Government on that point. It was felt that the provision fell within section 1(3), and there are good precedents both in relation to changes to the European investment bank and to the de-accession of Greenland, so I am told.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked by what means the European investment fund statute would become known to the House. The statute has not been promulgated because the fund has not yet been set up. There is no requirement that the detail of the statute shall be published or promulgated. I agree that a strong case could be made for that, and I shall take careful note of what the hon. Gentleman has said, as will those Ministers who are involved in the European Community. There is a strong case for ensuring that the statute—that is to say, the detail of the constitution of the new fund—is made more widely available.

I hope that I have answered most of the queries raised in this interesting debate, and that the House will approve the order.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I am grateful to the Minister for his attempts to answer the bulk of the questions asked by hon. Members. I asked a question to which he did not respond. I asked whether the Commissions's proposal that an interim board of shareholders be established immediately had been implemented, and whether the board is meeting and taking decisions. I shall give way to the Minister if he is prepared to answer that, or perhaps he will write to me on the matter.

The Minister said that the European Community and member states had moved speedily on this matter. The hon. Gentleman and the Government may think it speedy, but Europe's unemployed could not possibly agree, and the quicker it is up and running and doing some good by generating investment funds, the better. We shall watch closely to see how quickly it is established and what good it does. We shall also keep a close watch on how it reports its work and how the Government report back to the House to ensure the accountability that hon. Members rightly expect.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 3.

Division No. 7] **[11.06 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir A. *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Andrew
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pickles, Eric
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard

Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Cryer, Bob
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Spearing and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (European Investment Fund) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.

Merchant Shipping

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

11.17 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Mayday, Mayday, Mayday. This debate is a distress call of behalf on the British merchant shipping industry, and it is one in a long line of debates, amendments, committee reports and questions to Ministers that have for more than a decade —and certainly ever since I entered the House—sought to achieve Government action that would halt the catastrophic and unnecessary decline of the British merchant fleet.

I make it crystal clear that this is not a request for Exchequer handouts to an inefficient industry unable to compete on world markets. Our shipping industry is highly efficient and competitive. In several sectors, United Kingdom operators are among world leaders. The Department of Transport itself has stated that British companies have taken significant steps to rationalise their activities and to improve their competitiveness. Wage costs, thanks to a revolution in labour relations in recent years, are kept at competitive levels.

The Government have a policy to assist the industry, and on many occasions Ministers have spelt it out to the House. Why, then, is there still a problem and what is it? The difficulty arises because the Government's policy has not been successful in the past, it is not working now, and it shows no sign whatever of being successful in the future.

Other developed countries provide measures to encourage investment and to reduce crewing and operating costs that the British Government have steadfastly refused to contemplate for Britain's merchant shipping industry. Instead, the Government's policy has been to persuade our competitors to abandon their support measures and, in the meantime, to do nothing to enable our industry to compete on level terms, which is what the industry asks for.

I believe that those terms must now be provided. If they are not, as surely as night follows day, the merchant fleet will continue to decline and, by the time of the next election, we may very well see "the end of the Red Duster". That was to be the title of the debate when I applied to Madam Speaker for it. I suppose that, unfortunately, the Table Office must have intervened, and bowdlerised the title to the blander one of "Merchant Shipping". Either way, I am delighted to have the opportunity of the debate.

I ask again, is the end of the Red Duster—because that is what we are contemplating, for sure—what a Conservative Government wish to preside over? If it is, I believe that they should say so and we shall know where we are, but if it is not, the measures that I shall speak about are essential.

Let me first spell out several examples of what other Governments are providing. On the investment side, German shipowners are now allowed tax depreciation that gives, in effect, a 50 per cent. first year allowance, but that is in addition to a continuing depreciation allowance, reduced corporation tax rates on foreign earnings and existing operating subsidies—the continuation of those was confirmed, contrary to expectations in Britain, earlier this year.

In the Netherlands, shipowners receive ship investment grants, the scope of which was recently extended.

Furthermore, shipowners may now elect for a reduction in the profits tax in place of the subsidy, and that gives further flexibility to owners.

Let us now consider crewing and operating costs and the way in which other countries' measures have helped their shipping industry. In France, the level of contributions that are made by the shipowner to the seafarers' social security fund was cut by 50 per cent. in October 1993, making the cost of employing French seafarers comparable to crew costs on the French second register.

In Sweden, shipowners receive the income tax that is paid by their seafarers and a portion of seafarers' national insurance contributions as a wage cost subsidy. That measure had been cancelled, but was reintroduced and extended indefinitely in October this year.

The Norwegian Government are considering increasing substantially the subsidy that they provide for the employment of Norwegian seafarers, and the United States Government are actively supporting a new maritime subsidy scheme for designated ships operated by US companies at a cost of $1 billion over ten years.

Those are all measures that were either recently introduced or confirmed. Unfortunately, they are a broadside—it gives me no pleasure to say this—which demolishes the Government's argument that working for level terms is the right way forward at this time. The Government are going backwards, not forwards, as the examples that I have given show.

Working towards level terms may be the right way forward in the long term, but at present all our European competitors and the United States are moving firmly the other way. If my hon. Friend the Minister can tell me otherwise to any significant extent and give me examples, I shall be glad to hear them. In addition to the countries that I have already mentioned, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain all provide some form of tax allowances and related benefits, which in most cases are superior to what is available in the United Kingdom.

My purpose tonight is to impress on our Government the vital importance of taking urgent action to stimulate the renewal of our merchant fleet, which is aging fast, and express the hope that that will be reflected at last in tomorrow's Budget. We must staunch the decline of our merchant fleet and encourage the training and employment of British seafarers.

In terms of investment—the specific point on which I want to focus tonight—the purpose of what the industry asks for is the fiscal treatment of British owners on level terms with those of their competitors specifically by introducing a 100 per cent. first-year allowance for investment in ships. Interestingly, there is a precedent for that. Effectively, a sectoral maritime enterprise zone would be created, following the precedent of regional enterprise zones, of which shipping companies cannot take advantage. I should also like to see extended to seven years the period of roll-over relief which currently applies to the balancing charges on the sale and purchase of ships.

Recent independent research offers both a negative and a positive scenario for the future. It was commissioned by the Chamber of Shipping, but it was carried out by Professor Douglas McWilliams. He used econometric modelling to predict the future of the shipping industry under, first, the current regime and, secondly, a regime of 100 per cent. first-year allowances. Under the current regime, the picture is extremely gloomy. The report estimates that the size of the United Kingdom-owned fleet will fall from its present level of almost 14 million dead weight tonnes to 8·5 million dead weight tonnes by the year 2000, and to 5 million dead weight tonnes by 2010.

The number of seafarers would fall from its present level of 19,000 to 9,000 by the year 2000 and to 4,000 by 2010. The invisible earnings of the United Kingdom shipping industry would also be substantially reduced under the current regime. However, a policy of 100 per cent. first-year allowances would encourage greater investment in ships by United Kingdom owners. It is estimated that by 2010 the policy would have paid for the expected renewal programme and brought £360 million in overall additional tax revenues per year. It would maintain the size of the fleet at more than 11 million dead weight tonnes. It would also create or preserve 15,000 jobs in shipping and other industries. Most importantly, it would increase the invisible earnings of shipping to £6·6 billion from the present £3·7 billion.

That report was independent, but it confirms the arguments made by the Chamber of Shipping in the past five years. The prospects for world shipping are good. Estimates are that world trade will grow at about 4 per cent. compound until the year 2010. The Department of Transport supports that view. The demand for shipping services will expand, as the report recognises.

British companies are ready and able to take advantage of those opportunities in the right conditions, but unless the United Kingdom shipping industry is able to compete on an even footing with its rivals it will be unable to sustain its share of the market or its current contribution to our economy. If it sustains and improves its position in an expanding market, the benefits will feed into sectors other than shipping, especially the manufacture of shipbuilding and marine equipment and, most vitally, the various services in the City of London. That will help to keep Britain and London at the centre, where they are now, of the maritime world. We cannot expect that position to continue if we are not developing people with a maritime background, who then come ashore and work in the maritime industries later in their lives. That has always been the backbone of the strength of Britain's business contribution world wide to shipping activity.

One of the great difficulties in obtaining full recognition of the importance of these issues by Government may be the wide range of Departments and Ministries whose interests are affected, which include the Department of Transport, the sponsoring Ministry, on whose behalf my hon. Friend will reply. The Department of Trade and Industry is concerned, and the Department of Employment and the Ministry of Defence are involved. Key to all this, of course, is what I have to call tonight the baleful influence, so far, of the Treasury. That inevitably diffuse appreciation of the issues may dilute the real impact and urgency that Britain faces. It tends to result in a lower priority being given to the shipping sector than to other transport sectors.

I appreciate that, in making that point, I am not making a totally fair comparison. However, it is right to point out to the House the tiny proportion of the annual budget of the Department of Transport that is devoted to shipping matters. It is about 0·5 per cent. The annual budget is £6 billion and sea transport gets £30 million, which mainly covers safety and pollution control work. I ask my hon. Friend to ensure that shipping is given a higher priority in

[Mr. Mark Wolfson]

the Department than it has had in the past. It is surely essential to us as an island nation—to the carriage of our trade, to our economy, to our balance of payments, to our employment, to our skills and, not least, to our defences.

I know that Ministers argue robustly that the latest information makes them sanguine that if sea lift was required in an operation of the kind that we had to carry out in the Falklands or in the Gulf, in one way or another, ships and crews could be chartered and made available to do that sea lift. This is certainly not the view of Sir Julian Oswald, the recently retired First Sea Lord, who, addressing a meeting recently in another place, made it clear that he had deep concerns on the issue. I believe that current senior officers in the Royal Navy share those concerns. That issue too is of major importance.

I now turn to the most recent committee report—the report, produced by the Select Committee on Employment two or three days ago, containing its recommendations following a study into the decline of employment in the merchant fleet. It made a number of important points. It expressed its concern at the decline in the number of officers and ratings and said:

"The extra cost of employing British crews has been made harder to bear by the fact that the UK industry is forced to compete with countries which have introduced strong financial assistance for their own merchant fleets."

It repeated what others have said when it reported:

"Britain is not training enough officers to meet either future demand or the needs of related industries."

In uncovered an interesting point when it said:

"Furthermore, we are concerned that public funds intended to subsidise training opportunities for UK seafarers are being applied to train staff from competitor countries."

That issue must be addressed.

The Committee also focused on the need for training enough officers to take their place in jobs ashore in the future. It also spoke about defence requirements. In conclusion, it reported:

"We welcome the modest support that the taxation system currently provides the shipping industry, but we believe that measures to encourage investment in ships and reduce employment costs are essential to safeguard the future interests of the merchant navy, of related industry, of our national defence and of those young people seeking a career in shipping."

I rest my case, not on what I have just said, but on the long line of reports, amendments and discussions in the House and in Committee, and in the outside world, which have unfortunately demonstrated that the prognosis of decline has come true. That must not be allowed to continue.

11.36 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) on his excellent speech on an important subject. My hon. Friends the Members for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), for Worcester (Mr. Luff), for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who listened to him, take a keen interest in this matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) is also present and he has told me of his specific interest in merchant shipping. They have greatly enjoyed what my hon. Friend had to say.

I hope that it is not too churlish to say that it is rather significant that there is not one member of Her Majesty's Opposition present to listen to this important debate on an industry that they purport frequently to hold dear. When push comes to shove at what is, after all, just after half-past 11, they cannot even find a Front-Bench spokesman to attend. When the crocodile tears are shed on future occasions, I shall remind the Opposition of how much they seem to care, in practice, about our merchant shipping.

My hon. Friend has a great future ahead of him in writing film scripts. His opening line of "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday" was dramatic enough and I am rather sorry that the Table Office chose to delete the rather dramatic title for the debate of "Death of the Red Duster" and substitute the anodyne, "Merchant Shipping". I hope to be treated to other examples of my hon. Friend's imaginative approach to this matter in the future. It certainly does a great deal to enliven our debates at this hour.

My hon. Friend made some important comments and I shall try to reply to some of them in the short time available to me. He quoted from the report of the Select Committee on Employment, which said:

"the percentage of the Department of Transport's budget . . . devoted to shipping . . . is a telling example of how low down the list of the Department's priorities shipping stands."

If my hon. Friend will allow me to say so, that quotation is simply untrue, and it would be untrue even if the Committee had used the correct statistical data to support its conclusion.

I must make it clear to my hon. Friend that the Government are fully aware of the contributions that the British merchant fleet has made and continues to make to the country in times of peace and crisis. We are also well aware that there are associated maritime industries, which have grown up in the City, which serve the merchant fleet and which now exist to serve not only the British industry but the needs of a significant proportion of world shipping.

In the past, the British fleet developed and prospered by identifying opportunities and exploiting them. It should therefore come as no surprise that other nations, especially the newly industrialising nations, will follow a similar route in developing their own national fleets.

Inevitably, such competition will impact on the size and composition of our fleet. Over the past 20 years or so, we have witnessed a big reduction in British flagged and owned tonnage, and at the same time a significant restructuring which is reflected in the types of ships that now comprise our national fleet. But our experience is not unique. Other traditional maritime nations have faced similar and undoubtedly equally painful adjustments. Given that a large part of our shipping is international, we cannot insulate ourselves from international competition of the sort that I have described.

My hon. Friend was correct in claiming that we can all swallow hard and accept the consequences of fair competition, but it is a great deal more difficult to accept the pain caused by unfair competition. My hon. Friend had something to say about that which I thought was pertinent, but I hope that he will allow me to say that it is not the whole story. He gave the House some examples—and he was quite right—of areas in which some other European nations appear to offer more favourable practices, including fiscal practices, treatment of training and treatment of personnel, than perhaps is the case in the United Kingdom. I recall that the Select Committee report contains a tabulation listing the practices in each of the member states. I hope that I am not misrepresenting my hon. Friend when I say that he will undoubtedly have taken

his information from that table. If he did, perhaps I may make it clear that there are also examples which tend to point in the other direction.

In Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, seafarers are treated no differently from other employees for taxation purposes. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, seafarers who spend fewer than 183 days in this country in any 365-day period qualify for 100 per cent. tax relief on foreign earnings. Seafarers in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal, like their United Kingdom counterparts, make the same social security payments as other employees, and I know that some recent concessions have been made by France on this. As my hon. Friend will appreciate, we are seeking further clarification from the French Government on their move.

In Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy and Portugal, corporation tax is higher than the 35 per cent. levied in the United Kingdom. Of course, Germany's rate of 33·6 per cent. and the 35 per cent. levied in the Netherlands and Spain are exactly comparable with the United Kingdom. Unlike many other countries covered by the survey, we offer direct financial support for officer training. At present, that is in excess of £3 million a year—not, incidentally, the £0·7 million quoted on page 155 of the Select Committee's report. We also provide relief in the form of a subsidy of about £3 million per year to enable crews to be shipped or flown abroad to where they pick up the vessel.

In addition, as my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary explained during the debate on the Finance Bill earlier this year, shipping—together with the rest of industry—benefits from the Government's fiscal and monetary policies. While I am on this subject, I take the opportunity to acknowledge my hon. Friend's understanding that on the eve of the Budget he cannot expect me to say anything more specific on that matter; I aim to hold this office for at least another 24 hours, if not longer.

I have given those examples simply to demonstrate that there are two sides to the coin. My hon. Friend is right that there are some areas in which other European competitors appear to offer more advantage than that offered in the United Kingdom. As I hope that the illustrations I have given show, however, there are many ways in which the United Kingdom offers a competitive environment.

Our Government have evolved a package of measures tailored to suit the needs of our shipping industry. For example, training is high on our agenda, and that is entirely right. Some support measures serve only to distort the market and, as such, they represent unfair competition. It is that latter group that we targeted during our recent EC presidency, and which we shall continue to attack. I make no apology for that. We hope that our partners will be persuaded by our arguments. I do not claim that we are on the threshold of success, but there are signs that others are beginning to accept the force of what we say.

It is interesting to note that many of the EC countries which are often praised for the support that they give their national shipping have been unable to work the longed-for miracle. Within the Community, in the 12 months from 1 January 1992 to 1 January 1993, only France, Greece and the Netherlands could claim an increase in registered tonnage. All the other member states lost ground during that period.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will be the first to acknowledge that overt financial and/or fiscal support is not the only means whereby our competitors can gain unfair advantage. Over the years, we have made every effort to remove restrictions on trading opportunities. We were delighted that the debate on EC cabotage was brought to a successful conclusion during our presidency.

I shall not disguise the fact that the result was not so liberal as we should have liked. Nor do I ignore the fact that, regrettably, some member states are being selective in their implementation of the agreement. Nevertheless, even in its present form it is of considerable significance to British shipping and will open up new and potentially profitable opportunities, which will grow as the various derogations lapse. As I speak, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping met our EC counterparts in an endeavour to agree further measures, which we hope will redound to the benefit of the Community and, by extension, to our shipping industry, to those who work in it and to users.

It is of regret that many of the newer flag states regard shipping as a soft option and consequently pay little or no attention to their responsibilities. That is grossly unfair to seafarers, to passengers who sail on their ships and to manufacturers who, in good faith, entrust their cargoes to them. Nor is it fair to countries whose environment suffers the consequence of badly maintained vessels, or indeed those responsible ship owners, particularly those who fly the Red Duster, who maintain their ships to the highest standards at considerable cost in terms of time and money. The United Kingdom has recognised the problem and taken the lead in seeking remedies with like-minded Governments in the EC and International Maritime Organisation.

There are one or two points that my hon. Friend made on the detailed 100 per cent. ship allowance and roll-over relief that I have not been able to answer, together with his point about merchant shipping and defence. I hope that he will accept that the recent review allowed Ministers in the Ministry of Defence to announce that special measures on shipping were not considered necessary. If I may, I will write to my hon. Friend on any outstanding issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 30 November 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH (ANSWER TO ADDRESS)

The Vice-Chamberlain of the Household reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I opened the present session of Parliament.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL [*Lords*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the British Waterways Bill [*Lords*] may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read for the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph (*b*) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Trade Unions

2. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has held with trade unions relating to the rights of employees to trade union representation.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I have had a number of discussions with the Trades Union Congress at which the rights of employees to trade union representations have been raised.

Mr. McAllion: The right of employees to establish and join organisations of their own choosing, including trade unions, is one of the basic freedoms that are available to workers around the civilised world. Why do the Government continue to deny that basic freedom to their own workers at GCHQ? As January marks the 10th anniversary of the Government ban on trade unions there which was described at the time by the Tory Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) as the "nasty, thin wedge of fascism", is it not time that the Government got back to democratic basics by lifting the ban that has internationally isolated them in their anti-worker and anti-trade union bigotry?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the workers at GCHQ can join a staff association. Conservative Members will take no lectures on the rights of trade union members from the party that supported the closed shop and that only a year ago voted against the right for members to join a trade union of their choice.

Mr. Riddick: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is an absolute tragedy that 400 jobs have been lost at the Timex factory in Dundee? Does he agree that the left-wing extremists there seemed to be more interested in trade union rights than they were in the maintenance of jobs, and that those people who were involved should be thoroughly ashamed of their job-destroying tactics?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree that, unfortunately, the extremists in the trade union movement denied Dundee job opportunities at Timex, as before at Ford, and most people in the country and in Dundee would accept that inward investment depends on a good record of industrial relations. We have achieved that record thanks to the reforms that the Government brought forward, which were opposed by hon. Members opposite.

Unemployment

3. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to ensure co-operation between regions of the European Union in the common effort to overcome unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Europe will overcome its structural unemployment problem only by becoming competitive and removing unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy.

Mr. Wigley: Is the Minister aware that some areas in eastern France have lower unemployment than difficult areas of Wales, Merseyside, north-east England and Scotland, yet have higher inducements for attracting employment despite having a better infrastructure and being nearer to the heart of the European Community? What mechanisms can his Department use to co-ordinate incentives to develop unemployment opportunities through the regions of Europe to ensure that there is not unfair competition against areas in Wales with higher unemployment, so that they get a fair crack of the whip?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should cite France—a country which has a higher level of unemployment than Britain and where unemployment is rising—when Britain is leading the Community on unemployment and where unemployment is falling. It is falling in Britain because of the supply-side reforms introduced in the 1980s by the Government, which were opposed by all Opposition Members, including the hon. Gentleman. The way forward for Europe in terms of jobs is not through subsidy, but by becoming competitive and abandoning the kind of nonsense that is included in the social chapter.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Has my hon. Friend noted that it is important for all regions in this country and elsewhere in the Community to ensure that unit costs of production and labour do not outstrip those of our competitor countries? Since the beginning of the 1980s, unit costs of production in Europe have risen ahead of those in America and Japan, our big export markets. Can my hon. Friend ensure that the German Government continue to push in their presentation to the Commission their ideas, which are very similar to those advanced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree that we need to make Europe competitive to tackle the problem of unemployment in Europe. My hon. Friend is right to emphasise Europe's poor record in creating jobs. The United Kingdom has been among the most successful countries in Europe in that regard. Over the past 20 years, 36 million new jobs have been created in the United States; only 8 million have been created in Europe, most of them in the public sector. The way to create extra jobs in Europe is to oppose the social chapter, and to make the European Commission understand that competitiveness depends on setting free enterprise free.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Bearing in mind that it is intended to cut the common agricultural policy by 50 per cent. over the next five years, can the Minister confirm that special attention will be given to rural areas such as Wales, where tens of thousands of jobs will be lost? Will he give an undertaking that schemes will be prepared to produce substitute employment where agricultural begins to show signs of collapse?

Mr. Forsyth: Is it not extraordinary that the hon. and learned Gentleman could not find time to say that unemployment had fallen by 17 per cent. in his constituency? Is it not extraordinary that he did not recognise that Wales benefits from considerable inward investment, as does the rest of the United Kingdom? It benefits from that investment because we have set aside the kind of policies that he would sign up to tomorrow, including the social chapter.

Mrs. Clwyd: Can the Minister explain why Britain, which contains one third of the European Community's working children, is the only member state once again to opt out of an EC directive to protect 13 to 15-year-olds from working for more than 12 hours per week? Is he not ashamed that the only victory that he has secured is for rotten employers who continue to exploit the hidden army of child workers as cheap labour? For that lot,"back to basics" means back to kids up the chimney.

Mr. Forsyth: The Government took the position that they took because we thought it right for youngsters to have the chance to do paper rounds and Saturday jobs. I am sorry that the hon. Lady does not accept that. While she is talking about unscrupulous employers, she might look into the case of the Transport and General Workers Union, which sponsors her. According to *The Mail on Sunday*, workers at the seaside hotel owned by the Transport and General Workers Union are complaining that the TGWU gives them a deliberate eight-week break to circumvent employment legislation. Because their employment is interrupted in that way, they cannot be classified as full-time workers. The hon. Lady should look in her own backyard.

Working Hours

4. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment his Department has made of the effects on British industry of a statutory maximum 35-hour week.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Hunt): It would be highly damaging to British competiveness and jobs.

Mr. Streeter: Is my right hon. Friend aware that this afternoon he has confirmed my worst fears about the 35-hour working week? It would lead to a dramatic increase in the employment costs of British businesses, which in turn would have a major impact on our competitiveness throughout the world. Would not that mean thousands of British workers being thrown on the scrap heap of unemployment? What does my right hon. Friend think of any party leader who would sign up for that package?

Mr. Hunt: A compulsory 35-hour week would mean passing legislation in the House of Commons that would prevent 14 million employees from working the hours that they now work and want to work. It would also impose costs of £20,000 million on British employers, as well as asking those 14 million employees to take a £20,000 million pay cut. It is the politics of despair, and I am shocked and surprised that the Opposition should sign up to such a damaging policy.

Ms Eagle: Is the Secretary of State aware of what is increasingly going on at the other end of the labour market? There is an increasing prevalence of zero hour contracts, which mean that an individual is given a contract of employment with zero hours to fulfil and is then expected to be on the end of a telephone, to be called in at the whim of the employer, not knowing from one day to the next how many hours they will be expected to work. What effect does the Secretary of State think that that will have on British industry?

Mr. Hunt: I must tell the hon. Lady that, in the UK, there has not been a substantial increase in casual or temporary working. Those are the facts. *[Interruption.]* There has not been a substantial increase. The increase— *[Interruption.]* Listen to the facts. The increase has been only 6 per cent. The number of permanent jobs in the United Kingdom now exceeds 20 million. The hon. Lady will not succeed in trying to portray a different picture from the one that is reality: that a greater proportion of the working age population are in work in the United Kingdom than in most other countries in the rest of Europe; and that they do so at an average gross weekly wage of £316. That is because we are competitive and are winning new markets all the time.

Mr. Churchill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is quite difficult enough already for British and other EC workers to compete with Pacific rim countries, without putting the added shackle of a ball and chain around the ankle of every British employee? Will he and our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister carry on spearheading the fight against this 1950s socialist mentality, typified by Mr. Delors and those on the Opposition Front Bench?

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. It is positively ridiculous that, in this day and age, the Labour party and some socialists in the rest of the Community should believe that there is a definite parcel of work that can be divided between the available work force. We benefit in the UK because we have a flexible labour market. Why is it—as my hon. Friend has pointed out—that, in the UK, unemployment is falling, while in mainland Europe, in every country, unemployment is rising?

Mr. Prescott: Will the Secretary of State accept my official copy of the European socialist manifesto, which makes it absolutely clear that any such changes in the working week will be imposed not by legislation but by agreement with the social partners? Is he not aware that, in companies in the Netherlands, Germany and France, where such 35-hour agreements have been agreed, they have led to increased productivity and an increased work force, without a reduction in pay? That is one reason why they have a higher level of pay and a lower level of unemployment than Britain.

Is it not true that, only last week, the Secretary of State himself refused to vote against the 48-hour week European directive, which means that it will be he who introduces legislation to reduce the working week? Will that be in his European Tory manifesto?

Mr. Hunt: First, I welcome the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) to the Front Bench. I also welcome the hon. Members for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and also the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

Mr. Canavan: Answer the question.

Mr. Hunt: I will. The trouble with the Opposition is that they do not know a compliment or tribute when it hits them in the face.

I have to say to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East that I know that he has been doing his job for only a short time, but I have spent some considerable time reading through the manifesto that was distributed at the press conference.

Mr. Prescott: Here is the official one.

Mr. Hunt: I know that the hon. Gentleman is trying to pretend that the French version is the more authoritative one, but I rely on the English version. Paragraph 32 says:

"These measures must include a substantial cut in working time to ensure a better division of the available work. Several approaches are possible: a working week of 35 hours or four days".

Already, the deputy leader of the Labour party in the European Parliament has said that the party will campaign on a 35-hour week. Either the document to which the Labour party signed up is not worth the paper that it is written on, or it is the most damaging document for the United Kingdom that I have ever seen. Instead of reducing unemployment, it will spread unemployment.

Mr. Jenkin: Is not the evidence clear that, where legislation of this type is imposed on a working population, higher levels of unemployment result? Is not the evidence also clear that Britain is winning respect from its European partners by stating the case clearly, negotiating firmly and not backing down until we get the deal that we want?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. First, no country in Europe has a statutory 35-hour working week at present. Secondly, we are winning respect from our partners in Europe in seeking to contest any rigid regulatory measures which would only stiffen up the labour market and stop unemployment coming down. Thirdly, it is a fact that, in the United Kingdom, unemployment is coming down. It is down 137,000 so far this year, whereas on the mainland of Europe, it is rising in every country. My hon. Friend is right that people are listening more and more to the United Kingdom Government's message and the message of the Conservative and Christian Democratic parties, not the socialist message from the past.

VAT

5. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of jobs that would be lost as a result of the introduction of a 17.5 per cent. rating of value added tax on books and newspapers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I am not prepared to speculate on matters still within the realm of hypothesis.

Mr. Denham: Is not that a most extraordinary and complacent reply? Is it not the case that the imposition of VAT on books and newspapers has been widely canvassed as an option in the Budget, and that it has been estimated by the printing industry that the measure would cost 20,000 jobs? Yet the Minister has not even bothered to estimate the consequences for employment.

How many other measures that may be announced this afternoon in the Budget have slipped through the Minister's fingers without any estimate of the consequences for unemployment? Why on earth do we have Ministers for employment if they will not do their job properly? Is there not one cut in public expenditure on

which we can all agree—getting rid of Employment Ministers' salaries because they are not prepared to do the job they are paid for?

Miss Widdecombe: The job that I am paid to do is not to be led into using the Department's investigation resources by the mere speculation of the Opposition. Why does not the hon. Gentleman confine himself to some facts? Instead of spreading gloom and despondency, why does he not point out that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 13 per cent. since January? *[Interruption.]* I shall believe that the Opposition really care about employment when they greet questions like that with cheers.

Mr. John Townend: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is illogical for the working man to have to pay VAT on the boots and shoes that he needs to go to work, but not on *The Sun*, pornographic magazines or *The Tatler*? Does she also agree that the printing industry has benefited from our industrial relations legislation, which has enabled it to cut its costs, more than any other industry?

Miss Widdecombe: I suggest that my hon. Friend puts his question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer at an appropriate time.

Unemployment

6. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give figures for the total adult unemployment in Lewisham West on 1 January for each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Since 1989, 3,747; 2,978; 3,966; 5,895 and 6,904 respectively.

Mr. Dowd: Is the Secretary of State aware that those figures show that, for every marginal decline in the numbers of unemployed in my constituency and across London as a whole, there has been a far greater increase in the numbers out of work? Those numbers reveal not only the numbers out of work but the number of jobs that have been lost to London's economy since the Government took office. Almost half a million jobs have been lost to the London economy in the past 10 years.

When will the Secretary of State understand that the Government's two greatest failings are their economic policy and their inability to deal with that question? No synthetic anger towards those who point that out to him will obscure that fact; nor will his bogus enthusiasm for a recovery that has not touched London.

Mr. Hunt: So far this year, there has been a fall in unemployment of 231. The Lewisham jobcentre has placed 2,745 people into jobs since October of last year. I am saddened that the hon. Gentleman has not paid tribute to the tremendous amount of work being done by the South Thames training and enterprise council in providing opportunities to the long-term unemployed. The hon. Gentleman has not mentioned that the Employment Service has placed 190,273 people into jobs in the past 12 months, up 13.6 per cent. on the year before.

7. **Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met representatives of London local authorities to discuss unemployment.

Miss Widdecombe: Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had any consultations with the local authorities, nevertheless they are in close consultation with the training and enterprise councils. Any request for a meeting would be sympathetically considered.

Ms Gordon: The Minister has boasted that unemployment in Britain is lower than in Europe. Will she tell that to my constituents in the east end, where unemployment is about 20 per cent., 25 per cent. in some places and 60 per cent. for young black males? Will the Minister tell us the arrangements that are being made to ensure that east enders benefit from developments such as the Jubilee line and that they get the jobs created—unlike other developments, which have left us with a net loss of jobs?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Lady would benefit from a lesson from Martyn Lewis, which might give her constituents some other facts of equal relevance—for example, 13.6 per cent. more people put into work by jobcentres, from which her constituency has benefited; the advent of jobs, as she has admitted, from the Jubilee line, from Argos, from United Parcels and from Tesco-Metro. Why does not the hon. Lady bring hope to her constituents instead of always trying to depress young people who want to work and the long-term unemployed, all of whom our initiatives are helping? Why does she not welcome those initiatives and back her local TEC and local employment services? She should stop trying to spread gloom when there is obviously good news to be had.

Sir Michael Neubert: Again referring to Martyn Lewis, should it not be remembered that there 20,000 manufacturing businesses in London, and that London creates almost 20 per cent. of our national wealth and contributes £8.5 billion more in taxation than it receives from the Exchequer? Will my hon. Friend continue to support measures that will enhance the potential of London as one of the nation's greatest assets?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes. In addition to that good news, there is the winning of city challenge and all the potential that that has, and the fact that the highest number of people since records began left the unemployment register for London and the south-east.

Queen's Speech

8. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the Queen's Speech in relation to his responsibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 7 per cent. in the past year and by 34 per cent. in the past six years? Will he urge our European partners to follow our successful enterprise policies and not the job-destroying socialism of the Opposition?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. What has been remarkable about this Question Time is that every time Conservatives have pointed out the extent to which unemployment has fallen in the constituency of an Opposition Member, that has been greeted with a round of booing from the Opposition. It is clear that good news is bad news for them and that is a sad reflection of the lack

of any policy on their part. My hon. Friend is right. Employers are responding more quickly to the upturn in the economy because of the flexible labour market. Long may that continue.

Rev. Martin Smyth: What representations have been made concerning the fall in the number of unemployed disabled people? What steps are being taken to remove discrimination against them?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to focus and target more resources on the disabled among the unemployed, particularly those who are long-term unemployed. He will be aware that, earlier this year, I announced some proposals to enable those people to gain greater access to work. I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman and to several colleagues on both sides of the House who have made representations to me concerning that scheme and the new dimension that it gives to extend the range of help to a wider number of disabled people. I am now considering those representations and I will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Unemployment

9. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussion he has had with his EC counterparts about unemployment.

Mr Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with our EC counterparts, at which we discuss unemployment.

Mr. Willetts: Can the Minister confirm that Britain's unemployment rate is lower than that in France, Italy, Spain and across the European Community as a whole? Does that not show that we have nothing to learn from Mr. Delors about curing unemployment? They need to learn from us that deregulating the labour market is the best way to create more jobs rather than by piling new restrictions on.

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. It is quite right to say that our unemployment rate is lower and also that our employment figures are higher than elsewhere in the Community. My hon. Friend is right to single out France and Spain, as they are the only two countries in the Community that have embraced the Labour party's minimum wage policy and they have paid the price in lost jobs.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister ever predict to his ministerial counterparts in the Common Market when he expects the Government's economic policies to bring the level of unemployment down to what it was in 1979 at just over 1 million people?

Mr. Forsyth: If we were to take the hon. Gentleman's advice and embrace a minimum wage we would put 2 million extra people on the dole. If we were to take the Opposition's advice and embrace the social chapter, with all its nonsenses, we would put many more hundreds of thousands of people on the dole. The hon. Gentleman is in no position to lecture the Conservative party on jobs for the unemployed.

Mr. Paice: Will my hon. Friend continue to discuss with our European counterparts the voting basis for many of the measures that come from Europe? Will he particularly continue to challenge hard the use of the health and safety provisions, under majority voting, to introduce what is no more and no less than socialist legislation, such as the working time directive?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of ensuring that we do not add to non-wage labour costs in Europe, because the price will be paid in other people's jobs. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks about challenging the abuse of article 118A of the treaty of Rome. I should warn my hon. Friend, however, that if the Labour party were ever to get into power it would remove the necessity for unanimity on matters concerning the labour market and thereby expose many people in Britain to unemployment needlessly as we became less competitive.

10. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for unemployment.

Mr. David Hunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for asking that question. Last month, seasonally adjusted unemployment fell by 49,000 and now stands at 2,855,100, which is a fall this year of 137,000.

Mr. Skinner: Now that the Government have admitted that they say one thing in private and another thing in public, is not it time that we had a little honesty about the unemployment figures? Why does not the Secretary of State admit that there are 500,000 women who do not register who should be added to the figures? There are another 500,000 young men and women who have been thrown on the scrapheap of slave labour schemes, and more than 100,000 miners and others on special schemes. In Bolsover, some of those people do not figure on the unemployment benefit records. Let us have some honesty all round. If the Secretary of State wants the money to get the unemployed back to work, why does not he tax the rich rather than adding VAT to fuel and power?

Mr. Hunt: I am sad that the hon. Gentleman did not welcome the fall in unemployment of 137,000 this year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will answer the question by referring the hon. Gentleman to the speech made by the Leader of the Opposition at the CBI where, for the first time, the leader of the Labour party acknowledged that unemployment is now below 3 million.

Mr. Skinner: It is not.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman may say that it is not, but the leader of his party says that it is. In this, I believe the hon. Gentleman's leader because he was expressing the truth. Our statistics show the truth and it is about time that the hon. Gentleman acknowledged that.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend recall visiting my constituency 10 days ago when he was made aware of the importance of the hosiery and knitwear industries? Does he believe that the competitive position of the industries with the far east will be enhanced if further working hour restrictions are imposed by Europe?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no doubt that the imposition of a statutory working week of 35 hours would prevent 14 million people in this country from working the hours that they want to work. Compulsory legislation of that type would undermine the

competitiveness of key industries. That message came across to me loud and clear when I visited my hon. Friend's constituency.

Health and Safety

11. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent discussions he has had with the TUC on health and safety issues.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have had several meetings with the TUC to discuss health and safety, the most recent of which was yesterday.

Mrs. Mahon: Is the Minister aware that since the Labour Government introduced the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 the numbers of people killed or seriously injured at work have been reduced dramatically? How will workers taking their own toilet rolls and towels to work help British industry and resolve its problems? Will the Minister tell the House whether the Government's proposals on the deregulation of health and safety comply with the EC directive?

Mr. Forsyth: The Government have no proposals to deregulate health and safety. The deregulation review is being carried out by the Health and Safety Commission, which was established by the Labour Government. I am astonished that the hon. Lady seeks to attack the commission in carrying out that review. The hon. Lady's point about workers bringing their own soap and toilet rolls to work is fatuous nonsense in which the Government will have no part.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that his announcement that the Government deregulation proposals will have no impact on health and safety will be warmly welcomed by workers in my constituency? Is he aware that the biggest employers in rural areas are in tourism, hotels, restaurants and catering and that they want to see the Government's deregulation initiative put into practice?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Deregulation is important to ensure that firms are able to comply to maintain the effective health and safety regimes which everyone wants. The review is being carried out by the Health and Safety Commission, on which the TUC is represented and is playing a part. The Department of Trade and Industry has also asked business to make an input.

Quite frankly, the commission told me that it would need a special van to send round all the regulations which apply to health and safety in the workplace. There must be room for pruning and it is a pity that Opposition Members are not prepared to play a constructive role. Instead, they seem to want to make cheap political capital out of the important matter of safety and the competitiveness of this country.

Mr. Janner: Will the Minister tell the House why the vital new regulations introduced, on common ground and without dissent, in the House earlier this year are not yet being enforced at all in industry?

Mr. Forsyth: I know that the hon. and learned Gentleman has taken a close interest in the conduct of industrial tribunals, and I assure him that those changes will be introduced as rapidly as possible. I assume that he wishes to focus on that aspect, but his question did not make that absolutely clear. If he cares to write to me I shall be happy to assure him.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the United Kingdom has one of the best safety records in Europe, and that, by ensuring that our safety procedures are not overly bureaucratic and burdensome, we have succeeded both in saving lives and in saving people from injury, while at the same time keeping many significant employers in this country?

Mr. Forsyth: We have the best safety record not only in Europe but in the world, and my hon. Friend is right to say that that depends on conduct in the workplace. For Opposition Members to argue that we should retain rules such as the agricultural ladders regulations, which specify the distance between the rungs of a ladder and the grain of the wood to be used to make it, is fatuous and nonsensical. No one with the interests of safety at heart would seek to portray the regulations in the emotional way in which Opposition Members, even those on the Front Bench, have sought to do in the press and elsewhere.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister tell us whether it is right and proper for his Department to allow the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to repeal health and safety legislation by means of statutory instruments such as those laid down in clause 52 of the soon-to-be-published deregulation and contracting out Bill? If he, like me, has confidence in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, and in the Health and Safety Commission, why does he not let the commission, rather than the ideologues in the Department of Trade and Industry, repeal unwanted legislation?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman would do better not to spend his time ferreting around in dustbins; he would not then be misled, as he clearly has been. The draft in his possession does not represent what will eventually appear. The hon. Gentleman should know that the House decides on regulations, and says which of them should be repealed, not the Health and Safety Commission. The commission makes proposals about regulations, and that will continue. The review is being carried out by the commission, with trade union representatives involved. The hon. Gentleman would do better to spend his time talking to those people, rather than scurrying round the dustbins of Whitehall.

Manufacturing Industry

12. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the impact upon employment in the United Kingdom of companies moving their manufacturing centres to sites in eastern Europe.

Mr. David Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend that that is potentially serious, but provided that the United Kingdom remains competitive, it will not happen.

Mr. Winterton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his helpful, albeit brief, reply. Does he accept that our manufacturing industries are critical to the United Kingdom economy, and does he support the objectives of the all-party Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance launched in the House earlier this year, which believes in free but fair competition, and in constructive

deregulation? Will he tell the House what measures and initiatives he will take to improve both education and training to ensure the continued competitiveness of British industry?

Mr. Hunt: First, I strongly agree with what my hon. Friend says about the importance of manufacturing industry. Secondly, the deregulatory effects of the abolition of wages councils will enable manufacturing industry to be even more competitive. Thirdly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will confirm, the Government have focused heavily on manufacturing industry in Wales, where output is now 124 per cent. of what it was in 1979, and have done much to reinvigorate industry throughout Wales.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Is it not Government policy that we should compete successfully with eastern Europe and, for that matter, with the Pacific rim countries, by driving down wage levels and worsening terms and conditions in this country?

Mr. Hunt: What I would say to the hon. Gentleman is that the take-home pay of the average worker in the United Kingdom is one of the highest in Europe, and the hon. Gentleman would do well to reflect on the reason for that. Of course, it is because our non-wage labour costs are much lower and much more competitive. Instead of focusing on the subject that he mentioned, he would do better to abdicate from the socialist charter, which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has signed, to impose a compulsory 35-hour week and a compulsory four-day week, which would be grievously damaging to British industry. It is about time the Labour party dropped that sort of socialist nonsense.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Robinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that contacts have played an initial part in bringing about the process in the middle east and in bringing people together in South Africa; but contacts have always played an important part in bringing an end to violence? Hon. Members want my right hon. Friend to continue his courageous search to bring an end to bloodshed in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend and I welcome the strong support yesterday given by hon. Members on both sides of the House to the efforts to promote peace and political settlement in Northern Ireland. I believe that contacts can play a useful part, for the reasons set out yesterday by my right hon. and learned Friend. I hope that those contacts will have helped the IRA to understand that violence must stop before those who justify it can enter negotiations with the Government, and that the Government stand firmly by their public position. I regret very much that there has not yet been a permanent cessation of violence, as events in Northern Ireland over the past day have sadly demonstrated yet again. But if our present efforts do not succeed, we will not cease to explore opportunities for peace.

Mr. John Smith: As a former Chief Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer, as well as Prime Minister for the past three years, does the Prime Minister accept responsibility for the £50 billion Budget deficit?

The Prime Minister: During the recession—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer"] I shall answer in my own way. During the recession, the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues were keen to see us increase spending to protect people who are vulnerable. It was the protection of people who were vulnerable and the collapse of income during that period that increased the size of the borrowing requirement. What is presently odious about the right hon. and learned Gentleman is that his party objects now to spending reductions, having previously asked for spending increases. They complain about the size of the borrowing requirement, they complain about tax increases and they still promise extra expenditure.

Mr. John Smith: I will not bandy cheap insults with the Prime Minister. The House will notice that he did not answer the question as to responsibility. If he seeks to blame it all on the world recession, can he explain why Britain's Budget deficit is significantly worse than that of Japan, the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Portugal?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman can explain why our inflation position is better than that of all those countries, why our unemployment position is better, why our exports position is better, why we have unemployment falling and they have unemployment growing, and why we have the largest growth rate in the European Community this year and projected next year. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman could reflect on that.

Mr. John Smith: Perhaps the Prime Minister will reflect on why, if everything in the garden is growing as well as he suggests, we have a £50 billion deficit? Is not economic mismanagement the fundamental reason for that? And is not that the fundamental reason why, quite apart from anything the Chancellor does today, the British taxpayer faces a major tax hike next April?

The Prime Minister: I answered the right hon. and learned Gentleman's third question in my first answer. If he cares to look at it again, he will see that that is the case. Once again, he is trying to face both ways at the same time and attacks us both on the level of the deficit and the level of taxation. If he thinks that taxes are too high and the deficit is also too high, what spending would he cut? He cannot go on living in an Alice in Wonderland world where taxes fall, the deficit drops and spending rises effortlessly upwards. Whenever the right hon. and learned Gentleman speaks, the natural laws of economics are suspended.

Q2. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stephen: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the most significant result of the survey of manufacturing industry published yesterday is that our consumer-led recovery is providing a significant and sustained boost to manufacturing industry right across the country?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about that. Consumer demand is rising, manufacturing output is growing, retail sales are at record levels, exports are up, and car registrations are up, which is all good news for British manufacturing. Opposition Members who continually knock the record of British manufacturing should ask themselves how, if it is not doing well, British exports have risen so dramatically. We were certainly the first to go into recession, but we are also the first to be clearly out of recession and we are set to grow faster this year than almost any other European nation.

Mr. Ashdown: Should not those who hope for peace and wish the Prime Minister well in his pursuit of it in Northern Ireland nevertheless recognise that the events of the weekend, for whatever reason, have served to dent the trust of the Unionists, put the extremists centre stage and check the momentum of peace in Northern Ireland? Does the Prime Minister recognise the absolute urgency now of taking action to restore the momentum for peace by proposing, after discussion with the Irish Prime Minister, actions that will unite the majority on both sides?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, who made his own comments about the leaks over the weekend, might have been prudent to wait to hear what the Government had to say before he made those comments and to study the documents which the Government released to justify the position that they have taken, as those documents clearly do. I believe that when people in Northern Ireland have had a chance to study what was said, they will see that the Government have acted properly and done their duty throughout this whole affair.

If there had been a terrorist tragedy of some sort on a massive scale this week and it then became apparent that we had ignored the message that we received earlier this year, that would have been unforgivable, and I dread to think what the right hon. Gentleman would have said in those circumstances.

Q4. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Bearing in mind that there is strong and firm support for the Home Secretary's recent proposals on law and order, particularly with regard to people on bail and remand—reforms which have been urged on the Government over a period of years by the Norwich crime prevention panel—will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will encourage business leaders and local councils in Norwich to support the panel's campaign to install security cameras in the city centre, leading to the deterrence of crime and more convictions, as sure as night follows day?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is determined to make Norwich as famous as Basildon, and I suspect that he may succeed. I agree with him about closed circuit television and reject outright the views of those people who claim that it is in some way Big Brother. The public rightly want less crime, and closed circuit television has an important part to play in achieving that. My hon. Friend is right to say that there is strong support in the House and beyond for the anti-crime measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I hope that they will have the support of hon. Members across the House when they come before the House for consideration.

Q5. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Trimble: May I refer the Prime Minister to the channel of communication with the IRA that was revealed yesterday? Is the Prime Minister satisfied about the reliability and accuracy of that channel in view of the denials now issuing from Belfast about the February statement to which the Prime Minister referred earlier? Was the dialogue with the IRA in any way prompted by events in England? Were any messages sent on that channel of communication by or on behalf of any Minister other than the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Were they in any way related to recent events in England?

The Prime Minister: For the reasons that my right hon. and learned Friend set out yesterday, it is useful to continue to have a confidential channel of communication—which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and his hon. Friends said yesterday, has been available for many years. Any private communications on our part will, on all occasions, be consistent with the Government's public position, as was the case with the documents published yesterday. On the reliability of the channel, experience has proved it to be extremely accurate and extremely reliable over many years. But the real test over time is action not words. We need to see what the final outcome is. The documents published yesterday set out a full record of the exchanges and I have no further exchanges to report to the House.

Q6. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Coombs: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last month, not only was there a decrease in unemployment in my constituency of 7 per cent., but Brintons Carpets, my constituency's largest employer, has just announced a year-on-year increase in exports of 86 per cent? Is not that indicative of the huge improvement in competitiveness in British industry, and would not that improvement be severely damaged by the social chapter, the minimum wage and the European super-state, with which the Labour party increasingly seems to be obsessed?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to hear the good news from my hon. Friend's constituency, and to hear that unemployment is falling there, as it is now in all parts of the country. It is true that while I have no doubt that the Opposition wish to create jobs, their policies would, in practice, destroy jobs. A minimum wage would destroy jobs, a 35-hour week would destroy jobs and levelling up business taxes would destroy jobs. People will notice that

unemployment is falling here with our policies, but rising in other countries that follow the policies advocated by the Opposition.

Mr. Grocott: Can the Prime Minister confirm that, in the three years that he has been in the job, 1,300,000 people have lost their jobs, 250,000 people have lost their homes and 150,000 businesses have gone bankrupt? As he continues to draw a full salary, can we assume that, whatever else is in the Chancellor's Budget, there will be no reference to performance-related pay?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm a lot to the hon. Gentleman. I can confirm that when I became Prime Minister inflation was 9.7 per cent. and is now at 1.4 per cent., interest rates were 15 per cent. and are now 5.5 per cent., unemployment was rising and is now falling, the economy has been in recession and is now growing, and 137,000 people have come off the unemployment register total this year. I can also confirm that last month alone nearly 500,000 people came off the register. The hon. Gentleman can name no other country in the western world currently in that position.

Q7. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 30 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sims: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern in all parts of the House about too-easy access to pornography produced on computers? Does he join me in welcoming the announcement last week by the Home Secretary of measures to curb these activities, which can be so harmful, especially to children?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the concern expressed by my hon. Friend, and I strongly share it. Parents feel particularly revolted by pornography involving children. The measures that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced will be included in the criminal justice Bill in this Session. They will make it quite clear to the pornographers that we are determined to defeat them, and we intend to crack down especially hard on the appalling trade in child pornography.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise an important point of order about a serious matter—the leaking by the Secretary of State for Education of part of the statement that is to be made by the Chancellor this afternoon.

This is the first occasion on which we have had a unified Budget with announcements on expenditure as well as taxation. Clearly, any announcement on expenditure can be taken as an idea of the revenue to be raised by the Chancellor. Such an indication has been given by the Secretary of State for Education by way of a press release this morning— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must be heard if she has a point of order.

Mrs. Taylor: Although this press statement makes bogus claims about increases in Government expenditure on education, along with cuts in student grants, it is an official statement by a Minister of the Crown on the unified Budget.

That is more serious than just a discourtesy to the House: it is a clear breach of Budget security, and has been acknowledged as such by both the Department for Education and 10 Downing street. In view of this, I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Education has asked to make a personal statement to the House, because clearly he should resign.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed by the Secretary of State that he seeks to make a statement today. I have, however, had an opportunity to look at the document that has been referred to. It is an account of the expenditure plans of the Department for Education for 1994-95. The premature release of such information, ahead of the unified Budget statement and an associated parliamentary answer, does not have the gravity of the pre-release of tax proposals that are to have immediate effect.

It is nevertheless a most serious discourtesy to the House to disclose such information before it has been made available to Members. I most strongly deprecate what has happened, and I trust that all Departments will take note of what I have said, and that they will take steps to see that they prevent anything similar from happening again.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. *[Interruption.]* Listen, you berks. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Faulds: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In view of the comments that you have just made, that the House should be properly treated, is it not now incumbent upon the Secretary of State whom you have commented upon to make an apology to the House of Commons?

Madam Speaker: What I have said stands and will be reported in the *Official Report*. We shall now move on. With permission, I shall put together the seven motions relating to statutory instruments.

Statutory Instruments, &c

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

LEGAL AID (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Assistance by Way of Representation) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Limit) (Scotland) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

COURT OF SESSION

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (ACCOUNTS)

That the draft Companies Act 1985 (Insurance Companies Accounts) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Insurance Accounts Directive (Miscellaneous Insurance Undertakings) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

WAYS AND MEANS

Budget Statement

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that, at the end of the Chancellor's speech, copies of the Budget resolutions will be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

3.35 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): A politician presenting his first Budget is rather like a lion tamer trying out his act for the first time, but I have decided to tackle the difficulties I face in a direct way, on the basis of the clear policy objectives that I set myself when I became Chancellor.

INTRODUCTION

My first priority has been to sustain the economic recovery now under way and to create the right climate for growth and for jobs. I have been determined to take no risks with inflation. We have brought inflation down to the lowest level for a generation and low inflation must now remain a permanent feature of the British economic landscape.

To achieve these objectives, the task of my first Budget has been to set the Government's finances on a sustainable path for the rest of the decade, to make the decisions necessary now to secure lasting recovery and rising living standards in the future.

"The Financial Statement and Budget Report", together with a number of press releases filling out the details of our spending plans and my Budget tax proposals, will be available from the Vote Office as soon as I have sat down.

ECONOMIC SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

Britain's economic performance this year has been encouraging. It is now clear that the recovery started in the first half of 1992, well before sterling's departure from the exchange rate mechanism. GDP has risen for six successive quarters, and in 1993 as a whole, I now expect the economy to grow by about 1¾ per cent.

Unemployment has fallen since the beginning of the year, at a much earlier stage in the economic cycle than past experience would suggest, and crucially the recovery has been accompanied by continuing low inflation. Underlying inflation has not been lower since 1968, and unit wage costs in manufacturing have actually fallen this year, allowing British industry to establish a durable improvement in our competitiveness.

As a result, despite the weakness of activity in the other major European countries, Britain's trading performance over the last year has been excellent. Exports to countries outside the European Union were up by no less than 14 per cent. in the last three months compared with a year ago—a sharp increase in our market share. After the last three difficult years, that performance convincingly demonstrates the strength of British manufacturing today.

Continued growth in consumer spending, together with further increases in exports and investment, should bring faster growth in 1994. Economic forecasting is an unreliable art, to which in my opinion far too much importance has been attached in recent years, but on the best judgment I can make, growth next year should be about 2½ per cent.

With considerable spare capacity in the economy, inflationary pressures remain subdued. The tax measures announced in March, and the further measures I shall be announcing today, will push inflation up a little in the next few months, but this should not feed through into higher inflation over the medium term.

I expect underlying inflation to remain inside the Government's 1 to 4 per cent. target range over the year ahead, and to decline steadily into the lower half of that range by the end of this Parliament. Monetary policy will continue to be directed towards meeting that objective.

Monetary policy

As now, my decisions on interest rates will be based on a careful assessment of monetary conditions and inflationary trends, focusing particularly upon the growth of narrow and broad money, changes in the exchange rate and movements in asset prices.

On the basis of these indicators, I felt able last week to reduce interest rates to 5½ per cent., the lowest level for 16 years. The effect of that is very marked. Since 1990, industry's interest bill has been slashed by nearly £12 billion each year, and the typical mortgage borrower is now paying £170 less each month. That is a massive boost to spending power, fully justified by the remarkable progress that we have made on inflation.

Starting with last week's change, I decided to give the Bank of England responsibility for the precise timing of interest rate movements. That underlines my commitment to the new framework for monetary policy established by my predecessor last September.

Funding policy

The increasing credibility of that framework has brought our long-term interest rates down to their lowest level for over 25 years. That fact also demonstrates the ease with which this year's borrowing requirement has been financed, but the very success of the funding programme, coupled with last year's substantial gilt sales to banks and building societies, has squeezed the liquidity of the banking system, complicating the task of managing the money markets.

To offset the purchases made by banks and building societies last year, I intend to sell some £7 billion worth fewer gilts than would otherwise be necessary to fund the public sector borrowing requirement through to the end of 1994-95. Using this flexibility in our established funding policy will ease money market pressures, while continuing to ensure that borrowing is financed in a non-inflationary way.

RISKS TO THE RECOVERY

World economic developments

As I turn to look towards 1994, the prospects are encouraging, but two substantial risks remain. First, there is the continuing weakness of world economic activity, particularly in continental Europe. With Britain the only major country in the European Union likely to have grown at all in 1993, what manufacturing industry needs most is a pick-up of activity in the rest of Europe.

However, economic recovery on the continent will not be enough on its own. Europe's economic problems are not just cyclical. The continent as a whole faces a number of

deep-rooted and long-standing challenges, inflexible markets and declining competitiveness, which have combined to produce mounting structural unemployment.

There were more jobs created in Britain in the 1980s than anywhere else in Europe, and in the period ahead we must not only fight to export our goods and services, but also to win the battle of ideas in Europe. We must continue to work for more flexible and deregulated labour markets right across the continent, and we must continue to fight for free trade, not just within the European Union, but between the Union and the rest of the world. The first essential step is to secure a satisfactory conclusion to the GATT round.

THE PUBLIC FINANCES

The second major risk to the recovery in Britain is the public finances. The overriding need is to place the public finances on a sound footing. That is the immediate task of the Government, and it is the main theme of my Budget today. Business can plan ahead with confidence only if it knows that Government borrowing is under control. My task today is to deliver that confidence.

FISCAL POLICY

In his excellent Budget in March, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—*[Interruption.]*—who at this moment is no doubt commenting on my remarks on television, announced a series of tax measures designed to reduce public sector borrowing over the medium term. But necessary and controversial as those measures were, they still left the prospect of a borrowing requirement of over 4 per cent. of GDP by the end of this Parliament. In my judgment, we now need to go further. The first Budget that combines decisions on taxation and spending, a reform instituted by my right hon. Friend, gives me the opportunity to do so.

As a prudent Government, we cannot sit by, simply hoping that faster growth and forecasting changes will come to our rescue. As a Government committed to high quality public services, we must prevent ever larger sums being swallowed up in debt interest payments. As a Government with a long-term tax-cutting agenda, we must stop ever more national debt piling up for future generations to pay. As a Government determined to deliver sustained recovery, we must ensure that billions of pounds of the nation's savings are not poured into the public sector —savings that are better used by the private sector, to support investment, expansion and jobs.

It may seem easier to take the short-term view, but Britain's recovery can only be sustained if we tackle the deficit now. In my opinion, the Budget must sort out the problem of public borrowing once and for all. The measures I am announcing today will in themselves reduce the public sector borrowing requirement by a further £5½ billion in the next financial year, by £7 billion in 1995-96 and by £10½ billion in 1996-97, equivalent to 1¼ per cent. of GDP by the end of this Parliament.

Coming on top of the measures announced by my right hon. Friend in March, these are substantial sums, but, in my judgment, this is the minimum necessary to ensure that the public finances are on a sustainable track for the rest of the decade. It will help to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement from just under £50 billion in the current year to about £38 billion next year. It should eliminate borrowing to finance current spending by 1997-98 and eliminate Government borrowing entirely by the end of the decade.

In short, my proposals today should meet their objectives in full—establishing sound public finances into the next century.

VAT ON FUEL AND POWER

Before I set out the Government's new plans for public expenditure over the next three years, I have one important piece of business to conclude from the March Budget. My right hon. Friend's decision to extend VAT to domestic fuel and power was in my view fully justified, and I have no intention of asking Parliament to change the measure which it has already voted in favour of and put on the statute book.

To reduce borrowing, we had to raise revenue. In a full year, VAT on domestic fuel will raise nearly £3 billion, without affecting the job-creating sectors of the economy. It will also help to meet Britain's commitment to aim to return carbon dioxide emissions to their 1990 levels by the end of this decade—*[Interruption.]*—a commitment to which the parties opposite were fully committed until we turned to do anything about it. However, the Government recognised from the outset that the poorest would need extra help. I can now announce to the House our detailed proposals.

First, even before the extra help we intend to provide, all those on income-related benefits will get a substantial increase next April under the normal uprating rules. Benefits will rise by 3½ per cent.—a lot more than many people in work will get next year. On top of that automatic increase, the Government have decided to provide further, substantial help.

For poorer households other than pensioners and the disabled, we will calculate the benefit increases that would be paid at the April 1995 uprating from VAT on fuel, and pay them a year early—this coming April. This will ensure that extra help is available before the bills arrive.

In April 1995, we will adopt a similar approach, bringing forward the VAT element in the benefit uprating once more. In April 1996, this extra payment will remain as a permanent addition to benefit.

Beyond that, for poorer pensioners and disabled people on income-related benefits, we intend to go further. Next April, we will give a special increase on top of the normal uprating: 50 p a week for single people and 70p a week for couples. In April 1995, this will be doubled to £1 a week for single people and £1.40 a week for couples, partly through the normal uprating and partly through a further special increase. By April 1996, benefits will be £1.40 a week higher for single poorer pensioners and £2 a week higher for couples than they would otherwise have been.

The immediate impact next April will be to give a pensioner couple on income support a total increase in benefit of £4 per week. Cold weather payments will also be increased, to help the most vulnerable groups during periods of exceptionally cold weather. Next winter, these payments will go up from £6 to £7 a week; and there will be a further increase to £7.50 a week from November 1995.

This is a substantial package of help, which fully discharges the promise we have made. It will ensure that the introduction of VAT does not put the cost of fuel beyond the reach of the poorest in our society. That

promise was, of course, restricted to people on means-tested benefits—benefits which exist precisely in order to help those in the greatest need.

However, I recognise—over and above the promises that we have already given—that there is another group who have struggled to cope over recent years and will also have difficulty in meeting their higher fuel bills. Many retired people on modest incomes have worked hard all their lives and have been careful to put something aside each week. Often, these savings mean that they cannot claim benefit. Yet, while millions of families and businesses have benefited from falling interest rates over the last three years, many of these people feel that they have lost out again. Falling inflation helps to preserve the real value of their savings, but the interest that retired people receive on their savings has dropped very sharply.

The Government have therefore decided to give extra help not just to those on modest incomes, and not just to those who receive benefit, but to all pensioners. We will do so in three ways. First, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has decided to boost the home energy efficiency scheme by £35 million a year over the next three years. An equivalent extension will be made in Northern Ireland. This will provide substantial financial assistance with home insulation, helping people to reduce their fuel bills whilst staying warm. By almost doubling the present provision, we will be able to extend eligibility to all pensioners and all disabled people.

Secondly, I shall help savers, and particularly those whose incomes are made unpredictable by changes in interest rates. I intend to introduce a new pensioner's guaranteed income bond, which will combine a fixed rate of interest, guaranteed for five years, with regular monthly interest payments. Full details will be announced in the new year, but I can tell the House now that the rate will be a competitive one. Pensioners will be able to invest their savings with complete security, and know exactly what income they will be getting —month in, month out.

Thirdly, and most significant, I intend to make a special addition to pensions —and to the benefits linked to it —over and above the normal uprating in line with the retail prices index. Over the next two years, I propose to give all pensioners exactly the same extra help with their fuel bills as those pensioners on income-related benefits will be getting.

This extra help will build up over time. By April 1996, the weekly retirement pension for a pensioner couple will be £1.85 a week higher than it would otherwise have been without the VAT increase. A single pensioner will receive £1.30 a week more.

The help for pensioners that I have outlined will not precisely match increases in fuel bills in each and every household, because not everyone has an average fuel bill, but on average, pensioners are likely to find that, after taking account of falling real fuel prices, the extra help they receive will broadly cover changes in fuel bills, including VAT, over the course of this Parliament.

This is the first break since 1980 from our policy of uprating pensions strictly by the retail prices index. It must be regarded as wholly exceptional, and it cannot be repeated whenever a particular tax or price increase is opposed on the grounds that retired people should not pay it. In a very difficult year for public spending, this amounts to a huge package of extra help with VAT bills. Fifteen million people will benefit. We shall be providing around £400 million of extra help next year, and around £1¼ billion extra in the year 1996-97.

These massive sums more than deliver the Government's firm commitment to help the less well-off groups in society. They extend that significant help to all our pensioners. I am sure they will be welcomed by everyone who wants to see revenue raised in a sensible and fair way.

PUBLIC SPENDING

Let me now turn to the Government's new spending plans for the rest of this Parliament. In June, the Cabinet imposed tight ceilings on public spending over the next three years—a real terms freeze in the new control total over the next two years, with growth limited to 1 per cent. a year thereafter. In my view, as I have frequently said, nothing tougher has been attempted since this Government came to power in 1979.

Anyone who has actually run one or more of the big Departments of State knows how unacceptable it would be to contemplate cuts in the health service, in our education system, or in the resources needed to improve law and order. In a modern and civilised society, no one can regard all public spending as a bad thing.

Of course, more spending is not the only way to improve our public services. Quality public services also depend crucially on greater efficiency, better value for money, and, where sensible, on the involvement of private sector money, management and advice.

Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary launched a series of fundamental public expenditure reviews to establish more clearly what the Government's spending priorities should be. Already, this programme is producing dividends. The first four reviews have played a key role in this year's public expenditure survey.

I can now announce to the House that overall, even including the package of help with fuel bills that I have just announced, the Government's new spending plans are fully consistent with the tough limits agreed by the Cabinet in June.

For the next three years, Government expenditure will grow by substantially less than the projected growth of the economy. Public spending will therefore fall as a proportion of national income, from around 45 per cent. this year to 42½ per cent. in 1996-97.

Public sector pay

To achieve this, we have started with a rigorous approach to the Government's administrative costs. Central Government running costs, including paybills, will be frozen at this year's cash level. Pay increases for public sector staff will therefore have to be paid for by greater efficiency or by savings in the cost of running government itself.

However, we have also had to conduct a searching examination of spending on Government programmes. That examination began with the largest spending programme of all, social security.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social security spending is increasing at an underlying rate of more than 3 per cent. a year in real terms, well above the sustainable growth rate of the economy as a whole. If this trend continues, it will place a quite impossible burden

on the working population in the future—our children and our children's children. If we do not plan the social security programme properly, we shall be unable to give effective help to those who need it most.

A good social security system, under which the better-off and people in work pay to support the poor and the disadvantaged, is an essential feature of a modern civilised state. In reviewing the social security budget, the Government's objectives have been to ensure that the social security system is better targeted on today's real needs and to make it simpler and less susceptible to fraud.

Job seeker's allowance

Let me start with two proposals designed to help people back into work. The present convoluted system for helping the unemployed includes two entirely separate benefits—income support and unemployment benefit—and two quite separate bureaucracies for delivering them—the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency, employing between them no fewer than 44,000 civil servants to do the one job.

We intend to cut through this bureaucratic maze by introducing, from April 1996, a single benefit for the unemployed—the job seeker's allowance. This will align rates and rules and reduce the contributory element of the benefit from 12 to six months. But it will also build on the success of the restart programme introduced in the 1980s, by drawing a much closer link between the receipt of benefit and the claimant's demonstrated willingness to look for work. It will be reinforced by a strengthening of restart itself; by an extension of community action places; and by the introduction of pilot schemes offering intensive guidance, assessment and a financial incentive to long-term unemployed people who need it most.

Family credit

Our second proposal should have a more immediate impact. The House will be aware of the rising level of concern about the causes, consequences and costs of the growth of lone parenthood in this country. There are many lone parents—and married mothers as well—who have no desire to remain trapped in poverty or dependent on benefits, but who believe that they have no choice. As a result of the cost of childcare, they simply cannot afford to go out to work.

That cannot be right. The Government have therefore decided to introduce next autumn a new allowance available to those on family credit who need to pay for childcare. This will be worth up to £28 each week per family and it should help tens of thousands of mothers to get back into work and off income support. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that it will be warmly welcomed by all those who want to see the poorest parents back on the road to financial independence.

Statutory sick pay

I turn next to statutory sick pay. At the moment, employees who go sick and meet the qualifying conditions are entitled to receive sick pay at specified rates. After the first three days of sickness, their employers are entitled to reimbursement from the Government for 80 per cent. of the cost. We have no plans to reduce the sick pay entitlements of employees, but, with effect from next April, we propose to stop reimbursing the cost of statutory sick pay for the largest employers.

For smaller companies, the current special exemptions will be extended. At present, those with national insurance bills of less than £16,000 a year are fully reimbursed after the first six weeks of each statutory sick pay claim. I propose to increase that threshold to £20,000, to bring more companies into the scheme, and to provide full reimbursement after only four weeks. Two thirds of all employers will therefore continue to get help.

Employers' national insurance contributions

The transfer of these costs from the taxpayer to business will reduce public spending by around £700 million a year over the next three years, but to ensure that business as a whole does not lose, my right hon. Friend and I have decided to reduce the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions by 0.2 per cent. from next April. This means that, for well managed companies with low sickness rates, there will be a net reduction in the cost of employing people. Other companies will have a much sharper incentive to improve their management of sick leave and to take a greater interest in the health of their own employees.

However, with unemployment in Britain still far too high, it is vital that we do everything we can to reduce the cost of providing employment. Having reviewed the position, I have therefore decided that, even in a year of acute fiscal stringency, we can and should go further.

Long-term unemployed people are most likely to find unskilled and semi-skilled work at the lower end of the pay scale. To improve companies' incentives and ability to provide that kind of job, I propose, again from next April, to reduce each of the lower rates of employers' national insurance contributions by one full percentage point.

Overall, the reductions in national insurance contributions I have announced will reduce the cost to employers of providing jobs by £830 million next year, rising to £1 billion by 1996-97. That £1 billion is well above the overall cost to employers of the reforms that I have announced to statutory sick pay.

In our discussions within the European Union, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have repeatedly made clear our view that the surest route to higher employment is not the dirigisme of the social chapter, but measures to reduce the cost of creating jobs. That is the message that we will be taking with us to the European Council in Brussels next week.

Invalidity benefit

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security also plans a significant reform of the current regime for invalidity benefit. For those who are disabled and incapable of work, invalidity benefit is important and necessary. But the astonishing growth in the numbers receiving the benefit in recent years indicates that it is now being claimed by many people who are not genuine invalids.

The Government have decided to make a number of changes to the benefit, which will refocus it for the future on those who are genuinely incapable of work. My right hon. Friend proposes to introduce a new benefit—incapacity benefit—to replace sickness and invalidity benefit. The new benefit will involve a tighter and more objective medical test.

The Government have always made clear their intention to bring the tax treatment of invalidity benefit into line with that of the retirement pension and most other

income-replacing benefits. Now that the necessary administrative arrangements can be made, I propose from April 1995 to bring its replacement, the new incapacity benefit, into tax.

State pension age

Finally, I can announce one further decision which will have little immediate effect, but will certainly make a considerable difference to the affordability of the modern welfare state in the next century.

After careful consideration, the Government have decided that the state pension age should eventually be equalised at the age of 65. The change will be phased in over ten years, starting in the year 2010, so it will not affect anyone currently aged 44 or older. By the year 2020, the state pension age in Britain will be broadly in line with that of most of our industrial competitors, although we will still have more generous arrangements than in the United States, where the pension age is to be equalised at the age of 67.

All developed countries are making similar changes for similar reasons. Women nowadays tend to spend more of their lives in paid employment. They also live longer than men. Pension schemes need to recognise this, and end the current discrimination between the sexes.

In the next century, the ratio of working people to retired people will fall sharply, and the burdens on taxpayers will rise. The Government's decision will moderate those burdens, eventually by some £5 billion a year, and so help to ensure that they are sustainable. The basic pension is, and will remain, a cornerstone of the welfare state. The Government are committed to it and to retaining its value.

The proposals on social security overall that I have announced today will in themselves save some £2½ billion a year by 1996-97. Nevertheless, even taking these savings into account, we will still be spending £5 billion more on social security in 1996-97 than we planned last year. The social security budget will continue to grow in real terms, but at a more affordable rate than we have seen in recent years. At the same time, we have honoured our manifesto commitments, we have fully protected the real value of pensions and benefits, and we have provided generous help with fuel bills.

These are not short-term measures to deal with today's problems. The Government have the courage to take a clear and far-sighted view of the modern social security system. We must make sure that it is a system that future generations will be able to afford. This Government will never take part in any attempt to dismantle the welfare state. We intend to see a better welfare state, well run, well judged and one that meets the priorities of modern society. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will fill out the details in his uprating statement tomorrow.

OTHER PROGRAMMES

Let me turn now to a number of other areas where savings have been found this year.

Local authorities

The first area is local authorities. Growth in total standard spending in England, adjusted for changes in responsibilities, will be limited to 2.3 per cent. next year. There will in addition be extra provision for community care. The Government will continue to use their powers to cap excessive spending by local authorities where that is necessary to protect the local taxpayer.

Housing

The second area is housing. Here too savings have been made on last year's plans. Nevertheless, the new plans for social housing provide for more than 153,000 new homes over the three years to 1994-95, fully meeting our manifesto commitment. In addition, the Government will press ahead with plans to improve value for money in the housing association sector and to introduce more private finance into the development of social housing.

Transport

The third area is transport. British Rail's and London Transport's investment programmes will be maintained at levels substantially higher than in the 1980s, but to make room for this continuing investment in public transport, there will be modest reductions in the previously planned provision for the roads programme. In the past five years, real expenditure on roads has grown on average by more than 10 per cent. a year. With construction prices next year more than 25 per cent. lower than when the roads programme was announced in 1989, the new plans will sustain the recent improvements in our roads network—at less cost to the taxpayer.

Defence

The final area where savings have been found is defence. In the next two years, spending will be some £250 million and £500 million lower than previously planned. In 1996-97, it will be about the same in cash terms as in the previous year. The new plans will be delivered in part by lower procurement and employment costs, and through the planned sale to a private sector housing trust of married quarters for service personnel.

In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has set in hand a major review of all aspects of support, right back to the headquarters in Whitehall. Savings can and will be made without affecting our foreign policy commitments.

Priority programmes

The new method of controlling the total of public spending has brought big improvements in the system of Cabinet government. The Cabinet now decides its priorities collectively and brings to the House a single package that reflects our key policy objectives. Savings identified in a number of programmes have allowed the Government to meet in full the priorities and promises set out in our manifesto. I turn now to those priorities.

Health

We are all proud of the contribution that the national health service makes to the quality of life in this country. Even in a very tough year, we have decided to increase, once again, the level of real resources going into the health service. National health service spending will be over £1½ billion higher next year in cash terms and over 1½ per cent. higher in real terms than this year's plans. Indeed, the programme is set to rise in real terms in each of the next three years.

To ensure that these very substantial extra resources are translated into more and better health care, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be insisting on substantial increases in efficiency and firm containment of

pay and the drugs budget. The NHS will be able to maintain the steady improvement of recent years in treating more patients and treating them better.

Education

Our second priority is education. Increased educational opportunities and better standards are an essential investment in the future. Over the next two years, we will therefore be adding more than £1 billion to the plans for the education programme. This will ensure record levels of participation in further and higher education.

Our manifesto predicted that one in three young people would be in full-time higher education by the year 2000. With seven years to go, we have virtually reached that target already, but with a third of our young people now going to university, the ordinary taxpayer cannot be expected to pay for all their costs. Tuition is free; but why should the bus driver or the pensioner also pay higher taxes to finance all the living costs of tomorrow's lawyers?

I am glad to say that the recent explosion in student numbers has revealed as ridiculous the fears that the student loan scheme might deter students from poorer families. My right hon. Friend will therefore, as predicted, be bringing forward proposals to reduce the level of the means-tested grant for student maintenance and replace it with an expanded loan entitlement for students. Even taking this into account, spending on education will still be no less than £1½ billion higher in 1996-97 than it is this year.

Employment and training

I turn thirdly to training. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment plans to introduce a new apprenticeship scheme. This will provide a major boost to work-based training and increase substantially the number of young people obtaining the technical and craft skills which not only employers but trade unions agree the country has been lacking. There will also be an increase in training opportunities for the adult unemployed.

Science

The fourth priority is science. The plans fully protect the real value of spending on basic science and technology next year.

Home Office

Finally, in the vital area of criminal justice, previous plans for Home Office spending will be maintained in full. Next year, spending on the police service will increase by over 4 per cent. Over time, the management reforms and reduction in paperwork announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary could put over 5,000 more police officers on frontline duty. A re-ordering of priorities will also allow for extra provision to be made for more prison places and for victim support. Efficiency improvements will meet in full the costs of new policies, including our proposals to deal with juvenile offenders.

CAPITAL AND PRIVATE FINANCE

Spending on health, education, training and science contributes significantly to the long-term economic performance of the economy, by improving the nation's stock of so-called human capital—the health, knowledge and skills of the population as a whole. Important though it is, this contribution is very difficult to quantify. This year, however, as promised last autumn, the public sector accounts will identify separately the amount the Government plan to spend on physical capital projects, including improvements to the nation's infrastructure.

Overall, the new plans provide for total public sector capital spending over the next three years of around £22 billion a year. But just as that figure takes no account of the massive investment programmes of the former nationalised industries which are now thriving in the private sector, so too it ignores the very large amount of investment which is stimulated by Government policies, including investment in housing and urban regeneration. On top of this, the private finance initiative is now adding to spending in areas for which the public sector in the past has traditionally taken responsibility.

To make a success of this private finance initiative—and to deliver the increase in capital spending within the public services that I want to see—will require a complete change of culture within Government, together with imagination and innovation on the part of the private sector. That cannot be expected to happen overnight. Even so, the flow of private sector projects to date has still, in my view, been disappointingly small.

To speed the process up, I have already announced the establishment of a working group chaired by Sir Alastair Morton, who I am sure can be expected to work alongside me as something of a warrior in this cause. In the meantime, the Government are today giving the go ahead to three substantial new transport projects under the private finance initiative: first, the extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham; secondly, a new air traffic control centre for Scotland; thirdly, the refurbishment of the west coast main line, one of our most important routes, linking some of the biggest cities in the country—London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow.

The private finance initiative also offers major opportunities for improved services in the NHS. There are almost 40 NHS projects where private finance is already involved or being considered, ranging from cardiac units to hospital car parks. At Aintree in Liverpool, a scheme involving the construction of a 100-bed patient hotel, four operating theatres and other facilities is going ahead—a model for other private finance projects.

In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will be taking forward proposals to finance and build six new prisons using private finance. He has already announced that he also intends to involve the private sector in the provision of secure training centres.

Finally, I have always made clear my view that roads provide a major opportunity for private finance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will be informing the House shortly about the Government's plans for taking forward motorway charging in the light of responses to his Green Paper, but I can announce today that, when the technology is ready, we intend to introduce a system of electronic motorway charging in this country. This will be a massive high-technology project in its own right.

In the meantime, the Government plan to introduce new contracts under which the private sector will design, build, finance and operate roads. My right hon. Friend will hold discussions with the construction industry and others to identify the best road schemes to start with. Bringing private finance and management into the roads programme offers the prospect of substantial benefits for the construction industry, the motorist and the taxpayer alike. I am sure this will be warmly welcomed.

Resource accounting

I have one other announcement to make to improve the way in which the taxpayer's money and public sector capital is used and accounted for.

In my opinion, Government accounting for public spending has become archaic. In my view, the time has come to move to a system of accounting which identifies more clearly the cost of resources. This will put Departments on to a similar accounting basis not only to commercial organisations but to many other parts of the public sector. I shall be publishing a paper in the first half of next year on the introduction of accruals-based resource accounting by Departments, and its implications for the way expenditure is planned and controlled, and money is sought from Parliament.

PUBLIC SPENDING SUMMARY

The new spending plans reflect the carefully chosen priorities of an enlightened and responsible Government. We have taken strong measures to keep public sector pay and Government administration costs under tight control. We have taken a number of crucial steps to restrain the growth in social security spending, while fully meeting our commitments to the poorest members of society.

We have increased resources to support the Government's priorities, particularly health, education and training and science. We have protected spending on law and order. We have injected new momentum into the private finance initiative. We have honoured all our manifesto commitments. Most important of all, we have managed this substantial reallocation of resources and choice of priorities without breaching the spending ceilings agreed by Cabinet last June.

This significant achievement owes a great deal to the new arrangements for the public expenditure survey introduced last year by my right hon. Friend, the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr Lamont), but a great deal of credit is also due to my colleagues on the Cabinet known as the EDX Committee, and most particularly to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to whose skill and tenacity I should like to pay the warmest possible tribute.

TAXATION

I now turn to my proposals for taxation. My task is simple. I need to raise revenue, but to do so in a way which does least damage to the economy.

Loopholes

At a time when taxes are having to go up, it is particularly important to collect all the tax which is properly due. So let me begin with my proposals to counter tax avoidance.

Suggesting that Budgets should close tax loopholes is stating the obvious. Every Budget over the last 14 years, and indeed every Budget that I have listened to before that, has closed some tax loopholes. It is not a big new idea. The tax avoidance industry is always ingenious, but it is one industry which this Government has certainly never helped. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr Smith) would not know what a loophole was if he were looking one in the face.

My Budget today contains a particularly good crop of new proposals to combat tax avoidance, starting with an end to the ploy which is apparently growing under which salaries are paid in gold bars, coffee beans, cowrie shells, or other exotic payments in kind, simply to avoid national insurance contributions and delay paying tax.

I also intend to counter the abuse of the tax relief for profit-related pay; tackle the avoidance of stamp duty on property transactions; halt the use of shell companies to avoid payment of tax; and end the use of indexation to create or increase capital gains tax losses. These measures will yield about £2 billion in the next three years. Claims that more might be found in this way are, I regret to say, much exaggerated.

EXTENDING THE TAX BASE

Next, I propose to broaden the tax base. I have never disguised my personal view that the coverage of value added tax in this country is too narrow. Under the EC's sixth VAT directive, there are serious limits on the Government's ability to extend it to things which are exempt, but we do have the freedom to introduce separate taxes, and that is what other European countries do. I propose to follow their example —in two particular areas, which I believe are well suited to this country.

Air passenger duty

First, air travel is under-taxed compared to other sectors of the economy. It benefits not only from a zero rate of VAT; in addition, the fuel used in international air travel, and nearly all domestic flights, is entirely free of tax. A number of countries have already addressed this anomaly.

I propose to levy a small duty on all air passengers from United Kingdom airports. This will be set at £5 for departures to anywhere in the United Kingdom and the European Union; and £10 for departures to other destinations. The new duty will come into force next October, and will raise some £330 million in a full year. There will be exemptions for transfer passengers and small planes. This means, for example, that most flights between the Scottish islands will not bear tax.

Insurance premium tax

Second, we have always tended to tax financial services in this country much more lightly than other sectors, including manufacturing. In this Budget, I have decided to tackle one sector of this industry which is exempt from VAT. Virtually every other member state charges an ad valorem tax on insurance premiums. I propose now to do the same.

The rate will be only 3 per cent., among the lowest in Europe, and the tax will apply to most general insurance of risks located in the United Kingdom. It will come into force next October, and will raise over £750 million in a full year.

To avoid driving business offshore, I propose to exempt the reinsurance of risk, and the insurance of most ships, aircraft and international transit goods. To avoid taxing exports, I propose to exempt export credit; and to avoid taxing savings, I shall exempt long-term insurance such as life assurance, including assurance for endowment mortgages.

For the typical family with motor, home contents and building insurance, this tax will cost about 35p a week.

INCOME TAX

I shall return later in my statement to the existing indirect taxes, and particularly to VAT, but before I do, let me set out my proposals for direct taxation.

First, I propose to freeze again the personal allowance for income tax, the threshold for higher rate tax and the income limit for the age-related allowances. I do not propose to change the inheritance tax threshold or the exempt amount for capital gains tax; or the lower, basic or higher rates of income tax. The 20p lower band will be extended by a further £500 next year as planned, to £3,000.

I intend to raise one allowance which has been frozen for the last four years —the blind person's allowance. This will rise next April from £1,080 to £1,200.

These proposals will yield £560 million in 1994-95, relative to an indexed base, rising to £745 million in 1995-96.

Married couple's allowance

Now that husbands and wives are taxed independently—one of the best taxation reforms in recent years—the married couple's allowance is a bit of an anomaly. As announced in March, from next April it will be limited to 20 per cent. Given the need to raise extra revenue, I propose to reduce the rate of relief further, to 15 per cent from April 1995. This will yield £830 million in 1995-96, rising to over £1 billion in a full year.

Mortgage interest relief

I propose to take a similar approach to mortgage interest relief. As the House is aware, the rate of mortgage interest relief will fall from 25 to 20 per cent. in April. From April 1995, I propose to reduce it further, to 15 per cent., raising an additional £970 million in 1995-96. For those with mortgages of £30,000 or more, this will cost around £10 a month. That is a tiny fraction of the benefit borrowers are still receiving from the very substantial reduction in mortgage rates in the last three years.

The limit on loans qualifying for mortgage interest relief will remain at £30,000.

BUSINESS TAXATION

The tax increases that I have announced will enable me to give some modest help to businesses.

Corporation tax

There will be no change to the main rate of corporation tax, which remains the lowest in the European Union, or to the small companies' rate, but I propose to raise the profits limit for smaller companies by 20 per cent. This will reduce corporation tax bills for 30,000 companies.

Foreign income dividend scheme

To help reinforce Britain's place as Europe's most attractive location for international business, I shall implement proposals to make surplus advance corporation tax repayable on dividends paid out of profits earned abroad by companies based in the United Kingdom.

Export credit

For exporters, I propose to make an extra £200 million of export credit cover available in 1996-97, and to cut export credit premiums for certain important developing markets, including India, Mexico and Turkey. British exporters of capital goods have been very successful in winning orders over the last year, particularly outside Europe. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I want to see that continue.

Uniform business rates

The business rates poundage increase next year, based on the 1.8 per cent. September retail prices index, will be the lowest since introduction of the uniform business rate. For properties in England and Wales still protected by transitional relief, I propose to cut the maximum real increase in rate bills next year by a half, to 10 per cent. for larger properties and 7½ per cent. for smaller properties. Small properties that are used for both domestic and business purposes — the shop where the owner lives at the back — will face no real increase at all. Separate arrangements will be made in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

This will bring significant relief next year to over 600,000 business properties throughout the United Kingdom. It will cost a little over £100 million next year.

SMALL BUSINESSES

My particular priority this year has been to help small businesses. In my opinion, the biggest contribution any Chancellor can make to reducing unemployment over the medium term is to ensure that the conditions are in place for new businesses to become established and for small businesses to grow. As a country, we generate plenty of budding entrepreneurs and any number of good inventions and ideas; yet all too often, those ideas stay on the drawing board as money is channelled instead into the safer larger companies.

My proposals seek to address three separate problems facing small businesses today: the burden of regulation; the shortage of external finance; and cash flow.

Deregulation

I can announce today four contributions to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's campaign to turn the tide of excessive regulation, which threatens to engulf our smaller firms.

Simplified assessing

First, the Finance Bill will include the initial tranche of legislation to implement the plans announced in March to reform the current regime for assessing personal tax. The new system will be simpler and more efficient. The changes will be of particular benefit to the self-employed.

Income tax and national insurance contributions

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security published last month the report of the working group set up to consider the options for aligning income tax and national insurance contributions. My right hon. Friend and I agree with the group's conclusion that there are significant savings to be had from using the same definitions, same paperwork and same audits for income tax and national insurance. We are now looking at the group's main recommendations, and will be bringing forward proposals early next year.

VAT threshold

Thirdly, on the administration of VAT, firms are currently required to register for VAT when their turnover reaches £37,600 a year. I intend to raise this to £45,000 with effect from tomorrow. This will allow up to 75,000 more traders to opt out of VAT altogether.

Statutory audit

Finally, the statutory audit. The Companies Act requires all companies to have their accounts audited, but for the

smallest companies the expense can be out of all proportion to the benefit. When I was at the Department of Trade and Industry, I continually pressed for a change to that. My predecessor announced consultation in the March Budget. I can now announce the conclusions.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have decided that most companies with a turnover between £90,000 and £350,000 a year in future need only get an independent accountant's report on whether the company's accounts correctly reflect its books. For the 40 per cent. of companies with turnover of less than £90,000, we propose to take the deregulation a step further. For those small companies, the audit requirement will be abolished altogether.

Finance for industry

However, I do not just want to lighten the burden of regulation. I believe that positive steps are required to increase the flow of risk capital into small businesses.

Capital gains tax

For managers and employees to leave steady jobs and take a chance by going into business on their own, the risk must be worth while. At 40 per cent, our top rate of income tax is the lowest in the European Union, and I intend to keep it that way, but our capital gains tax regime still bears disproportionately on the successful entrepreneur.

In 1991, we increased the capital gains tax relief for business people who sell up on retirement, by providing a complete exemption from capital gains tax on the first £150,000 of capital gains and a half exemption on the next £450,000. I now propose to increase those limits to £250,000 and £750,000 respectively. By rewarding those who have been successful in the past, that measure will encourage potential entrepreneurs and creators of businesses in the future.

In addition, I propose that any individual facing a capital gains charge should be able to defer the tax indefinitely by reinvesting those gains in an unquoted trading company.

Venture capital trust

I also intend to create a new type of investment, a venture capital trust, which will channel savings specifically into unquoted trading companies. Investors will receive dividends and capital gains entirely free of tax. By investing through a trust, they will also be able to spread their risk across a number of different companies. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will shortly be issuing a consultation paper fleshing out the details.

Enterprise investment scheme

In my view, there remains, too, a strong case for encouraging equity investment in unquoted trading companies.

I propose to introduce a new scheme, the enterprise investment scheme, to do just that. The enterprise investment scheme will differ from the old business expansion scheme in several important respects. To target the money where we want it to go, property-related investments will be excluded. Up-front tax relief will be limited to 20 per cent., but any losses on investments will qualify for income tax and capital gains tax relief; and all capital gains within the scheme will be entirely free of capital gains tax. The limit for investors will be £100,000 a year.

Most important of all, to help those who are looking to invest their expertise as well as their money, people previously unconnected with the companies they invest in will be able to take up paid directorships. The cost of the new scheme could eventually rise to some £50 million a year. Taken together with my proposals on capital gains tax and the new venture capital trust, I believe that it could generate substantial new investment in the unquoted company sector.

Late payment

Finally, on the small business sector, I turn to the problem of small companies' cash flow. There is one issue which year after year tops the list of Budget representations made to all of us by the small business community — the problem of late payment. There can be nothing more frustrating than delivering a quality product on time at a competitive price and then finding that one does not get paid for months. Late payments wreak havoc with cash flow, and for many small firms they can make the difference between survival and failure. The habit of late payment is corroding our business culture. I am quite sure that it needs to be dealt with.

There are many options for tackling that problem, and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I will be looking at two in particular: first, a new British standard for payment performance; and, secondly — more significantly — legislation to provide for interest on late payments. Late payment was a serious problem for small businesses throughout the last recession. I believe that the time has now come to take that issue head on.

INDIRECT TAXATION

The Government's clear policy has always been to shift the burden of taxation, over time, from income to spending. This reflects the Government's underlying political philosophy — that people should be allowed to keep as much of their own money as possible. Provided the less well-off are helped, it is fairer and less damaging to the economy to tax people on how much they spend and consume than on the work they do.

In line with this policy, even in a very difficult year, I have been able to avoid any increase in income tax rates. But to do this I have had to raise further revenue from indirect taxation. Let me start with the excise duties.

Road fuel duty and vehicle excise duty

First, I propose a modest increase in the vehicle excise duty on cars — the tax disc — of £5 a year. The duty on lorries will be unaffected.

Secondly, on road fuel duties, with effect from 6 pm tonight, I propose to raise all the road fuel duties by 3p a litre. Even so, petrol will still cost less in the United Kingdom than in most countries in the European Union, and it will be cheaper than it was in real terms in the early 1980s. It is not good policy in these environmentally conscious days to keep road fuel costs so much cheaper than they used to be. Taken together, these increases will raise around £¾ billion next year. Bus fuel duty rebate will be held at pre-Budget levels.

In March, my predecessor announced that fuel duties would increase on average by at least 3 per cent. in real terms in future Budgets in order to restrain carbon dioxide emissions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for

the Environment subsequently announced in July that the Government would be looking at further measures in this area to help to meet our Rio commitment.

I have now decided to strengthen the March commitment by increasing road fuel duties on average by at least 5 per cent. in real terms in future Budgets. This will complete Britain's strategy for meeting our Rio commitment. We are the first country in Europe to do this; and we have done so in a way that minimises the additional costs to industry.

Others in this country—some others in this House—and in Europe continue to canvas unrealistic blueprints for a new European Union-wide carbon tax, which would impose massive new burdens on British industry. Any critic of the Government's tax plans who claims also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy.

Tobacco

Next, I come to tobacco. With effect from 6 pm tonight, the total tax on a packet of 20 cigarettes will go up by 11p—a duty increase of 7.3 per cent. The duties on other tobacco products will rise by the same proportion.

In addition, I have decided to strengthen the commitment on tobacco duties that the Government have given in the past. I intend to increase tobacco duties on average by at least 3 per cent a year in real terms in future Budgets.

I believe that the approach we are adopting in Britain is the most effective way to reduce smoking. It is clearly nonsense for some European countries to ban advertising to protect state-owned tobacco industries, but then impose markedly lower levels of tax.

Wine, beer and spirits

Turning next to the duties on alcohol, let me start with beer. I have listened carefully to the arguments put by the industry about the declining consumption of beer in this country, the effect of the change to end-product duty and the growth of cross-Channel imports of beer. Taking all these factors into account, I have decided that, for the first time in five Budgets, there will be no increase this year in the duty on beer.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): That is what comes of having a beer-swilling Chancellor.

Mr. Clarke: Let me assure the House that this decision has nothing whatever to do with the drinking habits of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and to prove it, I am also proposing to freeze the duty on spirits for a further year.

The spirits industry, which is a major United Kingdom export business, is facing problems similar to the brewers'. I know that my proposals will be warmly welcomed by the House, and will give right hon. and hon. Members from Scotland something to celebrate on St Andrew's day.

For wine, sparkling wine and cider, I propose to raise the duty in line with inflation. This will add 2p to a bottle of wine. But it will not take effect until after Christmas. [*Laughter.*]

For those hon. Members who are still here, the overall effect of all the tax measures I have announced will be to raise revenue next year by a little under £1¾ billion. By 1995-96, that will rise to about £5 billion, and to £6 billion by 1996-97, about ¾ per cent. of GDP.

These sums fall a long way short of the reduction in the borrowing requirement I judge necessary. As I announced earlier, I intend with my Budget to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement next year, not by £1¾ billion, but by £5½ billion, with a reduction by 1996-97 of £10½ billion.

The central challenge I have faced in finalising this Budget is how this gap could be bridged. Every commentator realised that one of my options must be to extend the VAT base. The main candidates are food, children's clothes, transport, sewerage and newspapers. A powerful case for each of them can be made, and no amount of lobbying need put us off, but before looking at that, I have always made clear that my first responsibility as Chancellor is to get public expenditure under the firmest possible control.

I have already announced that the Government's new spending plans fully meet the remit agreed by Cabinet in June, but when the House comes to study the Red Book it will see that the figures for the new control total in each of the next three years are markedly lower than those set out in the March Budget and the cash ceilings agreed by the Cabinet in June.

The explanation for this difference is simple. The Cabinet has decided to establish new spending plans which are not just consistent with the ceilings that we set for ourselves in June, tough though they were. We have decided to set plans which in each of the next three years are lower than the June ceilings.

Our spending plans for the coming year have been reduced by more than £3½ billion. The new control total for next year will be £3½ billion below the level we set last year, and £8 billion below the plans for that year that we first set two years ago.

That is not all. In 1995-96, we have reduced the new control total by £1½ billion and in 1996-97 by nearly £3 billion. Taking into account lower debt interest payments resulting from lower borrowing, I expect that, as a direct result of the Budget, total public spending over the next three years will be around £10 billion less than we assumed at the time of the March Budget.

Including also the reduction in cyclical spending as the economy recovers, and other changes, the total reduction in public spending over the next three years compared to the March Budget projections will be no less than £15 billion.

Those public expenditure savings dramatically reduced my need to raise taxes to get the borrowing requirement down. As a result of that achievement —and only because of that —I can now confirm that I have no need this year to propose any changes to the VAT base.

Throughout the public spending round, all my Cabinet colleagues understood that the essential job in this Budget was to move back towards a balanced budget; and we all understood the clear preference on this side of the House for this to be done, so far as possible, by firm control of public spending. That is what we said we would deliver, and that is what we have delivered, because that is what is required to keep the recovery going.

CONCLUSION

My Budget today puts Britain firmly on course for a sustained period of rising prosperity and falling unemployment, based on low inflation and healthy public finances.

This is a no-nonsense Budget which deals directly and firmly with the main challenges facing the country today. Above all, it is the Budget of a responsible Government which is determined to bring lasting recovery to Britain.

I commend it to the House.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Tobacco products (rates) (motion No. 4);

(b) Hydrocarbon oil (rates) (motion No. 5);

(c) Vehicles excise duty (rates) (motion No. 8).—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50 (Ways and Means Motions), and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion entitled "Amendment of the law". It is on that motion that the Budget debate will take place today and on succeeding days. The remaining motions will not be put until the end of the Budget debate next week, and then they will be decided without debate.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies, acquisitions and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—[*Mr. Kenneth Clarke.*]

4.51 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I congratulate the Chancellor on being the first holder of his office to introduce a unified Budget combining the traditional Budget and the public expenditure programme in one. In terms of the material to be covered, it was clearly a greater challenge than that posed to any of his predecessors, and he delivered it with his customary style. He may live to regret saying that he had public borrowing once and for all under control. After all, one of his predecessors as Chancellor, the Prime Minister, told us that there would be tax cuts year on year and that there would be no increases in VAT either upwards or in scope.

In another respect the Chancellor's Budget is unusual because many of the tax decisions that will hit people next April were taken in his predecessor's Budget last March. In 1993 there are two Budgets. As we heard again today, those Budgets are bad news for the taxpayer, they betray Conservative tax and spending pledges, and they are designed to make the British people pay the price of Conservative economic mismanagement.

I remind the House and the country that in March the former Chancellor primed a ticking tax time bomb which will explode in April. VAT on domestic fuel of 8 per cent. rising to 17.5 per cent., a hike in national insurance contributions, a cut in mortgage tax relief, and a real cut in personal tax allowances represent an additional £8.50 per week for a typical family from April.

What did we get today? We got more betrayals of Conservative election promises. I calculate that there are at least three new taxes on income because to freeze personal allowances, not for just one year but for two years in succession, is a devious way of increasing income tax. I calculate that that is another £1 a week extra tax for the basic rate taxpayer. The Government may not change the formal rate, but they wriggle in all sorts of ways to try to increase the income tax bill without the public detecting that they are putting it up.

I warn the Government that when people examine their pay slips in April next year and in the April after that they will see the true tax cost of the Conservatives. Similarly, cutting the married couple's allowance is another way of increasing income tax; and a third way, of course, is by a substantial cut in mortgage tax relief. Those are three ways in which income tax has been increased.

If that was not enough on the suffering people, there is to be a tax on holidays. I notice that it will not apply to

[Mr. John Smith]

executive aircraft because they are small enough to avoid it. I also noticed that the Conservative party is so out of touch with public opinion that Conservative Members cheered a Budget that increased taxes and cut public expenditure. For example, despite all the Chancellor's verbiage about who he would exempt, there is a new tax on car insurance and home insurance. It will be quite expensive because the premiums for both have soared following the boom in crime under this Government.

Those are more costs for ordinary and average families. They will have to pay more in income tax and the Government have paid no attention to the widespread cries that they should abandon their rise in VAT. There will be more taxes on income and a continuation of taxes on expenditure.

The Chancellor argues that he has met the problem of VAT by giving some compensation to pensioners, the disabled and others. At best, he has given them half the extra cost. He meets half of it, but the other half falls upon the poor. It is 50p followed by £1 the year after; and we are aware of the cost of VAT. That is not adequate compensation because there will still be an extra cost falling on everyone as a result of VAT. The Government have totally left out of account the millions of families who are not on any benefit and who struggle every week to make ends meet. They will have to meet the full blast of the vast increases without any Government assistance.

The Government should have thought about their election pledges and taken away the 8 per cent. value added tax in April and the 17.5 per cent. the year after. There is still an opportunity for Conservative Members to pay attention to opinion in their constituencies because we shall table amendments to the Finance Bill, and the vote on those will test whether they are prepared to stand by their election promises.

My stomach turned when I heard about public spending and, in particular, about the continued and vicious assault upon the welfare state. At a time of high unemployment, to cut the time for unemployment benefit from one year to six months is, to borrow a phrase from the Prime Minister, odious, odious in the extreme. As a result, fewer people will register for unemployment. We know that trick because it has been pulled often enough by the Government in the past. They will push more people into income support.

One reality of modern Britain is that a person who moves from unemployment benefit to income support and whose partner is working for 16 hours a week at whatever salary or wage will lose income support and will have no state entitlement. Conservative Members make all sorts of pious statements about how they care for the poor and the unemployed. No Government who cared for the unemployed would do this to them. The Government put such people in difficulty, but they ignore the huge loopholes in our tax system and all the people who did so well during the Tory years. Then to turn, in their search to raise money, to people on invalidity benefit by imposing tighter medical requirements and by subjecting it to taxation is absolutely disgusting.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Quite right. We will catch the fraudsters.

Mr. Smith: Quite right, they say. That is the party which believes that when the Chancellor needs to raise money he should turn to the sick and the unemployed before he calls on anyone else. The Chancellor and the Conservative Government and their philosophy stand condemned by those two public expenditure measures.

But there are other matters. There is the sleight of hand in public expenditure. I have not had an opportunity to go into all the detail of the public expenditure programmes that have been produced, but, as a working rule, I suggest that those who study them should be very very careful about the figures because public expenditure is stated in cash terms, not in real terms.

The Government claim an extra £1·6 billion on health spending in 1994-95. After adjustment for price increases, that drops to £263 million. The Department of Health admits that 1·5 per cent. extra is needed each year to keep pace. After this adjustment there is a shortfall of £175 million and capital spending will fall by £144 million in real terms. Therefore, let us be careful about the Government's boasts.

Let us also be aware of what has happened, and what the Chancellor told us has happened, to public expenditure. There will be a cut in the money available to the Housing Corporation. These were the parts of his speech through which the Chancellor hurried. I noticed that he had a tendency to increase his rate of delivery when he came—*[Interruption.]* He increased his rate of delivery because of his embarrassment at what he was about to announce.

The Chancellor could have told us that he was cutting the Housing Corporation's budget by £300 million. Instead of cutting it, he should have released the accumulated capital receipts for local authorities in order to allow unemployed building workers to get to work and homes to be built for homeless people.

I suspect that there have been more cuts in training. Despite our recent experience with London Transport, £64 million is to be cut from its budget. It might have been more upright of the Chancellor to have given those figures in his speech rather than leaving them to be dug out. But we shall dig away and get all the truth about the Government's public expenditure programmes.

We heard—and people must take account of what the Chancellor says—that there will be cuts in public expenditure, not this year but next year and the next year and the next year. Everyone who works in the public sector, and those who depend for services upon public provision, will bear in mind that nothing else is coming their way but cut after cut after cut.The astonishing thing was that the Chancellor seemed quite proud of that.

What about the quality of life in Britain? The Chancellor talked about a modern, civilised society. The quality of life in Britain is maintained by public expenditure on our social welfare system and our economic infrastructure and on proper welfare benefits, which the Chancellor has done so much to undermine in the Budget today.

There will clearly be fierce debates about the Budget, and so there should be. I have already said that it will cost the average British family £8·50 per week in April. *[Interruption.]* That is no joking matter; it is serious for those families. I hope that those watching this debate on television notice that the Conservative party thinks that it is a matter for humour when we talk about the cost to the typical family being £8·50. That cost will now be at least

£9 per week and probably more, and probably another £5·40 a week the following April. We have not just had tax increases and public expenditure cuts today; we have more tax increases and more public expenditure cuts to come.

There has been precious little in the Budget to revive British industry, to put us back on the path of sustained economic growth and to bring down unemployment. The Chancellor made little reference to that in his Budget. He had one basic objective and that was to reduce the deficit. But neither he nor his colleagues seem to understand that the deficit is the symptom, not the cause. The fundamental problems are the skills deficit, the investment deficit, the trade deficit and the jobs deficit. Raising taxes and cutting public expenditure, as the Chancellor has done, does nothing to tackle those. They will make some of them worse because they will threaten our economic recovery.

Above all, today we needed a Budget for jobs and for social justice. But, my goodness, we got neither of those. Instead, as I am afraid we have come to expect from the Conservative party, a party now well out of touch not only with the British people but with its own dwindling band of supporters, we had a Budget which was a blatant betrayal of election promises, a Budget which continues to pile taxes on the British people and to reduce the services available to them.

I pick just one example. When we complain about national insurance going up, the Government say, "Ah, but national insurance is not like income tax; it is there to pay for a contributory benefit." Well, here we have national insurance going up by 1 per cent. and the major contributory benefit, unemployment, going down. That is no better nor worse than a fraud on the British people. The Government ignore mass unemployment and economic weakness, the legacy of their period in office. This is not the Budget that Britain needs.

5.6 pm

Sir David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his first Budget speech. It was a well delivered speech. I was somewhat alarmed beforehand that, as this is a unified Budget, it might be a long speech, but it was commendably brief. My right hon. and learned Friend presented to us this afternoon an ingenious package, and he deserves the thanks of the House and country for the measures that he has introduced.

I welcome the fact that we now have a unified Budget. It was long overdue. It was always absurd to introduce public expenditure proposals in November and the tax-raising proposals later. I see that my right hon. and learned Friend wishes to leave the Chamber and I know that he has a meeting to go to, so I shall be pleased for him to do so.

I was saying that I welcome the unified Budget, bringing together as it does the public expenditure proposals and tax changes at one and the same time. It always seemed to me a strange way to go about things to have them brought in at different times, as has happened in the past.

The Leader of the Opposition made a commendably brief speech this afternoon. I can only imagine that its brevity was due to the fact that there was very little for him to go on about. He managed to work up a lot of synthetic indignation, but, fortunately, it was very concentrated.

I welcome the social security proposals in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. Obviously, we shall receive fuller details of those tomorrow when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security makes his statement, and when he has done so will be the right time to examine the proposals in greater detail.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. and learned Friend yet again give the firm commitment that the Conservative party has always given about the state retirement pension being fundamental to the protection of old people in Britain. It did not need repeating, but in recent months there have been rumours that the Government might attack the state retirement pension, so it was right that my right hon. and learned Friend should confirm the Government's intentions in that respect.

I was also pleased, as were most people, to hear about the introduction of the new child care allowance. We look forward to receiving full details, but I am sure that it will be welcomed by a large number of ladies throughout the country.

I was glad to hear the measures that my right hon. and learned Friend proposed to help those who will be affected by VAT on fuel. He fulfilled the pledge given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) earlier in the year to look after especially vulnerable people and went much further because he extended it to cover all state retirement pensioners and others in receipt of benefit.

I have always been in favour of the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel for environmental and economic reasons. It was especially ingenious of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames to introduce that phased measure as a clear indication that the large public sector borrowing requirement would not continue indefinitely and at the same time ensuring that the PSBR would not be immediately reduced, which might have cut off the recovery that had only just started. The Government have fulfilled their promise to help those least well off, which I welcome.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the increase for a single, disabled person by 1995 will be £1 per week, and as many disabled persons have fuel bills of £12 to 15 per week, with 17 ,5 per cent. VAT on top, £1 a week will not go half way to bridging the gap?

Sir David Knox: I shall not become involved in detailed discussions with the hon. Gentleman about such matters having just heard of them; I prefer to examine them in greater detail. My right hon. and learned Friend said that vulnerable people would be covered, and I have no reason not to accept his word.

I am pleased that the Government have grasped the nettle on the issue of the equalisation of the pension age in a sensible and phased manner that will not come into force until 2010 and gives ladies plenty of time to become accustomed to the change.

I welcome the measures that my right hon. and learned Friend announced to help small firms. The VAT ceiling has risen considerably and, if I am correct, his measures will remove 75,000 small firms from paying VAT. When I first arrived in my constituency 23 and a half years ago, employment was predominantly in textiles, mining and agriculture. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of jobs—about 10,000—in those industries, but

[Sir David Knox]

they have been replaced by a mushrooming of small firms. They need even more encouragement. Despite the loss of 10,000 jobs over 23 years, my constituency has the 15th lowest level of unemployment in a constituency in the UK, according to figures produced by the House of Commons Library. That shows the importance of small firms and their ability to provide employment opportunities.

I am pleased that there has been no general extension of VAT because, over past weeks, hon. Members have been inundated with correspondence from people who were concerned about the introduction of VAT on newspapers, periodicals, books, bus fares and food. It is a great relief to know that we can all reply by saying that those fears were unwarranted.

I welcome the announcement that there will be no increase in excise duty on beer and whisky, but I am not happy about the increase in petrol tax as I represent a large, rural constituency and the increase will cost some of my constituents more, although as country dwellers I think that we were expecting it.

A Budget should be about strengthening the economy and today's Budget was aimed at that. One of the most alarming features of the British economy over the past 23 years and the main reason for its weakness has been the performance of the manufacturing sector. In the 20 years from 1952 to 1972, manufacturing output rose by 88 per cent.; it rose by only 8 per cent. in the period from 1972 to 1992. Thus, while the average annual increase in manufacturing output between 1952 and 1972 was almost 4.5 per cent., between 1972 and 1992 the increase was less than half a per cent. a year.

International comparisons are not available for the whole of the earlier period, but in the 1960s, although the performance of British manufacturing industry left something to be desired, it compared reasonably favourably with the countries in the European Community. However, since 1972, it has compared unfavourably with those countries. While the average increase in manufacturing output in the UK has been less than half a per cent. during that period, it was 6 per cent. in Ireland, 4 per cent. in Portugal, 2 per cent. in Italy and 1.7 per cent. in Germany. That is not a satisfactory record for the UK and must be improved if the British economy is to achieve steady and secure growth and lower unemployment and enable us to pay our way in the world.

My right hon. and learned Friend has introduced a number of useful measures to help manufacturing industry, but most of them will have a marginal effect. If it is to prosper, manufacturing industry needs lower interest rates that fluctuate less, stable exchange rates, greater incentives for capital investment and the creation of a more favourable environment.

Far too many of my right hon. and learned Friend's predecessors as Chancellors of the Exchequer have given the impression that interest rates are the only means of controlling the economy, which has had unfortunate consequences. High interest rates impinge especially severely on manufacturing and place a heavy burden on those who borrow money to invest in new plant and machinery, but reward those who put their money in banks, building societies and other similar forms of savings. That is hardly the way to encourage increased investment and greater efficiency in the manufacturing sector.

Consequently, I welcome the falls in interest rates that have taken place over the past three years, including the cut in the past week, and I hope that there will be more of the same to come. In future, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will depend less on interest rates as a tool of economic management and will use the other weapons at his disposal. Lower and more stable interest rates would provide a solid foundation on which manufacturing industry could expand and prosper.

Stable exchange rates will also help the manufacturing sector. It is no coincidence that manufacturing output rose by so much more in the 20 years up to 1972, when we had reasonably stable exchange rates under the Bretton Woods agreement, than in the years since 1972, when we mainly had floating exchange rates. Floating exchange rates can cause trouble in the manufacturing sector because sudden, adverse movements can undermine years of hard work in building up confidence among customers.

To strengthen manufacturing, more generous capital allowances should be introduced on a permanent basis. The temporary changes that have been in force in the past year have been helpful—at least they should have been maintained. However, if we are serious about investment, as we must be, we should revert to the arrangements of the years up to the middle 1980s, when capital allowances were more generous. In addition, we need to create a better climate for manufacturing industry, but that goes far beyond the subject of the Budget and the management of the economy—a line that I do not wish to pursue tonight.

Let me emphasise again the importance of the manufacturing sector. It is the basis of our national wealth. It accounts for 60 per cent. of our exports: its export potential is very much greater than that of the service sector. It must therefore be the most important means of dealing with the deficit that causes me most concern—the deficit on the balance of payments. This cannot be allowed to go on indefinitely, and a strong, competitive manufacturing sector is the surest way of eliminating it.

In my view, my right hon. and learned Friend will be judged as Chancellor of the Exchequer on the improvement in manufacturing industry during his tenure of office. As a fellow midlands Member, I know that this is a cause that is very near to his heart to which he will devote great efforts in the years ahead.

5.20 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) gave a more balanced view of the Chancellor's Budget than was evident from the Back-Bench cheering behind him. I never thought to hear so many Tory Back Benchers cheering so many tax rises so loudly; but then I reflected that every year in the Budget debate those behind the Chancellor rise and wave their Order Papers with enthusiasm—only to find that enthusiasm waning as each day goes by in the succeeding debate and as, each month, the implications are absorbed. This year will be no exception.

The Budget will do nothing to aid recovery. It will hold recovery back, through lack of investment and through the huge pile of new taxes and tax increases that it imposes. Ordinary people will be taxed to the hilt, with none of the investment in education or improvement in public services that might have provided some justification for fair and well chosen tax increases.

The reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement that the Chancellor has forecast depends entirely on spending cuts to be achieved in future years. He has not yet managed to convince the Cabinet that actual spending cuts should be made; he has merely told his right hon. Friends that the global figure will assume that they will be made in future years. As for sorting out public borrowing once and for all, that simply is not a realistic statement: the Chancellor has not sorted out the Cabinet yet, and experience suggests that he will have some difficulty doing so. This is a soft-shoe shuffle with the figures, which will convince no one that the PSBR is on a clear, substantial downward trend.

What about unemployment benefit? The sickening message to those who lose their jobs in the future is that they will be denied six months of the unemployment benefit to which they believe that they have contributed, and the Government have told them time and again that they have contributed, under a contributory national insurance system. That contributory system has been blown apart by today's decision. Indeed, it is impossible to justify a 1p national insurance increase—which every national insurance payer, every taxpayer, will have to pay in April—when the contributory system is being destroyed. The Government say that they have to increase national insurance contributions to meet the demands on the fund, but what fund? The Government have made off with it—it is not there. Meanwhile, six months of unemployment benefit is being snatched from people who have worked and contributed on the assumption that they are entitled to it.

As for the taxes which now come on top of the previous Chancellor's Budget, this is "Son of Norman" with a vengeance. A whole new series has been added to the tax increases in the last Budget: the freezing of personal allowances, for instance, and the fixing of the married person's allowance at 15 per cent. That 15 per cent. is a new, mythical tax rate; it does not exist, but it is assumed that that is the level at which someone is granted a particular credit. The theory behind the 20p restriction was that there was a 20p tax band, into which we are told that increasingly large proportions of our income will eventually go. However, there is no 15p tax band, so there is no particular logic in attaching allowances to it.

Mortgage interest relief is to be restricted to 15 per cent. How many times did I hear Conservative speeches and read Conservative election literature telling the public, "Don't trust the Liberal Democrats: they might affect your mortgage interest tax relief at some future date"? The Government are cutting everyone's mortgage interest relief next April anyway, by restricting it to 20 per cent., and they intend to restrict it further, to 15 per cent., at a later date.

We proposed that the Government should make some use of the opportunity that had been provided and announce that they would remove mortgage interest tax relief from new mortgages at a date in the future—thereby exercising a good influence on the housing market when it needs it. These measures will not do that. People who were assured that they were voting for a Government who believed in mortgage tax relief, and who would go on providing it, have been duped.

Logically, mortgage interest tax relief is difficult to defend. It transfers money from not terribly well-off taxpayers to large mortgages held by better-off taxpayers. The difficulty lies in how that system can be changed. The logical way, surely, is to try to drive the system out without causing hardship to those who made their mortgage commitments on the assumption that they would continue to receive tax relief. Those are the very people whom the Government are targeting: the people who bought their houses and made their mortgage decisions taking mortgage interest relief into account—not those who have no reason to take it into account because they know in advance that it will not be available in the future.

The Government have raised taxes on petrol and diesel by approximately 13·5p per gallon—more than twice the rate by which petrol prices would be raised by the European carbon tax as currently proposed. There will be no compensation, and none of the relief for rural areas for which my party has argued. How many Conservatives said in their election speeches, "Don't vote for the Liberal Democrats: they might put up the cost of your petrol"? The Government are putting up petrol taxes by more than we ever dreamed of doing, and certainly by more than the European carbon tax would do. The Government really cannot accuse others of "bordering on hypocrisy" when they have increasingly implemented measures against which they have set their own face time and again.

There is also to be an airport tax, and a tax on insurance premiums. The Chancellor seems to have taken to heart the rather unkind description of him in Alan Clark's book as "that walking life insurance risk" as he has exempted life insurance premiums, but just about every other kind of insurance is to be the subject of a new tax.

There is no back door to the tax system that the last two Chancellors between them have not entered. Every possible back-door new tax, or way of freezing a tax allowance, has been found. They have found ways of making significant tax increases without achieving the purpose of increasing investment or increasing the overall fairness of the tax system.

Talking of fairness, let us consider what the Government are doing about VAT. They have been driven to work out a compensation package—driven by the indignation of people throughout the country about what they will have to pay. The package, however, certainly would not have won the Conservatives the Christchurch and Newbury by-elections, which were won so handsomely by my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), and it would certainly not have appeased those who took part in the many pensioners' rallies and other events in which ordinary people have expressed their concern.

The compensation will be 50 per cent., not the 90 per cent. that the average family is expected to experience by way of extra bills in the first year. Of course, average families and families with incomes well below the average will not receive any compensation. The Government have got the message that they must help not just pensioners on income support, but those above the income support level, because they are the new poor. So many Government measures have helped to turn pensioners with small savings into a new kind of poor. I am glad that the Government have started to get that message; but the people to whom I have referred will not be adequately compensated, and many more people will not be compensated at all.

We have had two Chancellors who have not made the tax system fairer, but have simply sought to extend it. The motto seems to be, "If it moves, tax it". What a battery—what an array—of taxes we have seen.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

On the provisions involving small business, I want to make an offer to the Government; I wish to be generous to them. In an interesting passage in his speech, the Chancellor said that businesses were troubled, as indeed they are—sorely troubled—by late payment of debt. Some of that late payment, incidentally, is made by Government Departments and other Government bodies. Much improvement could be achieved in that respect. The campaign waged by many small business organisations for statutory interest for late payment of debt has been recognised by the Government, who have issued a statement that Ministers will look at the matter again. I am very pleased to hear that, but looking at it is not enough.

Let me make my offer: I have gained second place in the ballot for private Members' Bills, and if the Government will assure me within the next few days—it must be done within that time because I shall have to announce the subject of my Bill—that they will not oppose a Bill to enforce payment of debts, I shall be prepared to introduce such a Bill. The Government will then have no problem fitting it into their legislative programme and no difficulty with having to push other Bills out of the programme. Their consultations will be speeded up, and their minds will be concentrated wonderfully. Not many Opposition Members have ever made so generous an offer, and I can see the warmth with which it has already been received by the Economic Secretary. I hope that he will be able to intervene in my speech, or consult during the afternoon and report later in the debate—perhaps tomorrow—that the Government will accept that offer, which is quite genuine.

If the Government agree that they will not oppose a Bill to enforce statutory late payment of debt, I will introduce that Bill and it can have the time allocated to me under the private Member's Bill procedure. I will, of course, consult the Government on the detailed terms of the Bill.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson) *rose—*

Mr. Beith: Say yes.

Mr. Nelson: I was always advised to beware of Liberals bearing gifts. Unfortunately, I am unable to accept the right hon. Gentleman's offer this afternoon.

It is right and proper that the Government should consult on the various options that are open, and there are a number of options open, as the press release following the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon made clear. It is far better that industry generally should be consulted rather than that we should hasten to private Members' legislation on the matter.

Mr. Beith: I am sorry that the Minister chose to intervene, because I think that he could have given the Government a little bit more of an opportunity. I hope that that is not the last word in the course of the next few days' debate. Clearly, that offer cannot remain open indefinitely. I am not prepared to introduce so valuable a Bill and simply see it blocked and defeated by the Government. That would be a waste of private Members' time, when there are many other issues contending for it.

I want to see such a Bill through. It would be very harsh on small businesses to have to wait another year for anything to happen, because small businesses are facing the difficulties now. I therefore urge the Minister to have expeditious consultations so that he or his colleagues can come back to me in the next two or three days to give a clear answer, bearing in mind that there will be time—between the day when private Members' Bills have to be announced and the proceedings on the Bill—for quite a lot of further consultations. I do not intend to press him further now, but I ask him to take it away and perhaps come back to me over the next few days.

I want to look briefly at some of the spending aspects of the Budget. I shall start with housing. There is nothing new in the way of housing investment. We could have used housing investment to tackle the housing crisis, the homelessness problem and get the building industry moving. The construction industry is showing none of the signs of recovery that are fleetingly apparent in some other parts of industry. It needs to be set to work and we need the homes. With its social housing problem, the Housing Corporation would have been an urgent priority for greater investment, not restricted investment.

Let me give another example of where the Government could have helped. It was announced this afternoon that the Ministry of Defence can sell housing stock to deal with its budget problems. In other words, it can use the receipts of asset sales—sales of houses—for new investment, or even current spending for all I know. Why cannot local authorities use exactly the same form of income—capital receipts in the public sector—to build more houses and renovate existing houses? Surely the doctrinal admission today that it is all right for the Ministry of Defence must mean that it is all right for the Department of the Environment and local authorities. I suspect that it does not mean that, but we should be told why. Local authorities could be adding to essential social housing.

As to transport, there is still not enough new investment. We were pleased to hear the announcement about the west coast main line, but that is a private sector investment project. I welcome the bringing in of more private sector investment, and I hope that there will be a great deal more of it, but we need more public sector investment in London Underground. People have had to be led out of tunnels in the dark because the system cannot keep going, so old and decrepit is its cabling. We need significant new public investment in London Underground if that job is to be dealt with.

The same applies in other parts of the public transport system. I noticed the press release in which the Secretary of State for the Environment—I do not know why it was him—referred to the fact that there were transport projects among the creation of public assets amounting to many billions of pounds over the next three years. When I looked at it more carefully, I discovered that, sure enough, the Minister had counted the Jubilee line yet again. The Jubilee line has been counted in every one of the past three ministerial statements about public expenditure. Every time it comes up, we have the Jubilee line. We have only just got the announcement that we can go ahead, so sure enough it is counted all over again. It is amazing what one can do with figures, but what one cannot do with figures is regenerate a public transport system that is desperate for real, new investment.

As for health, I do not believe that even the figures that we have address the colossal waste in the national health service which has arisen from the huge expansion of managers, management and administration in the health

service. The Government knew from the start that they were devising a system riddled with contracts, purchasers, providers, buyers and a lot of people shuffling paper about. The whole NHS system depends on people shuffling paper about, so it employs people at the highest possible salaries to shuffle it about. There are huge increases in costs in the NHS. They have been generated not by new patient care, better equipment or new highly qualified staff carrying out medical procedures, but by more and more managers and administrators.

Let us look briefly at education. Hidden away in the education proposals are provisions which raid the capital budgets of local authority schools to give money to opted-out schools. Not satisfied with the situation in which so many schools—the vast majority—have decided that they do not want to opt out, the Government intend to raid their budgets to give more capital to opted-out schools. That is a disgraceful piece of bribery at the expense of the people who refused the bribe, and it is outrageous at a time when education investment is so badly needed.

The Chancellor made a comment about student grants and asked why the bus drivers of today should pay through their taxes to finance the lawyers of tomorrow. I have another question for him about student grants. Why should not the lawyers of today be paying through their taxes for the sons and daughters of today's bus drivers to get into higher education? That is the real question. Why should more and more people be disbarred from higher education through fear of high debts and the inadequacy of the grants system and the combined grant and loan system to provide a reasonable basis on which they can go through higher education?

Another departmental area with which I shall deal is the Home Office. The great element in the Home Office budget is building more prisons, not preventing more crimes. The more prisons are built, and the more people are put into them, the more crime one assumes has been committed. We are supposed to be stopping crime in the first place so that people are not mugged or injured and do not have grievous bodily harm inflicted on them. Simply having more people in prison does not solve that problem. It shows that the Home Office has not got its priorities right. The building of prisons is very good for my constituency as it is the biggest expanding industry that we have had in my constituency in modern times, and it plays a role in the local economy, but it is not a good crime prevention policy: it is a way of dealing with the consequences of not having prevented crimes and not an objective of policy in itself.

Various measures in the Budget are welcome, or appear to be at first sight—measures such as the enterprise investment scheme, if it works. Unfortunately, there is a trail littered with disappointment of schemes designed to encourage venture investment. I hope that the venture capital trust will not prove to be another of those. It is well worth the Government's effort to try to find new ways of matching available venture capital to businesses that could use it.

Other welcome measures are the pensioners bond—although we do not know enough about the terms to be sure—and the limited child care provision. Many more working women could benefit from other forms of help with child care—for example, tax relief. Many youngsters would benefit if they had access to nursery education. Those are useful measures and we shall consider them in more detail as the debate proceeds.

We have not seen in the Budget a solution to the really big deficits that we face. The public sector deficit is certainly not sorted out once and for all. It will not be sorted out until we get more people back to work and recovery is at a level that ensures that many people are paying taxes instead of receiving benefits. That would require measures that the Budget does not contain.

We have an investment deficit. We are living on the capital that was invested and built up by previous generations, and are not renewing it. The record of decline in our public sector net worth is appalling. The Budget does not solve that problem.

We have a terrible trade deficit, and I was alarmed to hear the Chancellor set such store by the growth in consumer spending. We cannot get out of our economic difficulties in the long term by relying on growth in consumer spending, because it invariably results in a worse trade deficit for this country. Even in the depths of recession we had a bad trade deficit, and we are still not addressing that issue.

We also have a fairness deficit. It has been built up over the years of the Conservative Government, with the benefits to top rate taxpayers and the pressure on lower income people, much augmented by the Budget that we had earlier in the year, and not offset sufficiently by the measures in this Budget. It is a fairness deficit which leads people to believe that taxation must be bad and wrong in principle because they are not taxed fairly.

There are justifiable reasons for taxation: there are things that Governments have to do. But taxation has to be fair and people have to see that it is doing the job which justifies levying it in the first place. The Government have added hugely to the tax burden and vastly to the tax system without doing the things which justify taxation in the first place. That is a mark of the Budget's failure.

5.40 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): The difficulty in following the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), or, indeed, any member of the Liberal party, is that one is faced with a lot of bits and pieces but no philosophy. So it is extremely difficult even to debate with the right hon. Gentleman. That contrasts sharply with the manner and content of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget.

The objectives of the Budget were extremely well placed and well set out. They were to achieve sustained economic growth with low inflation and to do so by providing for a flourishing and growing private sector. One of the exciting things that he said was that the Government intended that public expenditure as a percentage of gross national product should be reduced over three years from the current level of 45 per cent. to 42·5 per cent.

Two particular points in my right hon. and learned Friend's speech are important in terms of the objectives that he stated. I agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that economic growth must be central to achieving the Government's objectives. It lies at the very root of the ability to balance greater buoyancy in revenue with the focuses within expenditure which my right hon. and learned Friend identified. That must be particularly true of the objective of reducing ultimately to zero the public sector borrowing requirement and the present £50 billion deficit.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

The Budget must be measured and judged essentially by what it says about growth. Two particular points about growth have to be considered. The first is the extent to which focusing public expenditure and holding down direct tax rates is plausible and sustainable. Both as a matter of basic philosophy and as a matter of economic efficiency, low taxation is absolutely essential.

I was excited to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor say that the Budget involved a long-term tax-cutting agenda. That must be right. In terms of basic philosophy such an agenda means a large private sector, which is the best insurance that we are likely to devise against overwhelming state control and even dictatorship. However, low taxation and a thriving private sector involve something much more immediate than that. Low taxation has to be the best way that Governments can devise of maximising economic endeavour and bringing out the most in the human spirit.

Without a good net wage there will not be incentives to work. Without a good net rate of return there will not be investment. It is as simple as that. Every society that has tried something different has failed. I suppose that the most clear and wonderful example of the failure of an economy while it was heavily taxed and allowed people virtually no net wage was China during the cultural revolution. Anyone who has read Madam Chang's book "Wild Swans" will remember the graphic descriptions of the effect on the economy of wiping out net take-home wages. The policy was reversed in the agricultural sector and more recently in the industrial sector. The spirit of people was lifted by giving them incentives. Net take-home pay rose as a result of work and productivity. As a result, the Chinese economy is being transformed.

It is not simply that high taxes are detrimental to human endeavour. High taxes have their own cumulative effect and create distortions which subsequently have to be put right. In passing, I hope that the new tax on airlines will not result one day in the Government having to compensate local authority airports which are screaming because the traffic is decreasing. My point is that any form of taxation creates distortions.

The question whether we can sustain a policy of low taxation is critical in determining one's approach to the Budget. I hope that the programme of focusing state assistance on those who really need it is firmly established and maintained. There is one area in which we can do more. When I was Minister for Housing I increasingly felt that we were not supporting people who really needed support as against those who did not need it so badly.

In the case of state housing, despite a good move towards privatisation by involvement of housing associations and private capital, £4 billion to £5 billion still goes into bricks and mortar rather than into direct assistance for people who need it. There is still scope for a greater switch in that policy so that rents are raised to a private sector level. The whole housing sector should effectively be privatised. Those who cannot afford to pay the market rents should be supported directly by housing benefit to a greater extent than now. In my ideal world, that would certainly include not only people on current state benefits but those on low incomes. There should be a much smoother tapering of the tax curve in that respect.

The second crucial determinant of the economic growth objectives that are central to the Budget and the question whether the Budget will succeed is the way in which the Government proceed with monetary policy. I was encouraged when I heard my right hon. and learned Friend say that monetary policy would be that which was appropriate to sustaining the objectives that he had set himself. That was a crucial statement. In recent memory it was not always the case that monetary policy was fixed by the need to sustain the domestic objectives of the British Government.

When we were in the European exchange rate mechanism—indeed before we entered it—exchange rate policy was more important than monetary policy appropriate to the domestic needs of the economy. Therefore, in the late 1980s, when it was appropriate for our economy to introduce policies that brought down inflation, we had the reverse. The Germans had low interest rates and it was thought appropriate to shadow the deutschmark. Therefore, we had low interest rates when we should have raised interest rates to contain inflation. By the early 1990s the reverse was the case. When we should have had low interest rates, we maintained high interest rates.

In this context I was somewhat more concerned about one of the Chancellor's asides, when he said that the economic recovery occurred well before we left the exchange rate mechanism. That argument is put about by people who think that it is quite proper for us to re-enter the ERM, as is the argument that the downturn problems of the British economy occurred before we went into the ERM. The latter argument is easily dealt with because we were then shadowing the deutschmark. The problems that emerged in the second half of the 1980s were related not specifically to our entry to the ERM but to the general policy of putting exchange rate management above interest rate management.

The Chancellor referred to the fact that things started to get better before we came out of the ERM. That is clearly the case because, at the beginning of 1992, we began to adopt interest rate and monetary policies—belatedly, by about 18 months, in my view—which started to bring down interest rates. That policy started to have its effect in the summer of 1992—before we came out of the ERM—but it finally clashed and conflicted with the policy of being in the ERM. The whole thing blew up and the first reaction was to put up interest rates to 20 or 25 per cent.—which was not sustainable for very long—and then we came out of the ERM.

The recent pronouncement by the CBI that it would like to get back into the ERM worries me. Sometimes the Government look as if they wish to get back into the ERM as part of their policy of moving towards a single European currency, which is a permanent ERM. If it were thought that that might be the policy, it would call into question the statement that the Chancellor made today that our monetary policy would be fixed according and appropriate to the needs of our own economy. I take great comfort from his saying that monetary policy is to be appropriate to sustainable economic growth without inflation; it all adds up to a single package—together with cutting taxes and focusing expenditure on those who really need it and on the functions that should properly be performed by the state.

Sustainable economic growth is central to that policy. If that is attainable, the Budget will be a magnificent Budget.

It sets out its objectives of containing the Budget deficit, of controlling expenditure to what it should properly be and of progressively reducing taxation as a percentage of GDP.

With this caveat, if that is to be the policy—and it is certainly the policy on which we went to the country—I welcome the Budget. I hope that during the course of the debate the Government will remove, once and for all, any further conflict or doubt about the priorities of monetary policy.

5.53 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): The hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) touched on the nub of the problem, that the Budget will be judged by whether it leads to major economic growth. I assume that the hon. Gentleman really meant that that in turn would help reduce unemployment, which is the basic problem. The premise is that a stringent monetary policy will eventually lead to economic growth, and that that will take care of our ills.

The weakness of that argument is that the Chancellor said today that one of the big difficulties—whatever the reasons—is that European economies are currently not doing very well. Approximately 68 per cent. of our trade is with Europe; the remainder is negotiated with the rest of the world. The reality is that we have to trade with Europe. If the European economic situation improves, ours will start to improve.

Unfortunately, that other 32 per cent. of trade centres around the nub of another problem, which is that the United States and its friends in the Pacific region are forming an economic unit. We must bear that in mind and ask the Chancellor and the Government what discussions they have had with the Americans, the Japanese and the Australians about developing markets in those areas. If we are not careful, the expansion that some hon. Members have been talking about could be threatened by the Pacific rim countries on the one hand and Europe on the other. We must be careful about what we say about our allies and partners in Europe and about our trading partners in the Pacific rim countries.

We should also look at who will bear the burden of the tax increases announced in the Budget. No one should shy away from the fact that they are tax increases, despite what the Government say. The people who will bear the burden are at the lower end of the earnings scale. No doubt Conservative Members will argue that they are trying to help pensioners with their problems with value added tax. That help will not be enough, however, and many pensioners will reduce the amount of heating that they use this winter in order to save on fuel bills.

One-parent families will also pay a heavy premium for the problems that the Government have created. There is nothing in the Budget to deal with the homeless.

Those who will be hardest hit account for 12 million people, and they have paid a terrible price for the policies of the Government over the past few years.

Conservative Members heard the Chancellor say that his long-term strategy was tax cuts. Some people would say that it is about time, because for the past 14 years the long-term strategy has been one of tax increases. What we have here is tax increases by stealth.

There is nothing being done about the industrial base of the country. There were no measures or initiatives in the Budget to help companies carry out research and development.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Most commentators agree that one of the problems for the industrial base is that we need to have the best trained young people for technical jobs. Does the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) agree that the initiative on apprenticeships that has been announced will provide a credit system through youth training to produce a new raft of apprenticeships? That will be a big contribution to that area, and is something that the trade unions will welcome.

Mr. Cunningham: I do not think that the Chancellor spelt out the details of the apprentice training scheme. A wise man would ask to see the details, but it will still not produce the numbers of highly trained young people that the country needs to protect its industrial base. I am sure that the trade unions would agree with me because they have argued for many years about the need to provide the necessary number of quality apprenticeships. The Opposition will consider the scheme once we know about its exact details and the number of people involved.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that the social security budget will be reduced by £2·5 billion. That cut reveals the true nature of the Government's promise to assist old-age pensioners, who will be hurt by VAT increases and cuts in benefits in the next two years, the homeless and one-parent families.

I notice that the Government have not introduced any new initiative to pump more money into the ailing national health service. The Chancellor merely said that he hoped that the NHS would be more efficient. Depending on what definition of efficiency one chooses to take, however, that could mean that more jobs will be at risk and that redundancies will occur. It does not necessarily follow that that efficiency will increase in relation to patient care.

We also learnt that public sector workers will be subject to a wage freeze, except when there is improvement in efficiency, but once again, that depends on what is meant by the Government's use of the word "efficiency". It may mean that they will receive a small wage increase if they are prepared to sacrifice some jobs. I am certain, however, that their wages will not be increased this year or next year.

The standard spending assessment for local authorities will increase by a marginal 2·3 per cent. We are aware, however, that many local authorities are already wrestling with the problem of providing care in the community out of their limited resources. Those authorities also need extra resources to provide new housing.

The Chancellor also announced that the tax relief for home owners and first-time buyers will be frozen. I have no doubt that the relief offered will be reduced prior to the implementation of that announcement.

When one attempts to judge a Budget, one considers whether the sacrifices have been distributed fairly. Today's Budget has failed to do that. The onus has been placed, once again, on those who are caught in the poverty trap. The Government may say that they will assist one-parent families with childcare. They have failed to recognise that two-parent families also need assistance sometimes, because in our modern society those parents must, reluctantly, both work to make ends meet.

[Mr. Cunningham]

This Budget should not be welcomed but greeted with great trepidation. It is difficult to analyse its full implications a mere one and a half hours after the Chancellor has delivered his speech, but I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition was right when he said that, in the coming months, the British people will become aware of the increased tax burden that has been placed on them. They will realise that it is due to the Government's mismanagement of the economy.

6.3 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I have always been told that, if one wants to take over a company, it should be one at the bottom rather than at the top, because it is a foil to show off one's abilities. If I were the Chancellor, however, I would not be too keen to take over a company with a public sector borrowing requirement deficit of £50 billion, a balance of trade deficit in excess of £12 billion, and 3 million people unemployed. My right hon. and learned Friend has also had to try to find some magic to keep the recovery rolling. The only bright spot on the horizon, as far as I can see, is low inflation.

In the political and media debate before the Budget, I was disappointed to note that the problem that my right hon. and learned Friend faced was treated as a linear equation based on either increasing taxes or cutting expenditure. The commentators ignored one dimension that is known in the commercial world as "growing the business". I shall talk later about the need to produce more in the United Kingdom. I was obviously delighted, however, by the moves announced by my right hon. and learned Friend to promote smaller businesses, because they are the seed corn from which growth and expansion can come.

In the past, in times of a little local difficulty in our economy, interest rates have gone up, unemployment has gone up, but, at a crucial moment—it normally coincided with an election—down came the interest rates. That meant that growth increased, orders went up and we then did rather well, thank you very much.

That often happened because we found that our major customers in the European Community or the United States had also enjoyed economic recovery. Their economic train began to chug uphill and we managed to hitch back on a few coaches further down. As a result, we were able to reduce our costs by between 10 and 15 per cent., and we did well. That gave a little boost to our economy and everything was all right until prices began to rise, inflation went up once again and we were forced, once again, on a down cycle.

This time, it is different. The core financial position of our customers in the European Community is well known, and we no longer enjoy any advantage offered by a potential upturn in its economy. The United States, however, appears to be coming out of its economic depression or down cycle.

The current circumstances have kept prices down and that gives us, for the first time in many years, the chance to build a stable recovery. My right hon. and learned Friend has performed a superb balancing act between keeping the fragile recovery going—it is fragile because no one should try to make out that things are booming in the marketplace—and making careful decisions to reduce the PSBR and our indebtedness.

The balance of trade deficit is another matter, and I do not believe that it has been given sufficient attention in the Budget. It is extremely worrying that the recovery has begun with such a large trade deficit, because that could make the recovery short-lived. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has pointed out in its "Green Budget" that benign neglect of the current account deficit could sow the seeds of the next recession. If that deficit continues unchecked, either the United Kingdom's competitiveness—that means volume production—must be boosted or growth cut. That would mean an increase in interest rates. The first option is surely more preferable to the second.

There must be a marked shift towards investment that will result in exports and import substitution. My concern—it is not the first time I have raised it in the House—is that the financial institutions are biased against manufacturing investment. Short-termism seems to rule supreme. That has led to a reduction in the investment we need. Investment against the gross domestic product is at its lowest level for some 30 years. That investment is considerably lower than that made by some of our industrial competitors in the world marketplace.

Within Government, an element of schizophrenia seems to be apparent. We laud the car industry because, at last, we have become a net exporter of vehicles. We no longer import more cars than we export. At the same time, however, we seem to have missed out on some of the opportunities offered by the huge investments that have been made by Toyota, Nissan, Honda and Peugeot, which have helped to produce that beneficial change in our exports.

In the short term rather than in the long term, we must focus our minds on providing more investment. I am talking not about blanket investment, but about specific focused investments. For example, we have fewer computerised machine tools per thousand head of population than any country in the industrialised world. In this country, the figure was around 0·9 per thousand. In western Germany—before it was combined with East Germany—the figure was 2·3. I learned a long time ago that I do not care how broad your back is or how big your shovel is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you will never beat a man who is driving a JCB if you want to dig a trench. We must compete in the modern world.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): One needs a big garden as well.

Mr. Page: I accept what my hon. Friend says.

Nevertheless, we must have investment in computerisation if we are to compete. I welcomed the increase in capital allowances in the last autumn statement, but I felt that the state of British business at that time was that companies had turned their attention away from investment towards short-term survival. After the restoration of corporate viability, companies are more capable of coming forward with investment plans than for some time. I could produce figure after figure to support that point.

I return to the announcements about small businesses, which are some of the more positive and welcome aspects of the Chancellor's speech. My right hon. and learned Friend correctly identified three areas of difficulty—the

burdens of regulation, external finance and cash flow. The measures which he announced went a long way to help in all three areas. Moving up the level for exemption against VAT to £45,000 will help many small businesses, and removing the cost of the audit has been asked for by small companies for years.

The message I would send to small businesses is that that must not be used as an excuse not to have proper financial accounting. I have been talking to three of the major clearing banks in this country, and all three came up with the same figure. The banks said that, of small businesses with a turnover of between £250,000 and £1·5 million, only 8 to 10 per cent. carry out monthly profit and loss accounts. As someone with a little knowledge of business, I find it staggering that anybody can try to run a company without knowing every month how it is doing. That is absolutely beyond comprehension.

The Chancellor has moved to allow people to reinvest and put moneys into other companies when they have decided to sell up or move away from their original activity. The raising of that level to £750,000 shows a realistic recognition of the amounts of money needed to be put into industries and businesses today to make them survive.

I will now mention the replacement of the business expansion scheme. The scheme was introduced to give finance to businesses, and, with the benefits to investors, went some way to compensate for the risks in small firm investment. However, as with most fiscal measures during that time, the scheme has lost much of that original aim.

The extension of the BES to rented housing accommodation in 1988 provided a vehicle for relatively low-risk, high-return investment. That was well away from the original aim of the BES. Therefore, I welcome what my right hon. and learned Friend has done with the enterprise investment scheme, and particularly with the block on property.

We must put money into ideas which will produce things for this country, and not just into the bricks and mortar. We must have the basis for growth and development. While the building is a part of that, if we do not put money into machinery and ideas we will fail against our foreign competitors. The idea of the creation of a venture capital trust is bold and imaginative. I would love to see the details before I make any final judgment, but the idea behind it is superb, and if it will encourage investment in smaller businesses, it is to be welcomed.

The payment of debt has been mentioned time and time again. Small companies are worried that their major customer is not paying them on time, and the major customer can use that situation cynically to its advantage. The small company can do nothing about it. If it criticises its main customer or takes action against it, the small company loses, possibly for ever. My right hon. and learned Friend's remarks about the charging of interest and other measures is to be welcomed.

When Ministers assess how to bring that into law, they must ensure that there is as little possible activity as is required by the small business. Otherwise, the business would have to initiate the action, and could lose that customer—the very reason why small businesses do not take action under the existing legislation. The proposal is marvellous, but it must protect the small business man who may be ripped off by a larger company.

With the exception that I have mentioned of the moves to tackle the balance of trade, I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has succeeded magnificently in the difficult balancing act of reducing the PSBR and keeping the recovery rolling. On that, he is to be congratulated.

6.17 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): It is with some diffidence that I rise to speak so soon after the Chancellor has sat down. Clearly, I have not had an opportunity to read the lorry-loads of paper which go along with a Budget. I do not have the advantage, as did the Chancellor, of having a glass of amber-coloured liquid in front of me to refresh myself. No doubt the Chancellor was just enjoying a quiet celebration of St. Andrew's day.

After the media flurry about the cost of cigarettes and wine has subsided, the question which people in Scotland, in Wales, in London and particularly in my constituency will ask is, "What will this Budget do about mass unemployment?"

After one has stripped away the gimmicks and the flourishes, we have been presented with yet another Conservative Budget which fails to make bringing down unemployment a priority. Instead of making that the centrepiece of their strategy, we have boasts. One of the Treasury handouts which I have had time to read claims—immodestly, I believe—that the Budget completes the job of sorting out public finances.

The Chancellor himself said—again immodestly, with echoes of Mr. Toad—that the Budget would "sort out" the public sector borrowing requirement "once and for all". I put it to those on the Treasury Bench that those boasts will come back to haunt them. It is not clear from the Chancellor's speech that there are enough concrete measures in the Budget which will deal with the burden of the PSBR.

Unemployment is an issue which haunts every family in the land. Every estimate suggests that this country will still have 2·5 million people unemployed at the end of the century. Who could forget those posters at the time of the 1979 general election featuring the long queues of unemployed people? The posters said that Labour was not working. Who could forget the Tories wringing their hands about unemployment figures of 1 million at the end of the 1970s? Yet we will see out the century with levels of unemployment more than double those which the Government inherited, thanks to more than 14 years of Tory economic mismanagement.

Sadly, my constituency has the sixth highest level of unemployment in the country, with the present rate being 23.2 per cent. More sadly, that is an under-estimate. I know for a fact that women workers and young workers have opted out of the job market altogether, and that they do not register.

The figures for Hackney, North, in common with the figures from all over the country, have undoubtedly been presentationally massaged by more than 30 changes over the lifetime of the Government in the statistical methods of collecting the unemployment figures. If I were a Minister, I should not be so quick to rush on to television to talk about unemployment figures coming down. Any set of figures can come down if they are tinkered with 30 times in 10 years. Hackney, like many other parts of the country, is not following the overall trend and, sadly, unemployment continues to rise.

[Ms Diane Abbott]

Even when, by jiggery-pokery, the Government fiddle the figures to bring the overall number down, the national picture shows that more than one third of the unemployed people whom even the Government are prepared to admit exist—that is, more than a million people—are long-term unemployed. It also shows that there are 750,000 unemployed young people.

It is worth reminding the Government of the real cost of unemployment, because they seem to forget it. There is a financial cost, in that we spend £350 million on benefits. When the Government talk about public spending, and about taking money away from the disabled to deal with the public sector borrowing requirement, do they understand what the real basis of our spiralling PSBR is? It is the cost of maintaining the unemployed.

The Government sometimes seem to get the argument back to front. They seem to think that the way to cut the PSBR is to cut the money we give the unemployed, whereas the only long-term decent method of cutting the PSBR is to cut the number of people who are unemployed. For as long as I have been in Parliament, the Government have refused to face that issue.

There is also a social cost to unemployment. Nobody believes that one can entirely dissociate the issue of rising crime from that of mass unemployment. No one suggests for a second that, simply because someone has no job, he will go out and commit a crime, but the correlation between areas of high unemployment and areas of rising crime are too obvious to miss.

It is odious—to use one of the Prime Minister's new words—to see the Home Secretary strutting around talking about how he will build more prisons, put more young people in jail for longer and make prison conditions tougher. It is odious to see him playing the law and order card ruthlessly, when he knows that, if one group of people bears the responsibility for rising crime and the mass unemployment that underpins it, it is the Government.

Unemployment also has a cost in terms of the quality of people's lives. Fear of unemployment affects every community in the country. Perhaps during the 1980s people in London and the south-east said, "Unemployment may be affecting coal mining areas, Scotland, Wales and the north-east, but at least we are experiencing a boom." But in the past 18 months, the chickens of Tory policy have come home to roost in the Tory heartland of the commuter belt, of London and of the south-east.

In the London borough elections next spring, the Government will pay a price for the extent to which unemployment has affected London, the south-east and the rest of the commuter belt, as it did not in the roaring Thatcher years during the 1980s.

I believe that no single factor acts to depress the housing market and growth more than the fear of unemployment, yet in the Budget, as in a whole series of Budgets, the Government refuse to make fighting unemployment a priority. Instead, we get gimcrack, gimmicky schemes that take up much time and space in press releases and give the Government something to say, but which do little about unemployment.

Let those of us who were in the Chamber in March cast our minds back to the schemes announced by the dear departed right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), which were supposed to reduce unemployment. The right hon. Gentleman was so desperate to have something in his Budget that seemed as if it referred to the unemployed that he dragged in schemes that were really matters for the Department of Employment.

The educational allowance scheme was trumpeted in March. What has happened to the 60,000 places that were promised? Ministers tell me that, so far, only 5,000 people are participating. In the March Budget, we also heard about the new community action programme, and were told that 20,000 places would be handed out. What has happened so far? Only 1,200 people are participating. What has happened to the pilot schemes for the long-term unemployed, about which we heard so much in March? They are only just up and running.

The presentation of those schemes and their value was limited. Shoehorning them into the Budget statement was extremely cynical. The seriousness of the Government's commitment to the unemployed is restricted entirely to window dressing schemes which, six months after the dear departed former Chancellor announced them, are hardly up and running.

This year we have been told about more schemes and more window dressing. There is to be a two-week restart course, and even "extended" community action—although even the places promised in March have not been filled. There are to be higher levels of skills training, career development loans, the job finders grant, and job finders workshops. There is to be caseloading—whatever that means.

Those schemes, like the schemes announced in March, like last year's schemes and the schemes before that, are mere window dressing. They achieve little in terms of affecting long-term unemployment; they are simply a public relations device so that the Government can be seen to be doing something for the unemployed, whereas the reality is that the long-term trend, especially for people who have been unemployed for more than a year, and in relation to the structural unemployment in communities such as mine, the long-term trend continues to rise.

Let us not waste any more time on the schemes that have been exposed as the merest cynical window dressing. What is the Government's real answer to unemployment? They must have given it some thought; I do not want to suggest that they have given the matter no thought. To find the Government's real answer to the problem of unemployment that is haunting every family in the country, we must pluck out a phrase from the Chancellor's speech. The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about the importance of a flexible and deregulated labour market.

What does that phrase mean? The Economic Secretary to the Treasury and the Government Whip are laughing; they know what it means, and they are fortunate indeed that it does not apply to them. It means a low-skill, low-wage labour market with no security and no job protection. In recent weeks, we have seen the Secretary of State for Employment, that well-known Christian Democrat, fighting off the other 11 European states' modest efforts to offer a level of protection to low-paid workers.

As we approach the year 2000, the Government present the British people with the notion of the British economy competing with Japan, Germany and the economies of the Pacific rim on the basis not of training or skill but of a low-skill, low-wage, insecure, unprotected labour market.

That is how they want to get people—or, at least, some people—back to work, at the very bottom of the employment pyramid.

Mr. Duncan Smith: If what the hon. Lady says is true, why does 40 per cent. of the inward investment in the EC arrive in this country?

Ms Abbott: Precisely for the reason that I have explained. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; it is precisely because what I am saying is true that we get the inward investment.

Labour costs in Britain are lower. Car workers in Britain cost 40 per cent. of what car workers in west Germany cost. I have never spoken to the hon. Gentleman before, and I do not know his background, but does he really believe that this country has any long-term prospect of competing with Germany, Japan and the Pacific rim on the basis of low wages and low skills? That idea does not present any long-term prospects for this country. The hon. Gentleman should go back to his constituents and tell them, "I have seen the future, and it is a future of low wages, short contracts and unprotected employment." They will thank the hon. Gentleman for that by lowering his majority.

I do not want to be entirely unfair to the Chancellor. There is one thing in the Budget for which I would like to give one cheer—the announcement of the child care allowance—although I have yet to see the details of it. I am a cynic. I dare say that, when those who will benefit from the allowance cut it up, they will have lost money in all sorts of other ways in terms of the value added tax on fuel and so on.

However, the principle of the allowance—it is an important one, and I welcome it—is that the way to get single parents off benefits and into the job market is to offer them some help with child care. But the way in which the allowance is worked out in practice is an entirely different matter.

The Chancellor began his statement by boasting about how he had solved the public sector borrowing requirement once and for all. That cannot be true. That claim places far too much weight on spending cuts which have yet to be specified. The proof of the pudding of the Budget statement will be in the eating. The balance of getting public spending under control relies too heavily on public spending cuts. We will have to see those spending cuts, and we will have to see whether the Government can get them through the House.

High unemployment is a tragedy not simply for those who are unemployed but for the young people leaving school with no prospect of ever getting a job, and skilled men in their 40s and 50s who are being made redundant and know that they will never work again.

Unemployment is not simply a tragedy for those who are enduring it. It is also a tragedy and a serious matter for the economy of this country, because growth and a sustained upturn will never be achieved unless the human capital of this country is maximised. However, that human capital is not maximised by condemning millions of people to long-term unemployment. For many years to come, we will pay the price economically and socially for the mass unemployment of the Thatcher years.

I listened with great interest to the Chancellor's presentation. He must be congratulated on the bravura and flourish with which he made his speech. Nonetheless, when all the fanfares have died down, I am waiting, the people of Hackney are waiting and the people of Britain are waiting for a Government who will finally, after 14 long years, put a return to full employment on the top of the political agenda.

6.32 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): One of the problems that Tory Members always face in dealing with Labour Members' speeches is that, when we ask them how on earth they would get from here to Edinburgh, they always say, "If I were going to Edinburgh, I would not start from here". The difficulty is that Labour Members are genuinely reluctant to face the main strategic problems of the Chancellor and his predecessors. Indeed, if Labour Members had been lucky enough to win the general election, they would have faced the same problems.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor presented a Budget which is not the Budget that he would have chosen to present in a perfect world. However, he has to deal with the real world and real circumstances and, as one would expect, he has done so with characteristic courage and integrity. We are fortunate that the Chancellor and, indeed, the Cabinet—I am proud to include Cabinet members and their collective responsibility—faced up to many of the problems which they immediately faced and introduced a package which is creative and is genuinely designed to address many of the short-term difficulties. But it also lays the basis for the longer term and for much more sustainable achievements in our economic fortunes.

I look forward to the day one year hence when my right hon. and learned Friend, as a result of what he has been able to do this afternoon, will be able to present a second Budget which builds on today's Budget and which is more in keeping with the sort of Budget that it would have been his ambition to deliver in a more perfect world. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) laid down the yardstick by which she would judge the Budget—what it does for unemployment in this country. I respect the impulses that led her to argue and analyse exactly as she has done.

When I came to the House more than a decade ago, I had the highest level of constituency unemployment. That is no longer the case, or anything like the case. At that time, we had structural unemployment in Corby and east Northamptonshire which meant that, whatever the national unemployment level, unemployment in that area was always significantly higher than the national average. Today, we have reached the point at which unemployment in the area is fairly consistent at 1 per cent. to 1·5 per cent. below the national average. Of course, it is still too high, but I draw comfort from the fact that unemployment has fallen by 6 per cent. in the past year. The way in which I judge the Budget is that more of my constituents are likely to find work next year than has been the case in the past year.

I agreed with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr Spicer) when he emphasised the question whether the Budget would assist in delivering higher sustainable growth in the future than has been the case recently. I think that it will do so. More of my constituents will get jobs as a result of that sustainable growth, and they will benefit correspondingly from it.

Matters that are important to my constituents and those of all hon. Members lie substantially beyond my right hon. and learned Friend's power. Above all else, it is absolutely

[Mr. William Powell]

essential for the sustained revival of economic activity in this country that we have sustained growth in world trade. In the past 250 years of British economic history, there has been no period when the British economy has prospered against a background of decline in world trade. If we are to prosper, it is absolutely essential that there is a robust recovery in world trade because so much of our economic activity is involved in international trade. However, one cannot be too sanguine that that is about to happen.

Resolution of the problem of the general agreement on tariffs and trade is of considerable importance to this country and should never be overlooked. I welcome the measures introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend which will encourage trade with countries in the Pacific rim and with Asia. Of course, European markets are likely to remain the most important markets in the foreseeable future, but there is no doubt whatever that the expanding markets in the world which offer opportunities for our business men, merchants and entrepreneurs are in Asia as well as in Europe. The message needs to go out loudly and clearly that, if businesses wish to prosper, they must prosper not only here but abroad. By "abroad", I mean not only western Europe but the burgeoning dynamic markets in the east.

I welcome many of the measures announced by my right hon. and learned Friend. I strongly support his announcements on local authority expenditure for next year. Even a 2·3 per cent. increase in the money that local authorities can spend next year on this year's planned target—not their actual expenditure—is still on the generous side. Since May last year, a number of large spending authorities have been on a financial binge, and wish to continue that binge. That has been happening in Northamptonshire, and it simply must stop.

I welcome the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend underlined the Government's willingness to use their capping powers to ensure that spending targets for local authorities are not undermined by local authorities that feel that they are entitled to go on a spending binge, spending not only council taxpayers' money but Government taxpayers' money.

The controls exercised by the House of Commons over how centrally collected taxes are spent by local authorities are hopelessly inadequate. A much closer interest needs to be taken in how local authorities spend their money, 50 per cent. of which often comes not from what they raise locally but from what the Treasury gives them. That Cinderella area of public expenditure has been overlooked for far too long.

A scandalous report has been issued in Birmingham saying that taxpayers' money allocated for education through Treasury payments to the city of Birmingham has not been spent on education as most parents, governors and teachers in Birmingham schools would have wished, but has been used to develop exhibition facilities and goodness knows what else. As a result, we now learn that Birmingham has some of the worst academic results of any education authority in the country.

It is wrong that a large authority like Birmingham can receive money from my constituents who believe that it will be spent on education and then discover that it is being spent on something else. That is happening in countless local authorities, including some in Northamptonshire. I hope that the Government will be firm in making it plain to all local authorities that the 2·3 per cent. allowance on this year's planned spending rise is the limit and that capping powers will be used to ensure that it is held.

I welcome the increased contribution to the national health service. All our constituents not only want that but need it. The increased expenditure on education will also be important. I was astonished at what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said about grant-maintained schools. It is right and appropriate that the Government should seek to make available more and more money to the grant-maintained sector, knowing that it is usually better spent than any money given to local education authorities.

I have many grant-maintained schools in my constituency, most of which have become grant maintained not least because of decades of neglect by the local education authority in Northamptonshire, whether it has been under Labour or Conservative control. They welcome their increased freedom to manage their schools and assets in a much more sensible and practical way. I hope that when the allocation of money to the grant-maintained sector is broken up, the Secretary of State will not overlook the important claims of many junior and infant schools that are now becoming grant maintained for capital allocations over and above those given to the secondary school sector. I hope that successive Budgets will ensure a progressive flow of funds into that sector and that the Opposition will get the message that grant-maintained schools are popular. Not a single grant-maintained school has had reason to regret going grant maintained. I have considerable experience of that sector and know that most of them richly welcome the opportunities given to them.

I very much welcome the schemes for expanding the unquoted companies sector. It is an important measure. Small businesses have taken a serious beating during the past four or five years and everything that can be done to encourage the revival of small businesses should be welcomed, and I welcome the raft of measures put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend. What he said about the late payment of debt is also important, but I wish to underline a good point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. Some of the worst payers in this country are Government Departments. Some of my constituents who work for Government Departments complain week after week about every imaginable excuse made by Government Departments about why they should not pay their bills. The matter will not be taken seriously unless and until the Government are prepared greatly to improve the financial discipline that they exercise and ensure that small businesses in particular receive priority payment rather than endless excuses about why money cannot be paid.

I welcome the schemes to give people an incentive to get back to work. What is needed is a much greater emphasis to encourage people to work. This afternoon some useful steps were taken, most of which have been called for by the Opposition, although the specific detail may not have been what the Opposition Whip, the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), wanted.

The House knows that I am among those who are totally opposed to the extension of the VAT base. I am as angry today as I have been at any stage in the past six or seven months that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) should have made such a

proposal. I welcome the fact that the Chancellor has decided not to go further in extending the VAT base. Any idea that the VAT base can now be extended at the standard rate of 17·5 per cent. is utterly impossible. During the past few months there has been much agitation in the country and the House among my right. hon. and hon. Friends—

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Powell: Will my hon. Friend allow me to persist in what I have to say before he intervenes?

There has been much agitation about the amount of compensation that will be allowed. I pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for introducing a package of proposals for compensation which is much more generous than anybody in the House expected and certainly more generous than I expected. At no stage during the past few months have I advocated a compensatory package because I should have preferred VAT not to be levied on heating and cooking. However, I pay tribute to all my right. hon. and hon. Friends who have persistently and vigilantly brought home to my right hon. and learned Friend and other members of the Government the fact that the proposal was not sustainable without handsome and generous compensation.

It is usually estimated that VAT at 8 per cent. would cost an average household 85p a week and, at 17·5 per cent., approximately £2. Although it must be said that, on those figures for an average household—many households are not average—there is not total compensation, there is all but total compensation for those who receive it.

I welcome the fact that compensation has been extended to all pensioners. One of the matters that made me so angry about what was done in the Budget in March was that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames did not seem to appreciate that those just above the benefit level, many of whom had seen a decline in the income from their investments because of the decline in interest rates, would be the worst affected by the introduction of VAT in that way.

My right hon. and learned Friend has gone almost as far as anybody could ask to compensate pensioners, including those above the social security thresholds, for the introduction of the tax. That is not to say that all those who deserve it will receive compensation. Of course, there will be individuals who will fall outside the package—that is one reason why I have never regarded a compensation package as the best answer to the problem.

There will also be deserving organisations, frequently charities, that will be hard hit by the introduction of the tax. As the House has heard me say on many occasions, organisationswhich raise money in modest circumstances will find the extra tax a heavy burden to bear on top of the many other fiscal burdens of recent years.

It would be wrong of me, in again registering my hostility and anger at the extension of VAT to heating and cooking, not to recognise that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has introduced a remarkable package that will go a long way towards dealing with immediate difficulties. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will ensure that the extra energy conservation measures that have been announced will be directed to houses inhabited by local authority tenants and old houses in the private sector, in which heating costs are above average.

We have talked throughout about average heating costs. We should recognise that, although there may be one or two that meet the average, homes will digress substantially from the average. I have seen Graham Gooch score many runs as a batsman at the crease, and he has an average of 44.61, but I have never seen him score that number of runs and I doubt whether anybody else has.

The announcement will go a long way towards meeting the legitimate complaints about the matter of so many people. Although I am unable to award my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor the highest accolade, as I would have wished, I am prepared to pay handsome tribute to his Budget. It will be recognised throughout the country as a great help.

The Budget is one of the meatiest that has been presented to the House. It may turn out to be one of the most important Budgets that has been introduced at this stage in our national and economic history. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor deserves the congratulations of the House for his courage and integrity in introducing the proposals. I look forward to supporting him and his Budget proposals in the Division Lobby.

6.55 pm

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Coventry, North-East): When the Government drew up the slogan "back to basics", they gave us a couple of opportunities. The Opposition can use it to judge the Government's lack of aspiration for the country. It also gives us a good handle and measure by which to judge the policies that they introduce in the House, including the Budget. When we use the slogan "back to basics" to judge the Budget and the tax system that is to be introduced, we should ask two questions. First, are they fair and is the overall system in which they will operate fair? Secondly, do they tackle the real issues that face the country?

I was astonished that Conservative Members cheered the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he sat down. There will be a £6 billion increase in the tax burden, to be slid in over a three-year period. If one takes out the concessions to business in the personal sector, there will be a £7 billion increase in the tax burden. It will be slid in over a three-year period, but nonetheless there will be a £7 billion tax hike. That increase follows the increases in VAT and in national insurance contributions that were announced in the spring Budget. Those are the policies of a Government who at the last election promised decreases in tax year on year.

A lot has been said about the compensation that will be applied to the introduction of VAT on fuel. I was confused by what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said on the matter, and I am not still clear about it. He announced some figures that would apply to individuals, and I did not think that those figures were generous or would cover the total cost—

Mr. Duncan Smith: Oh.

Mr. Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman is a clever chap—he can read the bundle of papers before other hon. Members make a speech. I have not read the whole bundle. The figures are hidden somewhere in the papers, but I have not read them yet, because I have been listening to the debate.

The Chancellor gave us some figures that I did not think amounted to full compensation. He then gave an overall

[Mr. Ainsworth]

figure for the cost of the measure—£1.25 billion. If that figure is correct, he has almost fully compensated some groups of people for the VAT.

I am still confused about that, and perhaps when he sums up the Minister will clear up the issue. If the second figure is correct, it sends a clear message: that, having heard about the threatened imposition of VAT on fuel, pensioners organised themselves and "frit" the daylights out of some Conservative Members. If they are to be almost fully compensated, as the second figure would suggest, that is the reason. If that is so, perhaps the pensioners have something to teach other people who will suffer as a result of VAT. Families will be on the receiving end of that appalling increase, even if the pensioners will not.

Mr. Sweeney: Is it not right that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) stated as long ago as the spring Budget that help would be given to those in need? Has not the Labour party used its fertile imagination to whip up fears among pensioners, the poor and the weak in society over the past six months?

Mr. Ainsworth: I seem to recall that, week on week, Conservative Members were reluctant to respond to questions asked, particularly by the Labour Front-Bench team, about whether or not people would be fully compensated. Conservative Members were not prepared to answer that question during the two by-elections at which the subject was an important issue.

If the Government have now decided to give compensation, and the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) wants to suggest that they made that decision a long time ago and the fears were all a figment of people's imagination, one wonders why the Conservatives suffered such pains during the two by-elections, and have continued to do so during the past few months.

People should recognise that, if the Government have been obliged fully to compensate one group of people, they have done so as a result of the pressure brought to bear. Even if that is so, the compensation will not solve the problems for many other people. As the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) said, there is no such thing as the average household. There will be no such thing as the average fuel bill.

People with decent houses and decent insulation, with double glazing and good heating systems—in short, the better heeled—will do all right. But people living in poorer accommodation, with less efficient heating systems, in no fines council houses and the like, will find, even if in general there has been full compensation, that they are pounds out of pocket.

Another worrying issue is that the fuel bill money has now been included in pensions, so it will be steadily eroded as time goes by. The Government have been adept at cutting by stealth. Since they came to power, the basic state pension has become worth less compared with average earnings. I have no doubt that the Government will try to claw back the compensation package as soon as they can.

Mr. Heald: Is not the hon. Gentleman's point about energy efficiency dealt with by the expansion of the home energy efficiency scheme, which already helps 200,000 poorer households and which in future will be doubled? I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman saw a recent announcement in answer to a question that I tabled to the effect that in future householders will not have to make any contribution to the scheme. That is a genuine help for all pensioners and poorer families.

Mr. Ainsworth: Given the number of deaths in the winter from hypothermia, the scheme will need a tremendous expansion. Let us hope that that takes place—

Mr. Heald: It is doubling.

Mr. Ainsworth: Talk of percentage figures in these terms will not be much help. Let us hope that people get the assistance they need.

I come back to the £6 billion tax increases—£7 billion when we discount the reductions offered to the business sector. On whom will the burden fall? I have no doubt that the measures chosen will fall on the middle-earning and lower-earning people of this country, just as they have done time and again before under the Conservative Government. In the 1987 and 1988 Budgets, billions of pounds were dished out to top earners, £2 billion in a single Budget—that of 1988. The balance of tax paid has shifted away from the better-off and towards those on average and below average earnings.

The Government try to tell us that they are a Government of low taxation, but between 1979 and 1991-92, the burden of taxation on an average family rose from 35·2 per cent. to 36·7 per cent. Meanwhile, the burden on the top tenth of the population decreased considerably, while for the bottom tenth it rose considerably. If we discount the Chancellor's sleights of hand in this Budget, we will find that it means yet another shift away from the top, down to the middle and bottom end of the scale.

I was told that last year's Budget was neutral, as it impinged across the social scale. I said that it was not; I was assured repeatedly that it was. Now research has shown clearly that that Budget was not neutral at all. It imposed a 3 per cent. increase in taxes on bottom earners, a 1·5 per cent. increase on top earners, and a 2 per cent. increase on the average person. So the Government's claims were patently untrue. Those on lower and average earnings paid for those on higher earnings.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge the contents of a leading article in *The Sunday Times* of 7 November, which clearly stated in great detail that the percentage of income tax revenue paid by top earners has risen in almost every year in the past 15 years, and that top income earners are paying a far larger proportion of income tax revenue than they did before rates were cut?

Mr. Ainsworth: People can do wonderful things with statistics, if they choose their words carefully. I note that the hon. Gentleman talked about income tax, not tax. We are talking about a period when these top earners lined their pockets to such a tremendous extent that it is only to be expected that they paid a couple of pounds more in income tax.

But the burden of taxation has irrefutably moved down from top earners to the middle and bottom earners, if we take into account the whole basket of taxation. I can take the hon. Gentleman through the figures afterwards if he wants to challenge that. I am astonished that he should

attempt to deny it. Surely he knows deep down that what I say is true—indeed, his reaction to what I am saying seems to show that.

The other problem is whether, in view of the fundamental economic problems that face our country, the Chancellor has done anything to put the economy right. Despite £110 billion of North sea oil revenues during the Government's period in office, in this last recession, 900,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost. The manufacturing sector now provides only one fifth of our income—it was one third when the Government came to power. We have the lowest growth rate of GDP and output of any Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country apart from Canada.

This problem needs solving. The Government have implemented some of the measures asked for by the CBI and by business. There are some small forms of encouragement for business in the Budget, but the Government have refused to give the necessary capital allowances on first year investments asked for by the CBI and the Engineering Employers Federation. If there is to be proper investment in manufacturing industry, it is essential to provide such incentives, yet the Government have failed to do so.

There have been announcements of cuts in housing and in infrastructure investment. The west coast main line work has been announced. The hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) said that Opposition Members always say, "If you want to go to Edinburgh, don't start from here." It is a good job that we do not travel to Edinburgh by the west coast main line, because we would never get there.

I make a prediction: this is the last day of November 1993, and I have watched the Government announce infrastructure proposals again and again, but they actually take place after the 10th or 12th time they have been announced. There is thus half a chance, given the Government's record, of getting some investment for the line in about a decade.

What about the fast rail link? The privatisation proposals will deprive the rail system of investment. The Government are effectively ensuring that no one else will invest until we have sorted out the mess. We are also cutting the roads programme. Our manufacturers have to exist on the edge of Europe, and they have to have access to its markets. To solve our economic problems, we must have a good infrastructure and transport links, but the Budget does little to bring those things about.

Cuts in housing will be inevitable. Every evening when we leave this place, people shout at us and try to sell us copies of *The Big Issue*. Housing is a big issue for those who are affected by the lack of it, but it is not one of the Government's political priorities, because they have effectively announced further housing cuts. That will ensure the continuation of homelessness, which, if anything, will be exacerbated.

There are 7,000 unemployed people in my constituency, and 20,000 people are out of work in Coventry. In the Foleshill ward in my constituency, unemployment is 37.7 per cent. Nothing in the Budget will significantly reduce that complete and absolute waste of human resources or cure the social problems that inevitably flow from it. That is a tragedy.

When we ignore the sleight of hand and look at the figures, we see that, over three years, the Chancellor will slide in a huge tax increase. He proposes real and significant cuts in public expenditure which he has not yet detailed. He spoke about having settled the public sector deficit, but he has not detailed or sorted out those cuts.

The Budget will not tackle our problems. It builds on the sins of the spring Budget. The betrayal of election promises has been furthered by thisBudget, and the failure to settle our underlying economic needs is a betrayal of our national interests.

7.11 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor performed not only the difficult task of delivering the Budget while surrounded by many people advising him on what or what not to say, but coped with the extra burden of the public expenditure round. I congratulate him on doing that with such style and elegance. It must have seemed a fearsome hill to climb but I understand the Government's desire to move the two areas together. I am slightly concerned that we may not have given ourselves enough time before setting the Budget to see some of the implications of our spending round. However, I am sure that our skilled Front-Bench Treasury team will have considered that.

The Budget must be examined in the context of consistent Conservative policy, the aims of which are security, self-reliance, enterprise, personal responsibility, securing sound public finances, low inflation and sustained economic growth. I was glad to hear the Chancellor stress again low inflation and sustained economic growth. Those themes were clear throughout his speech.

The Chancellor has inherited lower inflation, lower interest rates and falling unemployment, but he has also inherited a PSBR of £50 billion. He has had to perform a delicate balancing act because he must nurture economic growth, which is still delicate, while bearing down on the excessive PSBR. As Conservatives know, failure to control the PSBR will ultimately lead to higher taxation of the wealth-creating sector and, of course, that will lead to the problems that existed under the Labour Government in the 1970s.

The backdrop to all the arguments about taxation and expenditure is that the Chancellor has already been passed from the March Budget some £10.3 billion of tax increases, of which £6.7 billion are due to come into play in April. My right hon. and learned Friend deserves great credit for bearing that in mind throughout his speech. He knows that any great increase in taxation would damage the rather delicate economic growth.

The fact that the economy is becoming stronger has much to do with the fact that we have left the ERM. I do not wish to enter into discussion about whether growth occurred before or after we departed from the ERM, but my view is that growth was greatly assisted by departure. It will not surprise hon. Members to know that I am against exchange rate mechanisms. Events from the time of the gold standard through Bretton Woods into the ERM have demonstrated that such mechanisms end in tears. Government policy post our departure from the ERM has been carefully monitored and gauged, and the Government are to be congratulated on sticking to their original aim of retaining domestic monetary figures as the main focus.

This morning's issue of *The Financial Times* said that we did not really need to worry too much about money in circulation because M0 was showing a growth of some 5.3 per cent. M0 is a bad gauge of money in circulation. A

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

better one is M4, and we should be worried that M4 is still not at the level at which it should be at this stage in the cycle. It could be higher, and in that context it is worth bearing in mind the potential for further cuts in interest rates.

I unreservedly welcome the Chancellor's announcement of the reduction in the PSBR of £5·5 billion in 1994-95, rising to £7 billion in 1995-96 and £10·5 billion in 1996-97. Those are significant reductions on which I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend. I welcome the fact that income tax allowances are unchanged. Many people were worried about that. I understand the reason for imposing duty on air passengers, which will be £5 within the European Community and £10 for journeys to other areas. Most hon. Members will welcome that because it brings us into line with many other countries, as those who travel will know.

I am slightly concerned about the 3 per cent. levy on insurance premiums because it sends the wrong message to the insurance industry. We are trying to get that private sector industry more involved in providing schemes for people. Perhaps the Government will think further on that in the coming year.

I am also a little concerned about our approach to the married couple's allowance. I know that it is in line with previous changes to the tax policy, but in view of our concern about single parents we should remember that such an allowance could have been retained at a slightly higher level.

I welcome all the business aspects of the Budget. The change in the VAT threshold to £45,000 is an excellent move. I welcome the 1 per cent. reduction in national insurance for those earning under £200 a week and a commitment to extending the 20p band of income tax. I was pleased to see a reform of the requirement for the audit of small businesses. That will remove a great burden from many small businesses in my area which say that the requirement has been excessive. I unreservedly welcome the increased export credits. Those will be well received by some larger companies which rely greatly on exports.

The most important part of the Budget speech was the part that dealt with VAT on fuel. All hon. Members should welcome that announcement.

My right hon. and learned Friend has put together a generous package, more generous than I expected and probably more generous than many Opposition Members anticipated. It may seem like a small gesture but £2·5 billion over three years starting in 1994 before VAT comes in will mean a lot. Income-related benefits will be up by 3·9 per cent. in 1994 and will mean about £4·3 per week for a couple with two children on income support. I am surprised that I have not heard more of a welcome for that from the Opposition today.

Looking through the great tome of information that is available, I am interested to see the areas that my right hon. and learned Friend has covered for people not on income-related benefit. For example, a single pensioner not on income-related benefits in April 1994 will see his benefit increase from £56·10 to £57·60—£1·50 per week. In April 1995 that will rise by a further 50p a week and in April 1996 by 30p a week.

I was particularly interested to see that a pensioner couple, again not on income-related benefit, will see their benefits increased from £89·80 to £92·10. In April 1995 that will rise by 70p per week and in April 1996 by 45p per week.

Given the circumstances, that is generous, and my right hon. and learned Friend is to be applauded for that. I was somewhat concerned about where he would get the money for all that, but the fact that he has allowed himself to go beyond income support is a significant move.

I come now to the spending side of my right hon. and learned Friend's announcements. I am particularly interested to see that the original targets set for public spending are to be reduced. That will send just the right message to the financial markets—that the Government are determined to reduce the PSBR and will do something about it.

The public at large are quite within their rights to ask why, when those running businesses have had to cut their staff and seek to save money in a number of areas, the public sector has continued throughout the recession to take on an ever-growing number of new employees.

I recently made some quick calculations to discover the difference in the number of public sector employees in 1979 compared with 1993. After removing all the companies that have been privatised and the agencies that have left the public sector, there was a significant increase in the public sector of more than 500,000 employees, and that at a time when the private sector has had to reduce its number of employees. Therefore, more needs to be done in this area. It is significant that market testing has been extended, but can it not be applied and extended even further?

I note today that under the spending pledges there are real increases for the Department for Education, the Department of Health and the Home Office. But that should not stop them examining carefully again and again whether they need quite so many people to administer their funds. It is important for them to ensure that the public understand that they too will be examining their budgets in the way that any private company would.

I have one small concern with regard to the defence budget. We did not hear much about that today, but the defence budget has been significantly reduced, due largely to changing international circumstances, and it continues to be reduced. I am anxious that the Government should not treat the defence budget as a milch cow, just because it appears to be the easiest to reduce. We must take into account our international commitments and the way in which we structure our forces. Therefore, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to reassess carefully the pressure under which they put the defence budget and to ensure that the cuts do not affect our ability to carry out our duties.

I was interested to hear what the Opposition had to say on the tax changes in the Budget, particularly with regard to loopholes. My right hon. and learned Friend spoke about the need to continue to close loopholes and there is nothing new about that. Every responsible Government of any persuasion talks about closing loopholes. There is no such thing as a taxation system that is free from loopholes and there never will be because as soon as one set of loopholes is closed another is found. The biggest question is whether the cost of the exercise outweighs the saving.

The Opposition talk of taxing businesses by increasing corporation tax by some £20 billion. That is not a loophole; it is an increased tax. They talk of a tax on foreign companies. That is not a loophole, but those companies will be driven out of the country by such a tax. Then they

talk about a wonderful windfall tax on utilities, telling us that that was some sort of loophole, but forgetting that some £30 billion is being invested by the water companies to clean up the system. The Opposition intend to close that down as a loophole. What kind of a loophole is that? That is not responsible opposition. That is essentially trying to find money that the Government have not touched, but there is none. Those are not loopholes.

Watching the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) during the past few weeks I have been reminded of that wonderful character Zaphod Beeblebrox in "The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy", the strange two-headed figure who wanders around carrying on a perpetual argument with himself, each head putting forward another angle of the argument. On BBC Radio 4 on 17 January, on borrowing, one of the heads of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said:

"I am not talking about increasing current borrowing."

Meanwhile, when asked whether he would seek an increase in the PSBR, the hon. Gentleman's other head said:

"I would be prepared to contemplate that."

On 18 August, on spending, one head said:

"Mr. Major and Mr. Clarke are spending much of their energy saying that Labour has massive spending debts—there are none."

However, the other head then said:

"The public sector must now become the engine of growth."

Both heads say something different, facing different directions. One head was also busy talking about a pledge to full employment—a wonderful open-ended commitment.

The two heads went on to argue with each other over taxation. One head said:

"If you cut taxation—and I hope that we will be able to do so".

But with his other head, when asked whether he believed in a 50 per cent. tax rate, the hon. Gentleman replied:

"if the Chancellor, to raise money to do things, raised the top level from 40 to 50 per cent. we would not oppose it."

It really is a case of both heads talking in different directions. This socialist Beeblebrox, at one and the same time, on the right and the left of the Labour party, seems to design his speeches to suit his audience.

The Government are now a natural partner for the reforming Government of the 1980s. The great reforms were then to the supply side, now we are looking carefully at the welfare state and a variety of other issues. It is not surprising that unemployment has started to turn down so early in the cycle. That has much to do with the reforms of the 1980s.

However, I was particularly pleased to see that the Government have turned their attention to reforming the concept of the welfare state, something which is long overdue. My right hon. and learned Friend, in line with other of my right hon. Friends, clearly recognises that failure to do that will hamper our desire to reduce the burden on the wealth-creating sector.

Now is the time to look at the Government's role and the division of the two areas—on one side, raising revenue and expenditure and on the other, the delivery of service. It is time to transfer as many services as possible to the private sector which can provide many of them, such as insurance, far better.

I am glad that some of today's changes bear a great similarity to suggestions made recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. Some of the announcements fall well within the areas about which he spoke two or three days ago. The social security budget has increased by some 75 per cent. in real terms since 1979 and now accounts for one third of spending. When my right hon. and learned Friend talked about a real increase of 3 per cent., there were guffaws as some hon. Members said that it was something to do with unemployment. It has nothing to do with unemployment. That 3 per cent. takes into account unemployment and is a real year-on-year increase.

The new medical test to attack the abuse of benefit from 1995 should reduce some of the costs. I also note that many doctors have asked for such a measure because they feel under great stress, with their individual knowledge of the patient, having to decide whether or not somebody is eligible. That reform will save money and be well received by the medical profession.

The new job seeker's allowance, which will be integrated with and replace unemployment benefit and income support in 1996, is much in line with the single, means-tested proposal put forward by myself and others in August in a pamphlet, "Who Benefits?". It would be much more simple to administer and a more simple system for those who need the money and need to understand how much money they would receive. I am glad to see that we have begun our journey along that road and welcome it unreservedly.

The change in statutory sick pay is helpful because it is high time that large employers took more of the burden. If they do, there is every chance that they will take a greater interest and concern in the health of their employees and their infrastructure and general employment conditions so as not to end up with long-term sickness among their employees. It is an excellent move to force the larger employers, especially, into that area.

The equalisation of the state pension age at 65—again a change that we proposed in August—is welcome, but the Government should look again at increasing it, in due course, to 67 because the average age is rising.

I welcome the major structural changes that were announced in social security. They will open the door to much of the private sector. In providing services, we should certainly now encourage pension companies to be involved in the provision of pensions and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider it in the following year as an area that would help us to save money and increase the benefit to those who need to receive the money at that point.

I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend's speech was welcomed unreservedly on this side of the House. He has announced major changes in social security and taxation and his VAT package is generous, perhaps more than many would have expected, and he should be congratulated for finding room within the strictures of the PSBR. It is a good Budget, outlining a good spending programme and I look forward to the reduction in the PSBR and to Britain continuing with low inflation and growth over the next few years.

7.33 pm

Mr. Malcolm Chisolm (Edinburgh, Leith): In some ways, it is difficult to speak some two hours after the Chancellor has sat down, but in others ways it is easy because both his diagnosis and prescription for the economy are utterly predictable and utterly wrong. In the diagnosis section at the beginning of his speech, the

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Chancellor could have mentioned at least five facts, if he had any degree of honesty or humility—perhaps strange concepts in connection with a Conservative Chancellor.

First, he could have pointed out that we have recently come out of the worst recession of any major, industrial country in the past 25 years, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Secondly, he could have said that, given that, it would have been utterly amazing if there had not been some slight improvement over the past few months. What has been surprising is that the recovery has been so slight, given the devaluation and consequent cuts in interest rates that the Government did everything they could to avoid.

As the Chancellor said, we have growth this year of 1·75 per cent.—a level that Professor Wynne Godley called a growth recession. Thirdly, he should have pointed out our historically low levels of investment—14·4 per cent. of gross domestic product is 25 per cent. below the levels of our major European competitors and the lowest level of investment in Britain since the 1950s. Fourthly, the Chancellor should have pointed out that we also have historically low levels of public expenditure. Even in the depths of public expenditure cuts in the early 1980s, the Government pitched public expenditure at 47·5 per cent. of GDP. Now it is 45·5 per cent. of GDP. If we consider elements of that spending, we find far worse figures. Public capital spending is now only 1·5 per cent. of GDP, whereas it was 9 per cent. under the Labour Government. Even the percentage spent on the welfare state—which the Tories keep telling us is too high—is lower than in any other European country apart from Portugal.

The fifth and most crucial point that the Chancellor could have and should have cited in his opening statement is that the main reason for the PSBR problem is not the amount that we spend on the welfare state or public expenditure or capital expenditure, but because of the recession and because of the resulting unemployment that costs us so much money. That is the problem that he should have been addressing in his Budget, yet he failed.

We should have had a Budget for jobs and for investment. Perhaps the Chancellor was too carried away by his own rhetoric to give us such a Budget. His rhetoric boasted of the way in which unemployment is coming down in Britain, while it is rising everywhere else, so he says, and boasting of the jobs created in the 1980s. He should remember that since the beginning of the decade, we have lost more than 2 million jobs, while the claimant count in the same period has risen by 1·4 million. That shows that the claimant unemployment figures are not the best test of how our economy is doing for jobs. There are lots of hidden unemployed—people who do not go straight on to the claimant count. While unemployment is improving marginally in terms of claimant figures, the reality on the ground is that people are not getting new jobs and today's Budget should have been targeted in that area. I would have liked the Chancellor to say that he and the Government had had a change of heart and that from now on they were to make the creation of jobs the first objective of economic policy. Of course, there is no hope of that from the Government.

The section of the Chancellor's speech about jobs was almost unbelievable to Opposition Members. First, he mentioned a new job seeker's benefit as if that was somehow to do with creating jobs. We know that it is rather about cutting unemployment benefit. People have paid for that benefit through national insurance contributions and to receive it for six months instead of 12 means that some claimants will move on to claim income support and some, if they have a partner in work, on no matter how low a wage, will go from unemployed benefit to no income at all. That was his first job creation measure.

There was one announcement in the Budget that I thought was good news, although I want to make some detailed comments—a child care allowance for families on family credit. That is a tribute to the strength of the campaigns that were waged over the summer. I wrote to the Prime Minister about that matter in June and received the most dismissive reply imaginable, saying that such an allowance was a crazy, unnecessary idea and in no way was to be implemented. I am pleased that there has been a change of heart.

However, there are certain problems with the allowance as announced. First, those who work fewer than 16 hours a week and therefore claim income support should also have child care support. Secondly, I feel that those whose income takes them just above family credit levels should receive some kind of child care support. Connected with all of that is the whole question of the supply of child care. Whatever help is given, if only private child care costing £70 a week is involved, it will still be too expensive for low-income parents to use. The Chancellor should have announced a national child care strategy to tackle the problem of supply as well as helping people with the cost. Opposition Members believe that that is crucial to the welfare of millions of women who want to work, and also to the good of the economy as a whole. Although I welcome that measure on child care, I think that it should be the beginning of something far more.

Child care does not, in itself, create jobs for people eligible for family credit, who may now be more willing to look for jobs because they are receiving help with child care. Its expansion must be accompanied by an economic policy that creates jobs—which is precisely what we hoped for, but were not given, in today's Budget statement. Certain obvious steps could have been taken to create jobs.

First, a boost for house building would have been an obvious way of increasing jobs and meeting a clear need. Last week, in a Scottish survey, Shelter stated that 45,000 Scottish households had reported themselves homeless to their local authorities last year. That, of course, does not reveal the total extent of homelessness last year. There is a crying need for a house-building programme; instead, the Budget statement announced a cut of £300 million for the English Housing Corporation. I have not yet seen the Scottish figures, and I do not know whether they are available, but I suspect that a similar cut is planned. The policy is going in exactly the wrong direction: we need to put money into house building, both to solve a social problem and to get the construction industry moving again, returning building workers to employment.

The Budget made some gestures to infrastructure, but they consisted of far too little, far too late: Infrastructure investment by the public sector is a very effective way of returning demand to the economy and returning people to work; it is also a very effective way of improving the efficiency of the economy. The provisions in the Budget are derisory and inadequate.

Most fundamental of all is the need for help for manufacturing industry. One of the most significant

omissions from the Chancellor's statement was his failure to refer to the balance of payments deficit, which now stands at a level which is unprecedented in the current stage of an economic cycle—£17·5 billion. We need manufacturing for jobs; we also need it to deal with that problem. If that problem is not dealt with, any growth that we achieve as a result of the Budget—or, rather, not because of but in spite of the Budget—will soon run into the constraints of the balance of payments deficit. Unfortunately, it seems that the Government will never address the problems of manufacturing investment. Simple measures involving capital allowances could be introduced, but I also believe that the Government should take a more direct role to get the sector moving.

Instead of using the opportunity presented by the Budget to create jobs, the Conservatives have used that opportunity to carry out an agenda that they want to carry out in any event, irrespective of the state of public finances. I refer to the particularly right-wing agenda that involves reducing public expenditure, attacking the welfare state and putting up taxes on low-income families. I have not had time to examine all the details of the public expenditure proposals, but I remember the Chancellor saying that the total would fall by £15 billion over the next three years, and that within the next four or five years it would fall from its present 45·5 per cent. proportion of gross domestic product—which, as I have said, is historically low—to 42·5 per cent. That is bad news for jobs, because public investment is necessary to create them; it is bad news for the welfare state; and it is bad news for our public services.

Let us consider certain specific groups. First, the Chancellor highlighted pensioners, who he said were given a good deal by the Budget. Let us remember what kind of increase is in store for them. Before the Budget, it was to be barely £1 a week for a single pensioner next year: that appalling amount was announced a few weeks ago. The reason was the official rate of inflation at the time—which, of course, bore no relation to the actual cost of items that pensioners must pay for.

Today, we heard that those pensioners would receive a measure of compensation for the imposition of VAT on fuel—not full compensation; it is probably about half what they will have to pay. I have not had time to examine the details. We should have heard an announcement that no VAT would be imposed on fuel: instead, we were told of an inadequate compensation package. Beyond the pensioners' immediate problem lies the distant objective of pension equalisation at the age of 65. Although that does not concern today's pensioners, it will concern younger people. The Government missed the opportunity to equalise pension ages at 60, which should and could be the policy of any Government who believe that they can deliver economic growth. The present Government, of course, have no confidence in their ability to do that, which is why they must resort to public expenditure cuts and unfair tax increases.

The second group I want to mention are those currently receiving invalidity benefit. One of the most shameful aspects of the Budget is the fact that they are being targeted to pay for the mistakes and the economic incompetence of the present Government. We are told that thousands who should not receive invalidity benefit are receiving it. I can tell the House that constituents of mine have recently been taken off it. I am not a doctor, but I can see that those people are not well, and are not fit for work. The Budget proposal is a disgraceful attack on them. Once again, the Government seemed to think that the Government can get away with their actions, as long as they change the name of the benefit involved. They imagine that, if they call it "incapacity benefit", no one will notice. Opposition Members notice, however, and thousands of people in my constituency and throughout the country will notice as well.

The largest group, however, is composed of the millions of ordinary taxpayers who will suffer as a result of the Budget. The Government would like us to forget that many taxes—amounting to £8·50 a week—are already in the pipeline. In that sense, the Chancellor is indebted to his predecessor. Not satisfied with that, however, the present Chancellor has announced the freezing of tax allowances, and various other tax changes that will take the weekly tax increase for an ordinary family to beyond £10 a week after next April—and that from a party that claims to be a party of low taxation, and boasted about it at the last general election. The British people will never trust the Tory party again on taxation, and today's Budget will remind them of that fundamental fact.

We should also remember all the other people who will suffer as a result of the imposition of VAT on fuel, apart from pensioners. Those people did not get much mention in the Chancellor's statement. Some slight help will be provided for those on income support, but it will be in no way adequate to deal with the costs that they will face. Let us remember the state of the houses in which some of the people who will have to pay VAT on fuel will have to live. I remember someone on low pay who came to my surgery recently. She said that, because of the dampness of her house, she had to spend £25 a week on heating. Yet we are told by the Government that she will have to pay more. Because she is on low pay, she will not get one penny to help her with her increased heating bills.

For a moment, I shall give some respite to the Conservative party, although, obviously, my main fire is directed at it. I shall refer to another party with which we must contend in Scotland—the Scottish National party. I must point out this disgraceful leaflet that I was handed in Leith last Saturday. In opposing VAT on fuel, the nationalists contrasted Scotland's chill with southern comfort. It is a highly offensive leaflet, and it gives some idea of the nationalist poison of the SNP that we in Scotland have to put up with.

The concern of the SNP for the poor and the low paid does not seem to extend beyond the Scottish border. It forgets the millions of people who live in poverty in England in constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) who are by no means living in southern comfort.

In expressing our opposition to VAT on fuel, let us make it clear that the Opposition do not want VAT on fuel for anybody in the United Kingdom and that we still demand that it is scrapped. We shall continue to campaign for the scrapping of VAT on fuel in the expectation that we shall be successful.

If the worst comes to the worst and VAT is imposed next April, some Opposition Members will continue to campaign to ensure that the EC is challenged and that VAT is taken off fuel when a Labour Government return.

The main thrust of the Budget should have been to create jobs. If jobs are created, the problems of the deficit will go away. But I have to agree that, to create jobs in the short term, we must have public investment, and therefore

[Mr. Malcolm Chisolm]

public expenditure. As the Conservative party always wants to know how the Opposition will raise the money, I shall conclude by saying something about that.

I emphasise that the key to dealing with the budget deficit is to deal with the problem of unemployment. The taxation measures to which I shall refer are not the heart of our budget argument. Jobs will create more income tax and will mean less expenditure on unemployment benefit. That will solve the deficit problem, but in the short term we need expenditure on public investment.

I fully support, as would all Opposition Members, the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on tax loopholes. I shall refer in particular to the way corporation tax is being evaded, because the previous Chancellor referred to the problem of corporation tax evasion the day before he got the sack. It is not just an idea from the Opposition. There is a problem of corporation tax evasion.

I suggest also that there is a problem with the level of corporation tax, because we are way below the EC average. If corporation tax were increased to 40 per cent., that would bring in £4.5 billion. That has to be combined with a generous system of capital allowances, which the Conservative party will not accept.At the moment, the system of corporation tax encourages high dividend payments and discourages investment. We could put up corporation tax if we had generous capital allowances. That would be in line with the policy of creating jobs through investment.

A second way in which money could be raised, and which would be infinitely preferable to the offensive attacks on the poor through VAT on fuel and invalidity benefit cuts, would be to raise the top rate of taxation. If the top rate for those earning more than £50,000—I shall put it no lower than that—were increased to 60 per cent., that would bring in £4 billion a year, which is more than would be brought in from VAT on fuel.

Who with any conscience can possibly say that it is better to impose VAT on home heating than to impose a top-rate tax increase for those earning more than £50,000? There are not only arguments for that in terms of social justice. There are also strong economic arguments for that, because one of the problems that we have in this country is the extremes in income between poor and rich, which makes the balance of payments problem worse because rich people tend to buy more imported items. Secondly, it tends to make the boom-bust cycle far more extreme than in other countries. There are strong economic arguments as well as strong moral arguments for increasing the top rate of taxation.

I am not totally against VAT increases. The problem that the Government have is that they impose it on the wrong thing. I suggest that, before the next Budget, they look at other ways in which they can raise VAT. I suggest, for example, VAT on private school fees—I suggest a rate of 30 per cent. I suggest a VAT rate of 30 per cent. on people who take out private health insurance. Why do we not have VAT on luxury items, which can be paid by people who can afford them? Those thoughts are totally alien to the Government, who want to help people at that end of the income scale and penalise and punish those at the other end.

There are two other ways in which money can be raised. First, I am told that a long-term objective for defence cuts was accepted by no fewer than 72 per cent. in a recent survey of top Scottish directors of industry. It was not mentioned much in the Budget today, but there is a wide spectrum of opinion across right and left which recognises that military expenditure must be cut.

That is an ongoing source of money that can be used to boost manufacturing investment in this country. The Labour party has policies for a defence diversification agency and cuts in military spending could finance the work of that agency in boosting investment and jobs, particularly in manufacturing, because the key thing about defence workers is that they are highly skilled and must be kept in manufacturing employment.

Even to reduce our level of defence expenditure to the French level would release £8 billion. I do not suggest that it is done in one go. If it was reduced to German levels it would release £13 billion. That is a matter that, in the remaining years of the decade, must be addressed and accepted, because it is a very large source of revenue for investment in our economy.

Finally, I shall mention borrowing. I believe that if the measures that I have suggested were introduced, we would not need to increase borrowing. However, if in the short term we had to increase borrowing for investment, that would not worry me, because we know that through public investment we can decrease borrowing in the long term.

The problem with the Conservative party is that it has no strategy to deal with the underlying cause of the public sector borrowing problem, which is the low levels of investment and the high levels of unemployment. The Conservatives have no strategy for that. They are using the excuse of the deficit to whittle away at the welfare state and impose unfair taxes.

At the end of the Chancellor's speech, I noticed that Tory Members behind him were very impressed. That gave the game away. What we had from the Chancellor today was not a Budget for jobs, quite clearly. It was not a Budget for the poor, quite obviously, and we do not expect that from the Conservative party. What we had from the Chancellor today was a Budget for winning the next election. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I hope that the House will not make so much noise that I cannot hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Chisholm: What we had from the Chancellor of the Exchequer—I will say it again because it is a long time since I got the first bit in—was a Budget to win the next election. But the election that the Chancellor had in mind was his own election to become leader of the Conservative party. The Budget today was designed to impress and please the right wing of the Conservative party. The Order Papers being waved at the end of the Budget speech made that clear.

The Chancellor may win the election to be leader of the Conservative party, but it is crystal clear that he and his party have no hope of winning the real election. The Conservative party will never be trusted again, not only because of its broken promises on taxation but because after 14 years the people of this country know that the Conservative party is the party of economic incompetence.

Any people who want to deny that would need to be referred to a psychiatrist, although they would have great difficulty in finding one on the NHS.

8.1 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): In these days when we are used to listening to a pasteurised, shrink-wrapped Labour party, it was good to hear the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) showing that the real Labour party still exists, although it is usually kept more carefully hidden.

It was particularly interesting to hear the hon. Gentleman call for a Budget for jobs. We have a background of low inflation, low interest rates and—in case he has not noticed—steadily falling unemployment. The latest monthly fall in unemployment is the largest for four and a half years; almost half a million people left unemployment in October, which is the highest monthly total ever, and long-term unemployment fell by 10,000 between July and October this year. Against that background, I warmly welcome the Budget introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. He has recognised the main needs of the British economy.

First, my right hon. and learned Friend has recognised that it is essential to keep inflation down. Secondly, he has recognised the need to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement. If he had failed to grasp that nettle today, we would have won no plaudits from Conservative Members. The last thing we want is to go back to the days of the 1970s, when the fastest growing area of public expenditure was not health, education or social services but servicing the national debt.

The third priority which my right hon. and learned Friend has rightly stressed is the need to reduce the percentage of the gross domestic product which is spent in the public sector. I am pleased that he has set a target for that. I hope that, when we have got public spending down to 42 per cent., we shall press on and get it down well below 40 per cent.

Fourthly, my right hon. and learned Friend has recognised the need to encourage the private sector. It is from the wealth created by the private sector that all the things that we value in our society are financed—such as road building, housing, help for small businesses in general and small companies in particular. I was particularly pleased to hear reference to the possibility of introducing a statutory interest charge on overdue debts. I have been pressing for that for the past two years. It would be a valuable measure and would help small businesses, which are all too often made to wait for months for payment from large customers which enjoy an effective monopoly.

I was also pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend took the opportunity to maintain low direct taxes and to reduce tax relief on mortgages. That would certainly not have been a popular measure if it had been introduced before we left the exchange rate mechanism, when interest rates were extremely high. However, now that interest rates have fallen, there is a good opportunity to reduce the discrimination in favour of house purchasing as a way of spending one's money.

I was worried when my right hon. and learned Friend said that the recovery began before white Wednesday—the day on which Britain was forced to leave the ERM. I hope that that does not mean that my right hon. and learned Friend is contemplating a return to the ERM. It is clear that the recovery got into gear after we left the ERM, when we saw a dramatic fall in interest rates and the simultaneous establishment of a system in which our exports were more competitive.

I now turn to VAT on domestic fuel. I represent the Vale of Glamorgan, a highly marginal constituency, which the Labour party chose to target. It played on the fears of the poor and the old in my constituency by pretending that my right hon. Friend the previous Chancellor did not mean what he said when he said that help would be given to those most in need. The generosity of the package that has been revealed today fully vindicates what has been Conservative policy for the past six months.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does the hon. Gentleman believe—I am one of his constituents—that he would have won the seat if he had told the families in the Vale of Glamorgan that, in the first two Budgets after the Conservative Government were returned, they would increase taxes by £16 a week for the average family?

Mr. Sweeney: I am pleased to have the hon. Gentleman as a constituent. I trust that he voted for me. I am sure that, at the time of the general election, he was no more aware than I of what would be in this Budget or the last Budget. The Government stated in the run-up to the election that there were no plans then to raise rates of VAT. I am sure that that was correct at the time. Certainly, VAT was not raised at that time.

I have met many constituents who have responded to the Labour campaign of vilification in my constituency against the Conservative party in general and me in particular. They were naturally worried to read the press releases issued by the Labour party, which said that the wicked Conservative Government would not help them to meet their fuel bills.

Like other Conservative Members, I have been pleasantly surprised by the generosity of the package which has been introduced. It provides help for all pensioners. That shows that the Government have gone further than they needed to. Obviously, there are pensioners who do not need help to pay their VAT on fuel. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be better without the running commentary, particularly if certain hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Sweeney: It is difficult to target help to meet all those cases of need. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was aware of the needs of those people whose incomes are just above the level for income support, and wanted to make sure that he caught them in his safety net. It is because of that difficulty that I welcome the decision to help all pensioners, in addition to giving much-needed help to those people on income support and other income-related benefits.

I am glad that the lies put out by Labour supporters in my constituency have been laid to rest. I look forward to meeting constituents in my forthcoming surgeries and reporting to them on the excellent package that has been introduced today.

8.10 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Today the Chancellor has snubbed Wales. A typical family in Wales will be £10 a week worse off—paying higher income tax, higher value

[Mr. Peter Hain]

added tax, higher national insurance and higher mortgages as tax relief is cut—in addition to paying higher charges for home and car insurance, and even for holidays.

The VAT compensation measures announced by the Chancellor are a sham. The Budget is a vindictive assault on the disabled, the poor, the unemployed and pensioners, particularly women pensioners, who will have to wait an extra five years to receive their retirement pension in future.

The Budget will do nothing to reverse the long-term industrial and structural decline of the Welsh economy. We have had 14 years of Thatcherite and Majorite miracles, during which living standards have declined, and will decline for the coming generation. That decline will reverse the trend of hundreds of years in which, with a few peaks and troughs, people have been progressively better off. Under the Government, Wales has become a poor relation. It has the lowest GDP per head, the lowest earnings and the highest economically inactive totals.

The south Wales valleys have suffered even more. As a valley community, Neath is virtually at the bottom of the pile of worldly goods and associated wealth, as a survey for HTV's "Wales this Week" recently showed. Professors Wilkinson and Morris of the Cardiff business school have shown that, whether we measure car ownership or consumer white goods, central heating or cavity insulation, or sickness or social class:

"The Valleys are getting poorer. There is no sign that the valleys initiative has had any real effect."

That conclusion was endorsed by official Welsh Office figures released last week, much to the embarrassment of the Secretary of State for Wales.

What has the Chancellor done for a community such as Neath that is already struggling and where regular well-paid and skilled jobs, especially for men, have disappeared, to be replaced by part-time skivvy work for poverty wages? He has kicked Neath in the teeth with his steel-capped Hush Puppies.

The Chancellor is not reversing the long-term decline in training. In Wales, the Budget for training has been reduced by 16 per cent., £27·8 million. The Secretary of State for Unemployment—I am sorry, for Employment; it was a Freudian slip—in a manner redolent of his office when he was Secretary of State for Wales, has indulged in a typical public relations exercise this afternoon. He has produced a Mickey Mouse scheme, with no new money to address the massive skills gap in Wales and the United Kingdom.

The Government should invest money in quality training, and in jobs for the 2,400 in Neath who are officially out of work. To that total must be added another 11,000 men and women, who are not on the official unemployment register but appear in the Department of Employment's economically inactive category, which I regard as the unofficial measure of unemployment.

As to VAT on fuel, our "no-nonsense" Chancellor, as he has called himself, has bottled out. As a result, it will cost the poor, the old and the disabled among my constituents an extra £5 a week in the cold winter months. The 50p a week that is being offered to those people is an insult. It will go nowhere near addressing their plight and the problems of trying to make ends meet after such an extra imposition.

The nearly poor that the Government have identified will get absolutely nothing out of the Budget, unless they happen to be pensioners. What will happen to the others, and those who are just above the benefit level, perhaps with a small miner's or widow's pension that takes them just above the welfare net? The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr Sweeney) seems totally ignorant of the plight of those people, who will face this VAT increase with great fear.

Mr. Sweeney: Far from being totally ignorant, I made it clear in my speech, had the hon. Gentleman been listening, that all pensioners will receive help with their fuel bills, and those who are just above the threshold for income support will be among those who will be helped.

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman has clearly not understood his own speech. He has not understood my point. I spoke specifically about the nearly poor who are not pensioners. There are thousands of them in my constituency—and probably in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and millions across the country—who will not get any compensation at all when they too have to bear the VAT increases on fuel and heating, which could cost an extra £5 a week in the bitterly cold winter months.

In place of the Chancellor's Budget, I would commend to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Wales my own Labour Budget for Neath, which would give the people of Neath and Wales prosperity and hope instead of the miserly offerings of this afternoon. It rests on fair taxation and recognises that public investment is the way to sustained growth and lasting employment. Most importantly, it is a Budget that would restore dignity to those in our community who were asked not only to make sacrifices 50 years or so ago in their youth but, quite unfairly, are being made to pay again for the Government's mistakes and the systematic way that the Government piles tax increases and cuts in public services on those least able to protect themselves.

What we heard from the Chancellor this afternoon could be a matter of life or death for many of the 16,000 pensioners in Neath. Many of them are already living below the breadline; some 18 per cent. of them live in households without central heating; more than 7,000 of them suffer from long-term illnesses; and many cannot currently pay their bills, let alone when VAT is put on their coal, gas and electricity. The valley villages of Seven Sisters, Banwen, Crynant, Cwmllynfell and Rhifawr, for example, have no access to the cheapest fuel—gas. Those villages have a huge concentration of older people, all of whom are worried that the Chancellor will inflict further hardship on their lives. These fears will be proved right.

Mr Lock and 23 other residents of Canolfan and Seven Sisters took the trouble to write to me, voicing their concerns about the consequences of VAT on fuel. Their fears have not been allayed this afternoon. Others, like Mr and Mrs Lewis, are living out their 80s in great hardship, with no mains gas and an enormous works project needed to bring their home up to present-day fitness standards. They live in a draughty place and, because they can ill afford expensive energy conservation measures, they resort to the most basic of energy conservation measures, doing without any heating or fuel. The Budget will do nothing to assist them.

The measures announced this afternoon are a drop in the ocean and will go nowhere near addressing the needs of pensioners such as Mr and Mrs Lewis, who are in desperate straits.

Mr. Sweeney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hain: No. I have given way already.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lewis is in great physical shape—30-odd years as a miner in Blaenant colliery made sure of that in Mr. Lewis's case. If they turn off their heat in windy and damp Seven Sisters, it will make them ill. This will have dramatic consequences on the already hard-pressed local health services.

Last year in Wales there were 1,672 "excess winter deaths"—the official Government term for the worrying national trend of higher than average mortality rates in winter. Last year, there were twice as many deaths in the United Kingdom, 34,711, as in other cold countries such as Canada or those of Scandinavia.

Those deaths are caused not just by the weather, but by a failure to invest in proper home insulation and proper protection for some of the most vulnerable in our society. A substantial body of opinion, which includes the Oxford academic Brenda Boardman, is convinced that the causes of those deaths is linked to fuel poverty.

The Budget will do nothing to address that problem; in fact it makes it a great deal worse. It does nothing to help the 5,500 people in Neath who are on invalidity benefit; instead it will make their plight worse. The Budget will do nothing to help the 11,000 or more who are on income support. We have heard much in recent weeks from the Thatcherite right about benefit scroungers.

While the official snoopers chase people on benefit who do what is known in the valleys as "a hobble"—a bit of gardening or labouring in a desperate effort to make ends meet—and recover £558 million, tax loopholes will lose the Inland Revenue ten times as much, a massive £10 billion in the next two years. The Chancellor has only nibbled at the edges of the massive problem posed by those loopholes.

The Budget will do nothing to help those on poverty wages in my constituency. Figures just released in the 1993 new earnings survey reveal that Wales has the lowest pay rates of any region in Great Britain at £281.20 a week for full-time work. That represents a fall from 98 per cent. of the United Kingdom average in 1979 to just 89·2 per cent. in 1992. In Neath many adults work for £1.80 an hour or less. How can they possibly survive on such wages? The Chancellor seems to be totally indifferent to their plight.

The Chancellor should have introduced three immediate steps to ease the unfair burden that has been placed on my constituents. First, he could have introduced an alternative VAT strategy. My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) has already referred to some of the detail of that strategy.

Instead of dumping the load imposed by VAT on the likes of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, it would be possible to extend VAT to private education and private health schemes. That would raise as much as £600 million and £300 million respectively. There is also some scope for putting VAT on financial and insurance services which, if properly targeted on share issues and other company-related transactions, and not on homes and possessions, could raise between £1 billion and £3.3 billion.

Secondly, there is an emerging consensus in Britain that the well-off are undertaxed. They represent some of the beneficiaries of the £10 billion derived from the tax loopholes that were identified by the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Following the personal tax cuts of the 1987 and 1988 Budgets, the very rich have benefited to the tune of £8 billion a year—nearly three times the amount that VAT on fuel and heating will bring to the Treasury in a full year. If one levelled out to the European average in the top rate band of 55 per cent., that would raise as much as £6 billion for the Exchequer. That is the sort of target at which the Government should aim.

Thirdly, the Budget should have introduced phased relief of capital receipts for council housing. Neath and Lliw valley boroughs have £2.89 million of accumulated housing capital receipts which the Government have banned them from spending. If those receipts were released tomorrow, more than 50 local houses could be built. That would create not only badly needed new homes but even more badly needed jobs in my constituency.

The official unemployment figures do not take into account the economically inactive population, which is a special concern to valley constituencies such as Neath. According to the official figures, unemployment in my constituency stands at just over 10 per cent. If one adds to that the economically inactive, people of working age, below pensionable age, who for one reason or another have been forced off the unemployment register—after the Chancellor's Budget announcement they will be forced off the register six months earlier—or those forced into early retirement following a pit closure, the unemployment figure jumps by a further 30 per cent.

Neath is the 12th worst district of 459 districts in the United Kingdom in terms of its economically inactive total. When one looks at the plight of the south Wales valleys, it is not surprising to discover that, of those 459 districts, eight of the top 10 are valley constituencies. One in three adult men are now unemployed in Neath, if one takes into account the official unemployment figure and the official figure for the number of economically inactive. That makes a total of 6,000 adult men. The Chancellor has betrayed all of them.

The economically inactive total will rise as a result of the Budget because the unemployed will be pushed off the unemployment register after six months, while those in work who are sick or long-term disabled will find it increasingly difficult to maintain their jobs as their employers seek to push them out of their work forces in order to be released from the extra obligations that the Chancellor has imposed on employers.

The Budget does nothing for industry. Many of those who are unemployed in my constituency were previously in the local manufacturing sector—the hub of the local economy. That sector has been savaged by the Conservative Government. For example, between 1989 and 1991, manufacturing employment in Neath collapsed by a half. There is no sign that the Government are doing anything to provide an upturn for the people of Neath.

The Budget is designed to ingratiate the Chancellor with his own Back Benchers. It is not a Budget for an area such as Neath, which has enormous economic potential, enterprising business men and women and a traditionally skilled work force. Neath is crying out for a Budget that

[Mr. Hain]

will invest in jobs, skills and infrastructure. We have not had that Budget today, and we will not get it tomorrow unless we have a Labour Government.

8.26 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): We have heard the same old tune from the Opposition. They cry that the Budget does nothing for industry. I am sure that it has set the climate for a further reduction in interest rates, which represents one of the best ways in which the Government can help industry.

I do not believe that the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) is a great contributor to the industrial scene. I am not sure what he did to help industry before he was elected, but, judging from his comments, I cannot see that he has any understanding of industry.

Mr. Hain: Before the hon. Gentleman continues with his ignorant and arrogant remarks, let me invite him to visit local business men and women and industrialists in my constituency. He will then discover that not only am I a close friend of those people, but that they are crying out for a change of Government so that assistance can be given to them.

Mr. Thurnham: I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman has said because I do not hear anything like that from industrialists in my constituency.

The hon. Member for Neath played the same old tune about taxing the rich more. He is obviously ignorant of what happened in the past. Under the Labour Government the top 10 per cent. of taxpayers contributed only 34 per cent. of the total amount of income tax paid. Under this Government, however, the latest figures reveal that the top 10 per cent. of taxpayers contribute 45 per cent. of the total amount of income tax paid. If one raises income tax, as the Labour party did, one collects less money from the richest taxpayers.

Mr. Hain *rose—*

Mr. Thurnham: I shall not give way again to the hon. Gentleman because we have already heard enough of his distorted view of how industry works.

One of the most enjoyable things about being a Conservative Member is being able to hear a Conservative Budget each year. I look forward to hearing many more Conservative Budgets because each one is designed to increase the nation's prosperity, as they have done in the past 14 years. I am sure that this Budget will achieve the same.

The Budget is courageous and I am sure that it will achieve all its objectives. It is so wide-sweeping, however, that time hardly allows me to pass full judgment on all the measures in it. Its main aim is to put the budget deficit behind us, which tackles our greatest concern. It is encouraging to consider how that has been achieved. It has been done by raising a certain amount of extra money through taxation, but mainly by squeezing public spending. It is not clear what the full extent of that will be. I have looked at page 97 and other pages in the Red Book, and clearly there will be a strong squeeze on wasteful spending in the public sector. That is to be welcomed, but it will be interesting to see how that develops.

There will no doubt be squeals from various sources, scares put out and lobbies coming to raise issues. Those issues may not be as bad as will be thought if the scaremongers have their way. There is great deal of waste in Government. We have seen the figures which show that the unit costs in manufacturing are now falling, so let us now see unit costs in delivering public administration falling. We have before us a freeze on the running costs of the civil service and local authorities, and I am sure that we are all convinced that that can be achieved. It will be interesting to see how that works out in practice.

The Budget contains numerous measures to encourage business, all of which are to be welcomed. Jobs can certainly be created in small businesses. Cash flow is the major problem for nearly everybody in business—that is certainly my experience—and has always been a main issue. Payment, of course, is a double-edged sword. Not only does one collect money; one also pays out money. However, the concept of a British standard for prompt payment is encouraging. It may be the best way forward if firms adopt that as a voluntary measure which could be coupled with whatever is proposed in the way of statutory legislation for interest on overdue debts. That has been called for by people such as Mr. Wanless, the chief executive of the National Westminster bank, and it will receive broad support throughout business.

The proposal to reduce employers' national insurance contribution rates, which will cost nearly £1 billion, is a major measure to improve the supply side of the economy. It is clearly designed to help those with lower skills who are on lower rates of pay back into the job market. That measure, combined with the changes which are proposed to the family credit system for lone parents, will help more people get into the job market.

Measures to raise revenue include the reduction of mortgage interest payments to 15 per cent. That has been clearly on the cards. Mortgage interest relief has always been popular, but it has only ended up in the pockets of landowners who can achieve higher prices by selling their land for building. The effect of reducing mortgage interest tax relief will be to reduce the value of land when that land gains planning permission. Perhaps it will reduce the pressure for planning permission.

The Budget measures are aimed at raising revenue of £6 billion, or 0·75 per cent. of GDP, to help to bring down the fiscal deficit, but it is the squeeze on spending which is the most attractive aspect of bringing down that deficit.

The City will pay considerable attention to a tight settlement which is aimed at delivering £10 million. That will build a climate of confidence, as will in particular the projected reduction in the share of GDP which goes on public spending from 45 per cent. to 42·5 per cent. by 1996-97. That was attacked by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm), who said that it was "bad news". Again, that shows exactly what little understanding Labour Members have of how our economy works. The hon. Gentleman said that it was bad news for jobs, but I have to say that it is good news for jobs. The public sector can in no way create jobs which can help real economic growth. That growth must come from the country being more competitive in world markets which are themselves becoming more competitive.

This country can compete effectively in world markets only by reducing the burden of public spending, and not by increasing that burden. I was amazed to hear the old and unreconstructed Labour party holding forth. Underlying

inflation is at its lowest for 25 years, and it is clear that the Budget will maintain the pressure on inflation, although it is bound to fluctuate month by month. I was certainly pleased to hear the Chancellor say that he was confident that inflation will come down over the forecast period of the next three years. That should provide the firmest possible foundation for interest rates to fall further.

Unemployment has been falling for some months to the current figure of 2·86 million and, with unit labour costs in manufacturing coming down, I am confident that that fall in unemployment will continue. If we can combine that with a much lower current account deficit, which for this year has been reduced to £8·5 billion, that will confirm the strength of our economy. Hopefully we can continue to increase our share of world markets, in contrast to the declining share which we had for decades under the policies of the Labour party.

The effect of the measures contained in the Budget is that the economy should grow by 1·75 per cent. this year, and 2·5 per cent. in the year to come. I think that the Chancellor has been conservative with those figures, but he was wise to be so. If I had been giving my right hon. and learned Friend advice as he prepared the Budget, I would have told him to trust his pessimism and doubt his optimism. He has given those figures in a conservative fashion, and I feel confident that there will be better growth in the economy on the strength of the excellent Budget.

I was a little disappointed that the Chancellor did not go further with beer and spirits and introduced a cut in beer tax because of the bootlegging which occurs by people who are going across the channel. I think that that would have been highly popular. The freezing of the duty is, in effect, a cut in real terms. I am sure that that will be welcomed by those people who may be taking advantage of that tonight, as will the fact that the extra tax on wine will not take effect until after Christmas.

It is important that there should be increases in the tax on tobacco in the years to come so that cigarette consumption may be cut by the target of 40 per cent. by the year 2000. There is considerable evidence of the bad effect on health of cigarettes, particularly on young people who may not be aware of the risks.

That is also the case with young expectant mothers. There has been an adverse deterioration in the statistics in Bolton, where an increasing number of children have been born with a low birth-weight. I believe that that is linked with the fact that their mothers have been smoking. A study is being carried out on that problem in Bolton. I was particularly concerned that Bolton was targeted by cigarette companies for their advertising on billboards. If a link is proved between that advertising and the adverse statistics of baby deaths, I trust that we will have legislation which will allow more control of cigarette advertising on billboards.

The tax on air passengers had been forecast to some extent. I note that the tax is £5 on a single flight, or a return flight if it is booked as such, so that the effect will be less than would have been the case had the tax applied only to single flights. The profits which accrue to airports are also due to the free duty on drinks, and I would have thought that there might be a measure of recovery there. It seems wrong that airports should profit from their duty-free status to the extent that they do.

In the case of Manchester, the sooner that that city's airport is privatised, the better rather than allowing it to benefit from the duty-free goods which are bought by people from a large surrounding area. If the airport were to be privatised, a capital receipt would come to the local authorities, and they would not be denied the benefits of the increase in investment which has occurred.

The underlying statistic that is one of the strongest features of the British economy now is our enormous increase in productivity. In effect, we are having a revolution, and the latest productivity growth is the fastest for five years. In the 1980s we had the highest productivity growth of any country apart from Japan, and it now looks as though we should be set on another decade of high growth in productivity.

That is certainly needed, because our output per head is lower than that of many of our competitors, so we need to grow faster in order to catch them up. Having the lowest rate of corporation tax of any of the G7 countries must be one of the most important factors in helping to achieve that higher rate of productivity growth. Again, that shows that the Government are more capable than any Government that could be formed by the Opposition parties of understanding the underlying factors involved in running our economy efficiently.

I especially welcome the lower rate of corporation tax for smaller companies. Companies with profits of £300,000 or less will pay at 20 per cent., and those with profits of between £300,000 and £1·5 million will pay at between 25 per cent. and 30 per cent. That is a way of rewarding—or perhaps we should say of penalising less—companies which are successful and which contribute to the growth of our economy. The measure is welcome.

There has not yet been time to make full judgments about the other proposals to help investment in smaller companies, but the new venture capital trust sounds an interesting idea. Investors will have the liquidity to be able to move their investment in whatever way suits them best, while the unquoted companies will be able to benefit from the funds raised in that way. I look forward to learning more about the proposal, and to seeing the consultation paper when it is issued.

I am somewhat unsure whether any of the proposals will help the private rented sector. I recently produced a pamphlet "Choose Your Landlord", calling for more help to the private rented sector, which is the lowest of any OECD country. It stands at half the average level of those in other OECD countries—at only a quarter of the level of that in west Germany, for instance, and at only about half the level of that in east Germany, after 50 years of communism. That shows how considerable are the improvements that we need to make to our private rented sector, but the notes that I have read so far do not make clear the extent to which the Budget proposals to help small businesses will assist.

As I understand it, the capital gains reinvestment relief will apply to the sale of any asset, and that would benefit someone selling a privately rented property because he could obtain roll-over relief when investing in another type of business. However, that could encourage people to leave the private rented sector, whereas I hope that we can develop measures to encourage people to move into that sector rather than out of it. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General will be able to make it clear later whether that measure is designed to help the private rented sector or, in some strange way, to encourage people to move out of it.

[Mr. Thurnham]

The changes in statutory sick pay have been cleverly constructed, because larger firms can generally get insurance policies to help them to deal with sick pay, and insurance companies have their own requirements so that people qualify for invalidity payments only subject to satisfactory medical checks. The new arrangements have been well designed, and I hope that they will not hinder very small companies that cannot obtain insurance cover as large companies can. I know from experience of the insurance cover provided for sick pay for larger companies that there is a wide range of premiums quoted, depending on exactly how the benefits are to be assessed. I hope that everyone will be able to benefit from the new arrangements.

As for capital spending, the new private finance initiative is excellent. It is what we have been wanting for many years, and I shall be fascinated to find out the full details of how the west coast main line proposals, for example, are to be funded. There was something in the Sunday press about that, and I understand that about £600 million will be available through a privately financed project to improve the line from London through Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool to Glasgow. I understand that there may be an announcement tomorrow, so we look forward to learning further details and, of course, to seeing the project in action.

The social security proposals have been covered at some length, and it is clear to me that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has bent over backwards to help pensioners. Of the £2·8 billion being raised from VAT on fuel, £1·2 billion will be repaid in the package of measures that the Chancellor announced today, so that the net amount raised will be £1·6 billion. That £1·6 billion is welcome, but the repayment shows my right hon. and learned Friend's good faith in wishing to protect pensioners and others who may have felt unfairly penalised.

I especially welcome the extension of energy efficiency grants to all pensioners and all people with disabilities. Those grants were previously means tested, and it should be fully understood exactly what is available. Half a million homes have already been improved, and the existing budget provided for another 250,000. Further provision has now been made to extend the benefit to all pensioners and all people with disabilities so that they will all be able to get insulation for their homes. That seems the best way for people to keep warm.

Let us consider what happens in other countries. In Sweden, for instance, the rate of VAT on fuel is 25 per cent., yet there are fewer deaths from hypothermia there because people insulate their homes so well and are not caught out by a cold snap, as people can be here. I understand that the provision announced by the Chancellor will allow more than 200,000 extra pensioner households a year to benefit. That is a valuable way of showing how we can meet our Rio international commitment to reducing the amount of carbon burnt while ensuring that people keep warm. I hope that the scheme is fully taken up. It seems to me ridiculous that people should not take advantage of schemes to provide them with insulation in their homes, but should instead expect to be given more money only to pay for more fuel to be burnt.

I welcome the Budget. It is the 11th Conservative Budget that I have had the pleasure of hearing in the House, and I am sure that it will lay the foundations for continued prosperity in this country, and for the continued return of Conservative Governments for many years to come. I look forward to hearing many more such excellent Budgets in the future.

8.47 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): I believe that the effects of the Budget will become clear over the year, because the cuts are contained in the fine print. That seems incredible, because no local authority in the land would be allowed to present a budget that simply said, "We shall cut expenditure next year by capping our budget, but we shall not tell you how we shall do it; we shall just achieve it," and then use that meaningless phrase, "efficiency savings". Those savings involve more than issuing fewer bits of paper; they will often have important consequences for services. As the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) said, there will probably be quite a lot of shouting and screaming as Departments implement those fairly savage public expenditure cuts, which have not yet been made plain to the House.

I shall comment on some of the details that have been made known, starting with the child care allowance. Like many Opposition Members, I have campaigned strongly for child care allowances that would give parents access to jobs. When the Chancellor began to make the announcement I started to smile in anticipation that something positive would be announced. It means very little. I am not sure whether the Chancellor is aware of the cost of child care—it is mainly provided through the private sector and child minders—but it is in the region of £80 to £90 a week for a private nursery and perhaps £50 to £60 a week for a child minder. The cost is high because the children's legislation rightly demands a high level of skills and training for the staff who look after small children.

Mr. Morgan: It is £150 in London.

Ms Coffey: That is a lot of money to find.

The Chancellor seems to be saying that he will provide an allowance of £28 a week for families that already receive family credit. I wonder what that means. I thought that the aim of the exercise was to take families off benefits by giving them access to the employment market and giving them an allowance for child care. Does that mean that people applying for jobs must ensure that the job must pay a low wage because that is how they qualify for family credit? Does it mean that they cannot look for jobs where the wages are higher than the family credit level because then they would not get the allowance? That is what it seems to mean. If that is so, we are looking at more extremely unfair legislation. It will be similar to what happened with the Child Support Agency—it sounds good but the implementation of it will create a great deal of unfairness. It shows a lack of vision on the part of the Chancellor.

Surely the aim is to attract the maximum number of skilled people into the job market. It may be that many families will not be able to afford access to the employment market because the child care allowance will not be extended to them. I had hoped that the Chancellor would look at the whole problem of the provision of child care in a much more imaginative way. I do not believe that the child care allowance will make a lot of difference

except to a small number of people. That is a pity because the Budget provided an opportunity to do something about the matter.

As the Chancellor knows, value added tax on fuel is a profoundly unpopular proposal. Basically, most people understand that it is a tax on the need for warmth, rather than the ability to pay for that warmth. The Chancellor has not been generous. Many Tory Members have discussed the Chancellor's generosity in compensating pensioners for the extra money that they will have to find. Fifty pence a week for a single pensioner and 70p a week for a couple is not generous compensation and is well below the amount of money that they will need to find to pay VAT on fuel.

People cannot be compensated by a flat rate. The need for warmth varies enormously depending on a person's situation, age and medical disability. But that is not taken into account in the flat-rate compensation scheme. Whatever the Chancellor said about compensation, pensioners will still need to pay disproportionately for that tax.

Another interesting point about VAT on fuel is that a vast number of people will be excluded. Families with young children, especially when children are at home during the day with the parent, will be excluded. Some time ago, I asked the Chancellor for his estimate of the cost to the average family of VAT on fuel. He replied that his estimate was £2·9 a week. However, such families will not be compensated for that. In effect, VAT on fuel is a tax of £2·9 on every working family in this country. In view of some of the campaigning that has taken place, and the vulnerable position of hospices, I wonder whether the Chancellor will exclude hospices from VAT on fuel.

I do not understand why the Chancellor feels that the housing difficulties that are being experienced will be alleviated by more private money going to housing associations. All that has happened as a result of the grants going down and private money going into housing associations is that rents have gone up. In the town that I represent, Stockport, the average rent for a three-bedroom council house is £30, compared to £60 for a housing association house. The figure is double.

If grants continue to go down, and the Chancellor is relying on private investment to provide housing, rents will continue to increase. That is a serious problem because the only people who will be able to afford to live in housing association properties, whose rents will reach the market price of private accommodation, are those on full housing benefit. Those who are living in housing association properties on full housing benefit will never be able to afford to get a job because they will not be able to afford to lose that benefit. The local council in Stockport has £12 million in capital receipts from the sale of council houses. It could provide houses much more cheaply than housing associations. It is much cheaper to subsidise social housing through bricks and mortar than through rent allowances and housing benefit.

I draw the Chancellor's attention to another housing difficulty that has been caused by deregulation. I am sure that it is not specific to my authority. Since rents were deregulated in 1989, private landlords have been allowed to charge rents above the rent assessment level, set by the rent officer. That rent has been subsidised through rent allowances. A recent report to Stockport council showed that the council had to provide a contribution of £417 for unsubsidised rents in 1989-90. But the figure for this year is well over £90,000.

Effectively, the deregulation of private rents has resulted in a rigged market where private housing has been subsidised through rent allowances. That has resulted in private rents in Stockport rising to a level that most people cannot afford unless they get rent allowances. Nothing in the Budget will help that housing situation. It is a serious problem especially for young people who have no access to private ownership because housing is too expensive.

I was interested in the reference to invalidity benefit in the Budget. There will be a new incapacity benefit. Obviously, the criteria for getting that benefit will be much more strict. I wonder whether that will also apply to the review of people who are presently on invalidity benefit to get that new incapacity benefit. Many people have taken early retirement because of long-term sickness at work on the understanding that they will have an income from invalidity benefit. If that incomes stops suddenly, it will cause direct hardship and poverty for those people, and a feeling that the Government have reneged on their promise about invalidity benefit.

I am not convinced that the figures relating to extra funding for education are right. It is easy to present figures as though extra money is being put into services. The extra money to be spent on education will not be as real as it appears on the papers in which it is presented.

Problems in education concern not only funding but the structure of the education system. A distortion within education has been caused by the better financial deal for grant-maintained schools in an effort to get schools to opt out of local authority control. That is causing great concern among professionals in education, who feel that the aim of education should be equality of opportunity for all children in the borough, irrespective of where they come from or the school to which they go. The Chancellor should deal with that problem as well as funding issues.

More money was promised for health. Serious problems are being created by the market economy in health, particularly in terms of waiting time for aids, such as hearing aids. The money is going to the acute side, with consequences for people waiting for aids or treatment for chronic rather than acute illnesses. That is creating problems and distortions in the community.

The Government have made much play about their support for law and order, yet as a result of their public spending cuts it will be more difficult to spend money on crime prevention. I remind the Chancellor that better security lighting and security locks on doors are among the most effective crime prevention measures, particularly for elderly people. Those measures are usually funded through local councils and if that ability is taken away from councils through public spending cuts, crime will not be prevented. Most people would rather prevent crime than deal with its consequences.

We often hear the word "efficiency" mentioned in Budgets and I sometimes wonder what it means. We talk about efficiency in British industry and efficiency to be competitive. Efficiency has a long track record of leading to job losses. Employees always feel worried when people start talking about efficiency because they know that, ultimately, their jobs are on the line.

The Government should remember that British industry should provide jobs. The fact that it has seriously failed to do so in the past 14 years has much to do with how managers in industry have managed their work force. They

[Ms Coffey]

have taken a confrontational approach, and disposing of the work force has been too easy a solution to financial difficulties.

Together with the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, I visited the Rover plant at Longbridge. Rover has reorganised the management of its work force and now consults its employees and involves them in what it does. Surprise, surprise, that has led to higher productivity, of which the company is very proud.

The Chancellor should remember that helping British industry involves not only accounting and giving tax advantages but tackling the problem of managing people. The Government have been appalling at managing people and understanding their ordinary day-to-day lives. They have then blamed low productivity on the work force. It is the Government's job to lead and set objectives and to ensure that people achieve those objectives, but not in a confrontational way. Britain is not a company but a nation of people and the Government's responsibility goes beyond making a better business out of Britain—even when it can manage that. This country's recovery depends on the Government increasing people's morale and commitment, and on people's trust in the Government and willingness to work together. The Government have not managed to make that step and the Budget will not encourage people to feel that that is what they are about.

If this country is to get anywhere in the future, the Government must be concerned not only with accounting and balancing the books but must be seen to be fair. They must be seen to be doing their job, which is to mediate between the strong and the weak to ensure that everybody has the opportunity that they deserve. Nothing that has been said today, particularly by the Government, gives me any hope that that is what is the intention of the Government's Budget. The Budget is another sleight of hand.

9.4 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I have heard a dismal set of speeches from Conservative Members today. Some hon. Members went through the proposals introduced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, commenting on them while reading from printed papers. Other hon. Members obviously wanted a job in the Treasury Front Bench team because the words "excellent", "good" or "I support" appeared every second or third minute. The worst speech was made by the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) who, in his zeal for the Chancellor's proposals, went so far as to say that the compensation package for pensioners was too generous. I want to cut out that piece of his speech from *Hansard* tomorrow morning.

Mr. Morgan: So will I.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr Morgan) and I shall make sure every pensioner in the Vale of Glamorgan learns what the hon. Member who represents them thinks about the Government's proposal this afternoon.

It was a depressing Budget. After 14 years of Tory rule, what is the economic position? The public sector borrowing requirement is £50 billion. That is not the fault of the Labour party when in office, of the Labour party when in opposition or of another country. It was not caused by the extra expenditure incurred through war. The fault lies fairly and squarely on the present Administration. They caused the public sector borrowing requirement to go up to the staggering figure of £50 billion—perhaps 8 per cent. of gross domestic product. They are entirely responsible for that.

What else do we have? In the middle of a recession, the balance of payments deficit this year is about £17 billion. A deficit of that size was unheard of until the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The Administration have managed to build up a deficit of that size during a recession. In addition, tax as a percentage of GDP is just under 40 per cent. Years ago, when the Labour party was in office, tax as a percentage of GDP was about 33 or 34 per cent. The deficit has been more than 40 per cent., although it might be a little less than that now. However, the Government tell us that it is the Government of low taxation.

If I were honest and did not mince my words, I would use an unparliamentary expression to describe that record, but I cannot do so. Perhaps I can do so if I address my remarks to the Government rather than an individual hon. Member. The Conservatives blatantly lie when they say that they are the party of low taxation. That is clearly not true because taxation as a percentage of GDP in the 1980s and 1990s, if not every year then almost every year, has been higher under this Government than when the Labour party was in power in the late 1960s and 1970s. After 14 years of Conservative rule, average growth is less than that achieved by the Labour party when it was in office. Despite that dismal scenario, there were no explanations or apologies from the Chancellor. He did not explain why the economy is in such a mess after 14 years.

The Opposition and the country wanted the Chancellor to show some leadership on how to get out of the mess that we are in. Unfortunately, we did not get it. As a result of the Chancellor's measures and the Budget, would any householder say, "This the Budget that I have been waiting for. I know that the country's economy has been in a mess and my household's income has been strained, but as a result of the Budget, I am going to buy a new carpet or a new refrigerator or try to do some home improvements or work on the car?" No householder will do that as he will first realise that the married person's allowance will be frozen, not for one year, but for two years. He will also realise that it will attract relief not at 20 per cent. instead of 25 per cent. in 1995, but at a mere 15 per cent. No householder would go out and buy anything. He would realise that tax relief on his mortgage will be at 15 per cent. in 1995, instead of 20 per cent. Personal allowances for working people are being frozen not for one year but for two. People who are working will receive no relief for the imposition of VAT on fuel. To be sure, pensioners will get some relief—exactly how much we do not know. Working people, however, will bear the brunt of the price hike in domestic fuel, from April 1994 and then again in April 1995.

There have been other duty increases. Vehicle excise duty and duties on tobacco and wine have risen. On top of that there will be increases in the form of VAT on insuring cars and homes.

All these increases will amount to at least £10 a week for most households. It is clear, therefore, that householders will not welcome this Budget. It beggars belief to think that the governing party assumes that it can win an election as a result of its economic management.

People know that they have been had. People in Wrexham tell me that they thought that there was something in it when the Prime Minister told them to vote Conservative on 9 April and the recovery would begin on 10 April. They believed him when he said that he had no intention of introducing VAT on domestic fuel. They remember all that; the Government will not be allowed to forget the lies when the next election comes.

No small business man will find much pleasure in the Budget either. Whatever the Government may say, I predict that small businesses will not like it. True, there are one or two small measures in the Budget for them—some of them of doubtful value. For instance, small businesses will no longer be obliged to hire an independent accountant to verify the accounts once a year. That could lead to an increase in fraud. I should have thought that many small business men wanted accountants to check, just to make sure that everything was right.

Most small business men will look at the Budget's effects on the average citizen. If the average citizen feels that he has to tighten his belt and cannot afford to spend, because large increases in taxation are coming, he will do small businesses no favours. I do not believe that the Budget will do anything for small businesses.

The Budget should have been about industry, about jobs and about renewal. It would be nice to have an occasional apology from the Government, to the effect that they have got things wrong and will do their best to get them right in future. But no. Typically, the Secretary of State for Education did not apologise for leaking part of the Budget statement several hours before it was delivered. An apology would have cost nothing. The Treasury would have sanctioned an apology, but the right hon. Gentleman lacked the guts, the integrity or the decency to come to the Dispatch Box and say, "I am sorry; there was an administrative error. I will do my best to ensure that it doesn't happen again." This was a typical example of the Government's way of proceeding. They have their dogma, and it must be right, regardless of what happens in the country.

What should have been done in the Budget? My hon. Friends have listed most of the salient points, so I will not dwell on them. Obviously, local authority capital receipts could have been released, allowing them to provide low-cost housing for people who need it. If local authorities provided that housing, people would need to fit carpets and put in fridges. Curtains, beds and chairs would be bought, and such purchases would provide a little impetus towards restarting the economy. But not a bit of it. Because of dogma, prejudice and probably ignorance the Government are not the slightest bit interested in doing anything to help industry and create jobs.

They could have announced an urgent programme of training and retraining. Interest rates could have been cut. It is all very well for the Chancellor to say that he is leaving that to the Bank of England, but at the end of the day he decides whether to cut and leaves the detail to the bank. Real interest rates are still high and could be brought down, and I am sure that industry would welcome that.

Capital allowances could have been increased from the 25 per cent. of the past five or six years to 40 per cent. after 31 December. Conservative Members say that we have the lowest corporation tax in the G7 or in Europe, but there is little point in saying that when capital allowances are small and difficult to come by. Of course, there is a trade-off, because if capital allowances were increased it would be necessary to increase corporation tax.

The companies that do not invest much in machinery are attracted to this country because of its low corporation tax. Companies that invest much of their income in new plant and machinery and capital formation are not attracted here because our capital allowances are so poor. As I have said, through dogma, ignorance or prejudice the Government will not take that on board.

Those measures and others would have increased production and employment and would have helped industry, but the Government failed to announce them. Instead, there is to be VAT on fuel. That need not have been imposed. For example, if duty on share transactions had been kept, VAT on fuel would be unnecessary or could have been limited to the first tranche of 7.5 or 8 per cent. Other ways could have been used to raise money.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) that income tax for people earning £1,000 a week or more could be 60 per cent. There is no reason why such a rate should not be levied because those who are earning £1,000 could and should pay a little more. Of course, such people will not be asked to pay more. Pensioners and people on low incomes will be asked to do that through VAT on fuel.

Pensioners will be helped to some extent with their fuel bills. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said that a little more than half the extra cost would be met. If the Government have information to the effect that that is not true and that they will pay more than half, I would like to hear it, but I suspect that I shall wait in vain. VAT on fuel will also affect lone people and those on income support who are not pensioners. There are many low-paid people in my constituency. In Clwyd, women's wages are among the lowest in Great Britain and male wages are below average.

Low-paid families will bear the full brunt of the Government's action in slapping VAT on fuel. Nothing that I have heard in debate will help those people. If family credit is increased in line with the retail prices index, those who claim it will get a little help but, of course, family credit is not claimed by anything like 100 per cent. of those who are entitled to it. Perhaps about two thirds of such people claim it. The Government will not get away with such a tax and then at the next general election pretend that it never happened. One of the biggest mistakes that they have made is to put VAT on fuel. That will take effect in April 1994, just before the European elections, and that will remind the country, clearly and lucidly, that everyone will face an extra charge for VAT on electricity and gas, and presumably on paraffin as well.

That will not be the end of it. There will be an equal and added charge in April 1995. It will go up again. On top of that, every three months when the gas and electricity bills arrive, there will be a little line saying VAT £32·58 or VAT £27·66. That will happen not just once every three months but, because most people have electricity and gas, twice every three months. That is the best advertisement for the Government's inadequacies and their complete disdain of the needs and aspirations of working people.

We are now a country where one company director can be paid an £18 million bonus, not because he has invented some marvellous piece of machinery, or anything like that, which will produce for the country untold wealth in future, or because he has manufactured something. No, all he has

[Dr. Marek]

done is take some business from someone else to a different company, and for that he gets £18 million. That, according to the Government, is something that we are supposed to admire.

At the same time, a bankrupt crooked business man who lost £32 million is told that he need not go to gaol. He is told, "Off you go and try to sell vacuum cleaners in future." The Government do not want to institute a system that will stop such an abuse and, once someone is caught, the case will be dropped or there will be some plea bargaining behind the scenes and no prison sentence will be imposed.

It is a disgrace that the Government have done nothing to bring about integrity in the City. Such integrity is lacking, not, I have to say, in many quarters, but in some quarters in the City. I have yet to hear of any Government proposals to tidy that up. I suspect that I shall not because many City friends of Ministers and the Government are the very people who are coining it in, not paying the taxes that they should be paying, and the Government do not want to hurt them.

We have had 14 years of Tory failure but the party is now over. The Government cannot blame the Labour party, only themselves, for the awful state that the economy is in. The pity of it is that they have no social conscience. It will not be the wealthy or those who can afford to pay who will have to make up for it it will be the pensioners, the sick, the disabled and the majority of low-paid people in my constituency. The sooner the Government get out of office the better.

9.22 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I want to consider some aspects of the Budget that have been treated less intensely than others and to pick up the theme of the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) when he said to the Chancellor, "Trust your pessimism and doubt your optimism".

I want to explore that theme a little by looking at the Government's claims for the Budget. After all, it is an historic Budget. It is the first unified Budget this century, I believe, or for half a century at least. Therefore, not only is it unified, but it is four months earlier than most other Budgets have been.

What are the consequences of producing a unified and early Budget? In the opening statement of the Treasury's press release on the Budget, the Government say:

"This budget completes the job of sorting out the public finances. Sound public finances are essential for sustained recovery and higher living standards. This has been achieved by a combination of tight public spending control—with planned spending reduced by £3·6 billion in 1994-95 and £1·5 billion in 1995-96".

The Budget claims that planned spending is reduced by £3·6 billion for next year. Where are those planned spending reductions? I cannot find them. The planned spending reductions are made entirely by wiping out the contingency reserves. According to page 97 of the Red Book, the departmental spending totals roughly balance—I am not sure whether to believe that—but the planned spending reserves are wiped out. According to page 97, there is a £3·5 billion reduction in planning reserves for 1994-95 and the new controlled total is £3·6 billion. Of the total reduction of £3·6 billion, £3·5 billion appears to come from the wiping out of the contingency reserves.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): I want to spare the hon. Gentleman any further embarrassment as he is barking up the wrong tree. The amounts provided for the reserves are £3·5 billion in the first year, £7 billion in the second year and £10·5 million in the third year. In the past year, the sums were £4 billion, £7 billion and £10 billion. There is no difference in the amounts of the reserves over the three years—it is £500 million less in year one and £500 million more in year three.

Mr. Morgan: Far from sparing me any embarrassment, the right hon. Gentleman has confirmed the figures in the Red Book. There was an original figure of £3·5 billion for next year that has now disappeared. To remove the contingency reserves from the present year is understandable, as we are approaching the final quarter of the year. That always happens, unless there has been unplanned overspending. But to remove the reserves for next year and claim that public spending has been reduced is completely fictitious. But that is what it says on page 97 of the Red Book.

For 1995-96, what the right hon. Gentleman says may be perfectly true, but next year is the key year. That is where he has not been able to demonstrate anything correct; otherwise, he would be saying that his Red Book is incorrect. The contingency reserve and a £1·3 billion transfer of finances from this country's Treasury to the Treasury of the European Community is the total planned spending reduction. The £1·3 billion change from the past year is the only other change.

If one adds up all the departmental spending changes, they are roughly balanced—less for defence, more for education, less for transport, more for one aspect of environmental expenditure. Public spending has not been reduced, but the figures presenting public spending have been reduced, if we believe them.

The Budget has taken place four months earlier than usual. What does the Red Book say about that? Page 137 says that the impact is to increase the margin of error of forecasts. The average margin of error for PSBR forecasts in a March Budget is £8 billion. By announcing the Budget in November and by using the previous November public expenditure estimates, there is an average margin of error of £10¼ billion. The margin of error has increased by £2¼ billion and the contingency reserve has been decreased by £3.35 billion. So is a unified Budget fictitious? In fact, we shall find that there will be hidden expenditure increases or supplementary borrowing next year. The Budget is intended to massage the market and hide from the public the Departments that will really carry the expenditure cuts next year. All that we have been presented with so far is a netting-out Budget, but the claim will be made that planned public spending is down when it is nothing of the kind so far. If the wiping out of the contingency reserves is eventually found to be a mistake—if North sea oil receipts fall well below expectations next year, for instance—the Government will have to increase the public sector borrowing requirement to cover it.

The Government cannot have it both ways. They must either cut public expenditure in the individual

Departments, as shown on page 97 of the Red Book, or not. If departmental expenditure is not cut, how will the Government close the £50 billion gap and how will it be reduced to £38 billion next year entirely on the tax side? The Government are clearly not doing it entirely on the tax side; the problem is that they are pretending to have achieved a public expenditure cut that they are not willing to attribute to any individual Department. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr Marek)—it is Government dishonesty on a massive scale. It is no wonder that Roger Levitt was let off with just 180 hours of community service; he could have been a member of the present Government—we have seen a triumph of creative accountancy and market massaging of which he would have been proud.

Normally, when we use the phrase "Clark the conman, who was economical with the actualité", we are taken to be referring to Alan Clark, the former Member of Parliament for Plymouth, Sutton. I fear, however, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken considerable risks with his own reputation today by saying things like "Planned public spending has been reduced", given that it is impossible to find the aggregate of the Departments in which it has been reduced; it can only be seen being switched from one Department to another. That strikes me as being dishonest with the British people—or, alternatively, with the financial markets. I am very much afraid that, by tomorrow morning, they will have woken up to the truth, and will not buy the message that planned public spending has been reduced.

If the Government want to have it both ways, they will be caught out by the reaction of the public to an increased margin of error accompanied by a reduced contingency reserve. Would hon. Members like to run a business in that way? I do not think that they would. To present a unified Budget in November rather than March is to take a risk with sound public finances—despite the Government's claim to be the master of sound public finance, and their claim that they will have eliminated public sector borrowing by the end of the millennium. They do not specify the millennium concerned, but they say that they are now back on the strait and narrow; the £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement is there this year, but give them another seven years and they will have sorted it all out. That is not just Red Book—it is red flannel, and it will give unified Budgets a bad name right from the start.

The reason is, of course, that the Government are in trouble with their reputation as a tax-cutting party. They love that reputation, but today it has been blown to smithereens. It has always been fair to say that the Conservative party is not a tax-cutting but a tax-switching party—a party that prefers to introduce fees, duties, imposts, indirect taxes and any other measures rather than increase the rate of income tax. This year, no one is likely to claim that the Conservative party is a tax-cutting party; people will say that it is a party that freezes allowances, thus increasing taxes indirectly, and puts VAT on goods such as fuel.

People have no choice about spending on fuel, unless they want to go out on their bikes to chop their own wood. VAT has become a compulsory tax on compulsory expenditure, rather than on discretionary expenditure which involves a choice. That is a new principle—imposing VAT on unavoidable expenditure. No one, except perhaps a Yogi monk who might last the winter wearing only a loin cloth, could manage without fuel expenditure. This is a compulsory tax in exactly the same way as income tax is a compulsory tax.

The Government want to keep headline taxes low, and to try to flannel the British public into believing that the non-headline ways of increasing taxation—freezing or reducing allowances, imposing excise duties and putting new tolls on roads; all those ways of imposing fees, charges, duties and imposts—somehow do not have the same impact as income tax increases. In the end, it is all about headline impact. I know that we are not allowed to read newspapers in the Chamber, but it is fascinating to examine the headlines in the different editions of today's *Evening Standard*. The early edition—obviously produced with a good deal of heavy briefing from the Chancellor—said:

"Income Tax: It's A Let-Off".

Wonderful; the British public are really pleased and will be going out to celebrate. A couple of hours later it becomes, "Clarke turns screw on tax and spending". That is getting a bit closer to reality, but who was doing the briefing earlier in the day to say that it was a let-off on the income tax? It is all about headline taxes and headline grabbing by the Chancellor to ensure that he is a popular man.

We are looking, therefore, at what will really happen next year. Has the Chancellor hidden cuts in departmental budgets in today's Budget statement in the hope that something will turn up? If something does not turn up, the Government will bring in real cuts next year, even though they have given a commitment today that a departmental budget will be such and such. They have said that health spending will increase by a certain amount, although not by as much as the increase in health inputs. So it will be a real cut in health spending.

We fear that the position will get worse unless something turns up. We believe that there are hidden departmental cuts and that the Government have not had the guts to put them in the Budget.

The Chancellor claimed that one does not need a contingency allowance because the Treasury has discovered a new method of public expenditure control. The Treasury always says that. I remember that, 15 years ago, the Treasury said that it had discovered a new method of public expenditure control, and that therefore one could manage with a lower level of expenditure controls and contingency reserves than before. We have heard that for 15 years and we are bored with it. It does not work. It is always the same message from a new clever bunch of people at the Treasury who say that they are cleverer than the previous bunch, even if the previous bunch were all in the same party as them, and that includes the Prime Minister himself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) said that today's Budget was intended to increase the popularity of the Chancellor. He is absolutely correct. The Chancellor has not had the guts to say what he is really doing. He has not had the guts to say which departmental budgets are going to carry the knock, nor has he said what the total expenditure will be next year.

One cannot simply wipe out the contingency reserve without having some allowance in it in case some of the tax projections do not come through, if the winter weather is far worse, or if North sea oil receipts fall, or whatever. The Chancellor is like the famous American congressman in the 1920s who said that what he believed in was sound money and plenty of it. The Chancellor will have to learn

[Mr. Morgan]

that if he does the Budget on the basis that he wants to be popular, he will find that he cannot have it both ways and he will go down as a Chancellor who is irresponsible and too imprudent to believe that he needed a contingency reserve. He will not produce a Budget that is for the good long-term government of the country.

9.37 pm

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I should like to ask some questions of the Budget. What will it do to increase investment in manufacturing research and development to the level of that in our competitor countries? What will it do to reverse the growing inequality in our society?

What will the Budget do to help those people who will not be affected by the increase in insurance premiums on cars and home contents insurance; first, because they do not have cars; and secondly, because they cannot afford to insure their homes, vulnerable as they are—in many cases more vulnerable than the average—to burglaries? What will the Budget do to reduce substantially unemployment levels over those predicted, even if the Government succeed in sustaining the pathetic levels of growth that are starting to come through?

I shall talk first about manufacturing. There has been some help in the Budget to encourage retention rather than distribution of profits. Let us look at the scale of the problem in our industry. For example, the figures that were recently released by Kleinwort Benson show that the real cost of capital for research and development projects over a long-term 10-year pay-off in the UK was 60 per cent. higher than in Germany, and three times higher than in Japan. That is the scale of the problem that the Government need to address. I am not convinced that the measures announced in the Budget will come anywhere near dealing with the deficit in manufacturing investment. Manufacturing investment is needed to deal with the deficit in our balance of trade.

I listened to the radio today as I drove down to London from Birmingham, where I was attending a Boundary Commission review. I noticed that the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) shared my doubt about whether the Budget would provide the boost that manufacturing required.

My second question is about the inequality in our society. We all know that under the Conservative Government the rich have got richer and the poor poorer. In relative terms the poor pay more tax. The taxation policies of the Government have been regressive in the extreme, not least because of the increase and expansion of VAT.

There has been some help for pensioners and those on income support, thank goodness. But what about the people who are just above the income support level such as families with children? A third of the children in Britain are being brought up in poverty. Most of them are from families on income support, but many more are on low incomes. There is nothing in the Budget to help them.

The freezing of tax allowances, the attack on unemployment benefit and the attack on disability benefits are again regressive measures. It would have been far better to increase the rate of taxation for the better off than once again to freeze the tax allowances because to do so disproportionately affects the low earners.

The Chancellor announced a small amount of extra money for insulation schemes. I should like to comment on those schemes in relation to my two questions about inequality and poverty and about jobs. I do not know whether it has been mentioned so far, but this week is Conserve Energy week. On Monday I helped to insulate the home of a pensioner in my constituency as part of one of the Government schemes which will be expanded. That is welcome, in so far as it goes, but all it does is to reverse the cuts which have taken place in recent years on such schemes.

The elderly lady lived in a Victorian terraced house which she rented from a private landlord. She could not use the upstairs because of her disability, so she lived downstairs. The front room was heated only by a two-bar electric fire—a very inefficient source of heating. She used the middle room as a bedroom, in which she had a gas fire—a slightly more efficient source of heating. The kitchen was very cold and situated in a wing building in the Victorian villa-type house. The lady had to heat it by lighting one of the gas rings. The room was full of condensation as a result of that poor quality heating system.

That lady will benefit from the couple of hundred pounds worth of insulation to draught-strip her doors and windows and insulate her loft. But what she really needs is a much more effective and efficient heating system that is cheap to run. She needs something doing about the fact that, due to the lack of investment in that type of property, she has to go outside every time that she needs to use the toilet. Such improvements would cost far more than the £200 or £300 per household which is provided for under the scheme. Welcome and job creating as such schemes are, just think how much more it would help the poor and the badly off massively to expand such schemes.

Even with the increase in the programme, it will take 25 years to deal with the 6 million homes which have poor insulation. It will take far more than draught-stripping and loft insulation to bring our homes up to the level of those in Sweden, which does not have the level of excess deaths in winter that we have to suffer, even though it has a much colder climate.

Programmes to invest in insulation will not only help people on low incomes; they will create jobs and conserve energy. Those are the very programmes that need to be expanded dramatically—not merely by £35 million. The Government are taking billions out of the economy by placing VAT on fuel. Surely they could put a substantial proportion of that back into energy conservation programmes and improvements in housing. Surely the money gained from the loss of mortgage interest relief could be reinvested in bricks and mortar. That would help not only the people living in unfit houses and the homeless, but create jobs.

The pathetic level of child care provision, £28 a week—welcome as it is—illustrates the Government's attitude towards jobs for women, and the low level of remuneration that they are expected to receive for important jobs such as looking after children. It costs far more than £28 a week to pay somebody a proper rate to look after children. It is time that the Government learnt about the realities of life for ordinary people.

The Budget goes nowhere near addressing the real problems in our economy. It is designed to appeal to the right-wingers in the Tory party—and to boost the Chancellor's popularity when the time comes perhaps to replace the present Prime Minister—but it contains nothing that will give hope to the unemployed, to those living in poverty or to the 53 per cent. of workers who fear that they might lose their jobs.

I predict that under the Government the recovery will be short-lived and that we will soon be back in a recession. The Government have failed to tackle one of the underlying problems in our economy—the lack of investment in manufacturing. They should help those people who would give a boost to the economy by consuming the type of goods that do not suck in imports. They should generally invest in public sector projects, because those projects will create the jobs that we need.

The recovery will be short-lived. If there is any hope arising out of the Budget, it is that it will ensure that we have a Labour Government after the next general election.

9.46 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): This Budget must have broken all records for the extent to which it has been discussed and fought about so much in advance. People have adopted postures about this Budget—some of them utterly simplistic, some rather more sweetly reasoned—almost since the day that the former Chancellor sat down after delivering his speech in March.

I took the view then, and I have had little cause to change my mind, that the then Chancellor could have been more severe more quickly in tackling the deficit, and that the fear of undermining the so-called fragile recovery was misplaced. I prefer the approach in "Macbeth" that

> "'if it were done . . . then 'twere well
> It were done quickly:"

Any suggestion that the recovery should be fuelled by the stoking up of consumer demand would be equally misplaced, because the last thing that we want is a return to the cycle of boom and bust. Anyone can create the illusion of recovery by fuelling inflationary consumer demand, and the test of the Budget is whether the Chancellor has resisted that temptation and looked instead to the long term and to the laying of foundations for sustainable prosperity, which involves a shift away from our obsession with property that is so damaging for investment in business.

One way of looking at our economic predicament is by the immediate indicators that we use to measure our performance. To understand properly the decisions that we needed to take, we must look far beyond our domestic figures, not just across the English channel to our European partners, but far across the ocean to the Americas and to the tiger economies of the east.

Any sensible assessment of our economic well-being is necessarily a study in comparative performance: it is about competitiveness. If all that we do is to perform as we have performed before, and no better, the rest of the world will overtake us. If we are to maintain or improve our international competitiveness, we need to proceed faster than the speed of the escalator moving against us in the opposite direction. Stand still and we would be drawn backwards. Had the Chancellor got the Budget wrong, we would have run the risk of coming perilously close to standing still.

Britain has been traditionally blessed with the disposition to take a world view. That outlook has made us ambivalent about our association with the European Community, not just because we look to our close association with the United States but because we are rightly wary of becoming too closely tied to the habits and practices of the severely under-performing economic club which is the EC.

That clear picture of our comparative economic performance vindicates, as if it were necessary, the unique stand that Britain took at Maastricht in resisting the social chapter and the imposition of a single currency. It also vindicates the Government's efforts to secure a successful conclusion to the GATT round, which deserves everyone's full support, despite the siren calls of Sir James Goldsmith and Ross Perot to cocoon us in the illusory comfort of protection.

That is the big picture; but what about the immediate indicators? First and foremost, after some roller-coaster years at the end of the 1980s we are back in reality and that is exactly where we must remain. Gone are the days of either boom or bust; gone is the absurd belief, which infected so many who should have known better, that the business cycle had been abolished for ever. Back has come the realisation that any progress that is real and sustainable will be gradual and unremarkable. That is how it should remain.

Within the larger picture the immediate indicators are broadly encouraging. Inflation is at its lowest for 25 years; productivity has shown some remarkable improvement; interest rates, at 5·5 per cent., are the lowest for many years; the stock market is buoyant; and unemployment is falling faster than many predicted and faster than suits the Labour party.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, just because claimant unemployment has come down, that does not necessarily present an accurate measure of actual unemployment. Reference has been made to the fact that the number of long-term unemployed has fallen, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that people are disqualified from appearing on the register if they are no longer able to claim. If their wives take a job and those men lose their unemployment benefit after 12 months, they are still unemployed, but they are not claimant unemployed, so they disappear from the figures.

Mr. Duncan: What matters most is the genuine opportunity to acquire a real job. I am confident, and all the more so as a result of what has been announced today, that our policies will deliver those jobs, while those of the hon. Gentleman will destroy them.

My only caveat amidst the good news—and it is a large one—is that the PSBR has been far too large and that, even in the midst of a severe recession, our trade balance has continued, stubbornly, to run at a deficit. Here lies the key because absolutely everything points to the need for a significant shift, sizeable and permanent, away from consumption to investment. We have been living on tick and now is the time to stop.

Today's Budget has taken some important steps towards rebalancing the economy to prepare for long-term prosperity. Some themes behind that must not be ignored. For instance, I endorse the discipline of European convergence criteria, because it is a good orthodox discipline, not because it would take us along the road to

[Mr. Duncan]

monetary union. If a common orthodoxy helps other EC economies to behave similarly, steady exchange rates will follow. If balanced parities are established, the call for a formal mechanism to govern exchange rates simply becomes redundant and should be resisted.

Dr. Lynne Jones: How will honouring the convergence criteria get unemployment down?

Mr. Duncan: That kind of orthodox fiscal discipline will lay the right foundations for the prosperity that will deliver jobs.

As this is the first Budget to consider simultaneously revenue and spending, it highlights certain elementary problems. The main one is unmatched expectations. I have devised my own first law of public spending. It is that anyone's expectation of what the Government should deliver always exceeds the sum total of everyone's contribution to that cause. The Budget needs to be seen as commencing the task of rebalancing people's expectations with the real cost of what they are asking for.

This has been a masterly Budget, and in my view it passes the tests which I have just described. The Budget has introduced discipline in spending, fairness in raising revenue and imagination in encouraging the wealth-creating energies of the economy. In addressing spending, the Chancellor has tackled head on the deficit which has bedevilled us for the past few years.

My right hon. and learned Friend said that the Budget was about sound finance. He deserves recognition for restoring fiscal rectitude on a scale which no one had predicted before he rose to speak this afternoon. Some had spoken of cutting the public sector borrowing requirement by a further £2 billion. Some, rashly, had predicted a cut of £3 billion. None had dared predict an overall reduction of £5·5 billion, followed by £7 billion and then £10·5 billion, as was delivered in the Chancellor's statement today.

I am pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the Chamber. Great credit should be given to him for the strict discipline which has been put into public spending decisions. To have no borrowing at the end of the decade is a worthy discipline. I might add that to have surpluses after that is an even worthier discipline. I welcome the fact that spending is due to increase less than growth, and that Government spending as a percentage of national income will fall from 45 per cent. to 42·5 per cent. That is part of the rebalancing that we so desperately need.

The major element of the Chancellor's spending announcement today has been the package of compensation for those poorer people who must pay VAT on fuel. Those who have waged a campaign against the extension of VAT have overplayed their hand. They adopted their stance and wrote their letters before the balancing side of the equation had been announced. Today, a generous and well-directed package has been announced. It will benefit all those on benefit, and indeed will benefit many who are not on benefit. The compensation will go to all pensioners and thereby will benefit many who have a low income but who are on the cusp and do not qualify for benefits. Furthermore, an element of the package will be paid a year early. In some cases, the package will exceed the cost of VAT on fuel to certain individuals. The package should be welcomed, and the complaints should now stop.

The social security measures also pass the tests which I described in my opening remarks. The Government today displayed the foresight that is properly required of a responsible Government. The equalisation of the pension age is a logical and compelling policy which, at last, has been addressed. In doing so, the Government have put to shame robustly those people who tried to scare people who are on the brink of retirement by saying that they would be adversely affected. The policy will not alter the plans of any woman who is now aged over 44. Indeed, the measure will be phased in over 10 years starting from 2010. The measure will, however, bring pensions expectations into line with what we are able to afford. That is in stark contrast to the deceitful promises of the Opposition.

I welcome the amalgamation of income support and unemployment benefit into a single job seeker's allowance, and I welcome also the replacement of sickness benefit and invalidity benefit by an incapacity benefit. Nothing was more noticeable today than the Opposition's churlish reaction to the introduction of the £28 per week child care allowance for those who are on family credit. For many, that is a lot of money. If £3 a week for VAT on fuel is a lot of money—as all Opposition Members have charged relentlessly since March—then £28 a week for child care is a hell of a lot of money. Opposition Members should express their gratitude for the decision made today in the Budget.

Capital spending has been maintained at £22 billion. Importantly, the measures for small business should be enthusiastically welcomed. Increasing the VAT threshold to £45,000, dropping statutory audit requirements, revising capital gains tax provisions and introducing the venture capital trust and the enterprise investment scheme will turn a lot of new investment towards small business. I welcome the Chancellor's decision to fill that gap in the financing of small business.

Everything that the Chancellor has announced today is in stark contrast to what has been proposed by the Opposition. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is the creation of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), but as he was being assembled at some secret dungeon in Walworth road a bolt of lightning must have hit the building and flashed across the lab. As a result—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Glenlight Shipping Company

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10 pm

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the future of the transport of bulk freight to the Scottish islands. As the Minister knows, that is carried out mainly and significantly by the Glenlight shipping company, which I believe is dedicated to supplying the islands. Of course, other shippers, such as Gardeners, Dennisons and the Easdale Island shipping company, are involved. One could say that they are the last link with the 150-year-old tradition of coastal puffers.

Glenlight employs 50 people, and many more are involved in support services. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Clyde shipping company, founded in 1815, which is a privately owned Scottish based and

Scottish controlled company. Glenlight operates three coastal freighters and two barge systems—a far cry from the image conjured up by Para Handy and the Vital Spark. Nevertheless, the operation is still of significant importance to the highland economies.

The shipping company provides bulk freight services to, from and within the highlands and islands, and to Northern Ireland. It transports such commodities as coal, salt, building materials, cement, steel fencing and roadstone. It serves islands as far afield as Barra, Canna, Tiree and Lismore, in my constituency. I have received representations from some of those islands in the past week, and I shall quote part of a letter from the community council on the island of Lismore:

"I am writing to you on behalf of Lismore Community Council to express our concern over the plight of the Glenlight Shipping Company. We feel that the loss of the company would have very serious consequences for the island communities.

At present our entire supply of coal along with lime and other bulk materials are supplied to Lismore by Glenlight Shipping Company. The loss of the service would rely in much greater reliance on road haulage and Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries. This would not only put an unacceptable strain on mainland roads and the...ferry service but would inevitably lead to a considerable rise in delivery charges."

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): As the hon. Lady knows, we have a shared constituency interest, and the issue of road transport brings me to my feet. As we know, in the year to 31 December 1992 the Glenlight shipping company recorded 500 transport movements, representing about 55,000 tonnes of bulk freight and 45,000 tonnes of round timber. To move an equivalent tonnage by road would take 5,000 20-tonne lorries, which would use the road that my constituency shares with the hon. Lady's—the Rest and Be Thankful. Can she envisage 1,000 lorries coming down that road every week of the year? Is there not a sound community case as well as an economic case for retaining this subsidy for Glenlight?

Mrs. Michie: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I hope to say more later about the environmental effects. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The lorries would join the other trucks that cart up and down the roads the oil freight that the west highland railway line lost recently.

Glenlight is a pioneering firm. Together with timber growers and processors, it developed the concept of special barges with roll-on/roll-off flaps to run on to beaches and take large loads of timber, shipping them to Irvine, Workington and Northern Ireland. In fact, two of those landing areas are at Ardcastle and near Carradale in my constituency. The potential for further development of this type of barge transport by sea down the west coast of Scotland is considerable.

The Minister may remember writing to me on 23 February this year. In that letter, he said:

"The Glenlight scheme is therefore supported by The Scottish Office, the Forestry Commission, private forestry interests, the timber processing industry, Strathclyde and the Highland Regional Councils and Highlands and Islands Enterprise."

The Minister agreed that what the company was doing was worth while.

I understand that the effect of tariff rebate subsidy on the timber barge operation has resulted in land and standing timber values increasing. It has also provided the Forestry Commission's balance sheet with greater than expected timber stocks because remotely located supplies can now be brought to market at a competitive cost.

Glenlight has told the Scottish Office that without increased financial help it can no longer provide private enterprise money to support this lifeline service to the islands. Last year, it suffered a loss of £287,000 with its coasters making some 500 journeys to and from ports in the highlands and islands carrying 100,000 tonnes of cargo, of which 45,000 tonnes were timber.

The problem is that the present level of tariff rebate subsidy, whose purpose is to equalise the price of goods between the Scottish mainland and the islands, does not take proper account of the operating costs of providing that vital service. At this point, I must stress that Glenlight would be extremely reluctant to withdraw its service. Should that happen, we must look at the consequences.

The alternative to the environmentally friendly sea transport is transport by road. That does not bear thinking about. As the hon. Gentleman said, we are talking about huge 20-tonne lorries trucking the freight by ferry and road throughout the highlands and islands, increasing danger, congestion, noise and pollution. Not only would the cost to the island customer rise significantly, putting many such as coal merchants and building firms out of business. The cost of repairs to the damage done to the miles of narrow single-track roads would be much more significant than the cost of the tariff rebate subsidy. "Value for money" is the Government's watchword. That would cease to be so if everything had to be transported by road.

As the Minister knows, the tariff rebate subsidy covers certain goods shipped within the highlands and islands area. The level of subsidy depends on the commodity carried, and ranges from 10 per cent. to 40 per cent.

However, to bring commercial and financial viability to those lifeline freight services, Glenlight would like the Scottish Office to adopt an across-the-board TRS of 40 per cent. without arbitrary capping. It is essential to come to an agreement that includes a longer term programme and allows more certainty and stability for future planning.

Although it is not helpful to carry out such sensitive negotiations under an ultimatum, it can nevertheless concentrate the mind, and Glenlight has been negotiating with the Scottish Office for the past three years.

A report commissioned by the Shetland Islands council entitled "Sea Freight and Passenger Costs Study", produced in March this year by the Maritime Economic Research Centre, says:

"UK Government support for the services is therefore limited to a tariff reduction scheme, whereby rebates are given to consumers of the transport services on tariffs set commercially by shipping operators, in order to reduce rates to more 'acceptable' levels. Support is therefore targeted at the users of the services, rather than at the operators themselves."

The Minister will be aware of the apprehension and deep sense of unease felt by the islanders and those living at ports on the mainland about the future of Caledonian MacBrayne. I hope that he will not add to it by a lack of commitment to shipping freight services.

Sea freight is just one of the strands—part of the mosaic—in the many efforts being made by Government, local authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local companies, voluntary organisations and communities to stem the tide of depopulation, to hold the line. On some islands the battle has already been lost. The indigenous people have gone, and with them the language, culture, traditions and the values of their way of life. But others are hanging in there, albeit on a fragile basis, and they are determined to succeed.

[Mrs. Michie]

That is where the Government come in as an enabler to create the infrastructure that will help them to survive—surely a good example of public and private enterprise working together. The Government owe it to those people on those highland islands to make reparation for what has gone before. The ultimate aim should be to make the islands less dependent on the mainland and more self-sufficient, trading between themselves. That is my vision for the future of the highland islands.

I thank the Minister for listening and hope that he will give a positive answer.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I welcome this debate, and I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on initiating it. I am glad that the hon. Members for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) are also present.

The debate gives me an opportunity to answer a number of points that have been made in the press recently about Glenlight Shipping Ltd and to clarify the Scottish Office's position in support of shipping services to the highland and islands area.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of misleading statements about Glenlight's position as a shipping operator on the west coast, the adverse consequences of its possible withdrawal and the Government's commitment to supporting essential shipping services to the islands.

I should first make it clear that the Scottish Office remains committed to providing the financial support for shipping services necessary to maintain and improve economic and social conditions in the islands. Shipping services necessarily play an essential part in maintaining the viability of island communities. In recognition of that, the Scottish Office has greatly increased subsidies for shipping services provided by Caledonian MacBrayne, P and O Scottish Ferries and bulk shipping operators from the level of £10.8 million in 1989-90 to £17 million this year. That represents an increase of 57 per cent. over the past five years. In that period, the level of support provided under the tariff rebate subsidy scheme for P and O Scottish Ferries and currently nine coastal bulk cargo carriers has risen from £5.3 million in 1989-90 to £9.8 million this year. That represents an increase of 85 per cent. in provision over the past five years.

It might help the House if I were to explain how the tariff rebate subsidy scheme operates. It operates simply on the basis of providing for reductions in shipping operators' normal commercial tariffs. The bulk shipping operator decides on the tariff that will be set on a normal commercial basis for the carriage of a particular cargo. If the cargo and destination are eligible for subsidy under the scheme, he will then reduce the commercial tariff by a percentage decided by the Scottish Office. The Scottish Office then pays subsidy to the shipping operator to compensate for the revenue forgone by tariff reductions. Subsidy of that type directly benefits the islands by reducing the cost of importing essential commodities and of exporting economically important island produce.

The subsidy is not a direct subsidy to shipping operators, although without such support the shipping services could not be provided at a cost affordable to customers in the highlands and islands. The main commodities covered by the scheme are coal, fertiliser, building materials, foodstuffs, animal feeds and, as the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute suggested, timber. Subvention rates on the west coast are 40 per cent. for shipments to the islands and 30 per cent. for island exports.

At present under the scheme, we support P and O Scottish Ferries and nine coastal freight carriers, including Glenlight Shipping Ltd. Glenlight is one of five coastal freight shippers operating on the west coast of Scotland that receive support. It is necessary, in discussing the importance of Glenlight's shipping services, to recognise that Glenlight is only one of five coastal freight carriers operating off the west coast.

It is also necessary to recognise that probably 10 times as much freight is carried by commercial vehicles travelling on Caledonian MacBrayne's ferries as is carried by the five bulk shippers operating on the west coast. In recent years there has been on the west coast, with the introduction of modern roll-on/roll-off ferries, a progressive transfer of freight from coastal bulk cargo carriers to roll-on/roll-off ferries. That is a pattern of change that has applied all over the world where roll-on/roll-off ferries capable of carrying commercial vehicles have been introduced.

One of the misleading impressions currently held about Glenlight is that the company's freight services on the west coast are in some sense unique and essential. That is clearly incorrect in the circumstances when there are four other coastal freight carriers providing similar services in the same areas, as well as Caledonian MacBrayne's ferries already carrying approximately 90 per cent. of all freight carried by sea.

Another misleading assumption that has been made is that the withdrawal of one particular company's freight services would necessarily cause a great increase in commercial vehicle traffic on roads in the islands. I have considerable difficulty with that argument. At the moment freight to the islands, such as coal, fertiliser, building materials and foodstuffs, is carried either by bulk shippers or by commercial vehicles on ferries. On the islands, those commodities have to be distributed by commercial vehicles, however they may have been carried to the islands. Therefore, the withdrawal by one company of bulk shipping services would be unlikely to affect substantially either the total volume of freight traffic to the islands or the pattern of distribution by commercial vehicles on the islands.

A third misguided assumption that has been made about the possible withdrawal of Glenlight from operating in the Highlands and Islands Enterprise area is that it would lead to the transport of commodities in smaller amounts by commercial vehicles, and hence to higher costs for carriers and residents of the islands. That in turn would lead to serious economic problems for the islands. As I have already said, four other bulk cargo carriers besides Glenlight operate, all of them receiving financial assistance through the scheme. There is also evidence of considerable excess carrying capacity in the coastal freight market.

In the event of Glenlight's withdrawal, the likely outcome is that one or more of the other bulk shipping operators would carry the cargoes previously shipped by Glenlight, at similar cost.

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): I hope that the Minister will get more positive. Will he confirm that the

gist of his remarks so far is to suggest that we do not need Glenlight, and that the Government are happy to watch the market operate and then see the company withdraw from providing a valuable service to the islands?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman does not do himself justice. I have made it absolutely clear that large subsidies have been and are being given through the tariff rebate subsidy, which has been greatly increased in recent years. Moreover, there must be a level playing field for all bulk carriers in the islands.

I come now to the heart of the case presented by the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute. Since 1991, Glenlight Shipping Ltd. has made a number of representations to the Scottish Office seeking additional assistance under the scheme. The Department took a number of steps within the scope of the scheme to provide the company with additional assistance. First, the tariff rebate subsidy was restored in 1992 for shipments of timber from remote mainland locations, and the TRS rate for carriage of timber was increased to 40 per cent.

Secondly, Glenlight's entitlement to TRS assistance was increased from £245,000 in 1992-93 to £350,000 in 1993-94 in the light of higher traffic levels forecast by the company.

Thirdly, Glenlight was paid a revenue grant of £200,000 in 1992-93, in addition to TRS assistance totalling nearly £247,000, partly to meet the operating loss incurred that year. The additional assistance given as revenue grant in 1992-93 was made available, exceptionally, in recognition of the company's development costs incurred in introducing a specialised tug and barge system for the transport of roundwood logs from remote locations.

Fourthly, the Scottish Office agreed, pending consideration of the company's recent application for additional assistance this year, to meet all eligible TRS claims for November and December in excess of Glenlight's cap level of £350,000 for this year. Officials have had several meetings with the company's directors in 1992 and 1993 to discuss the company's financial difficulties. It has been made repeatedly clear to the company that no commitment can be given to any long-term change in the arrangements in advance of the conclusion of the review of shipping subsidies schemes which is now taking place. But we have already provided the additional assistance that I have described to help the company to continue providing services on the west coast this year.

Although the review is unlikely to be concluded before March next year, Glenlight Shipping has demanded an answer early in December this year to its request for an increase in assistance this year, from £350,000 to £500,000, and a revenue deficit grant of £625,000—taken together, a sum in excess of £1 million. This assistance is being sought in the present financial year alone. It represents a large amount of funding being demanded by just one bulk shipping operator in the scheme. Also, the demand for revenue deficit grant represents a sort of assistance, different from tariff rebate subsidy, which no other bulk shipping operator receives under the scheme.

In considering Glenlight's case we have to take careful account of the effect on other operators in the scheme, and ensure a level playing field. It would be wrong of the Scottish Office to take any action that would distort competition among shipping operators. Nevertheless, in view of Glenlight's immediate concern about its financial position, the Scottish Office's accounting services unit carried out an investigation into the company's financial and trading position—an investigation recently concluded. It is now urgently considering Glenlight's request for assistance in the light of the accountancy services report, and we expect to decide on the matter in the very near future.

I hope that I have convinced hon. Members that the Scottish Office remains absolutely committed to providing the funding support for shipping services that is necessary to maintain and improve economic and social conditions in the islands. This is evidenced by the wide-ranging review that we are undertaking. I also assure hon. Members that the most careful and urgent consideration is being given to the particular concerns of Glenlight Shipping. However, that consideration must take into account the need for equitable treatment of all shipping operators supported by the scheme. It cannot involve any major change to the present subsidy arrangements in advance of the outcome of the current shipping subsidies review.

That review provides the context in which Glenlight must be considered, and is examining the present arrangements under which financial assistance is being provided for shipping services to Orkney, Shetland and the islands off the west coast of Scotland. We shall also review the options for the future organisation and structure of CalMac, including the scope for introducing private sector participation in the provision of CalMac's services.

The review's main objective is to establish whether it is possible to improve the existing arrangements for providing financial support for shipping services in ways that are consistent with safeguarding the interests of island residents. Achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in the targeting of subsidies, and hence in the delivery of shipping services, would provide better services for existing users. The study is being carried out by KPMG Management Consultants, which will report to the Scottish Office in the first quarter of next year, and thereafter we shall carefully consider the consultants' findings and recommendations before deciding on action.

I assure hon. Members that the tariff rebate subsidy scheme as it applies to Orkney and Shetland services and to bulk shipping services on the west coast of Scotland is a major element of the review.

Before saying more about Glenlight's specific circumstances, I should like to mention the recent BBC "Focal Point" programme which dealt with Glenlight's present difficulties. I have seldom come across a more misleading and incomplete analysis of an important matter. The programme wholly ignored the fact that as well as Glenlight there are at least four other bulk shipping operators providing services on the west coast. It suggested, in my view erroneously, that the reduction in bulk freight services would lead to more traffic on island roads, and it made scaremongering references to the possibility of increased transport costs for bulk freight.

We shall look at the case with the utmost care, come to a decision as soon as possible, and inform the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute as soon as we have formed a view. In the long term, the consultants' terms of reference are to review all aspects of the present tariff rebate subsidy scheme with respect to shipping services and bulk shipping services on the west coast; all operations of the present deficit grant subsidy system with respect to CalMac; to examine a range of options for the possible introduction of private sector participation, which I have mentioned; and to make recommendations about future shipping subsidies.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

The consultants are making steady progress with the study. They have had wide-ranging discussions with the shipping companies, local authorities, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, local enterprise companies, users of the services and other interested parties. They have gathered a wide range of material on the schemes and will shortly embark on their examination of options for improving the current arrangements.

I assure the hon. Lady that the tariff rebate subsidy scheme for west coast operators will be carefully studied along with all other aspects of the terms of reference of this important study. We wish to be in the best possible position to take fully informed decisions about the best means of securing the future of the shipping services that are necessary to ensure the social and economic well-being of the islands. We intend the review to examine fully the causes of problems experienced by operators such as Glenlight and, in the light of that examination, to recommend any changes thought to be necessary.

We shall study with the utmost care the remarks tonight of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute before final decisions on the matter are made.

Mr. McLeish: We need the report.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have said that the report is due next year.

Glenlight wants a decision on this matter as soon as possible. I shall consider with the greatest care what the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute has said. However, I hope that she will appreciate that one of the subsidies that Glenlight is asking for is not similar to any that has been offered hitherto. That is a point that I am bound to make in this debate, but we shall consider carefully all that the hon. Lady has said tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 1 December 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Right to Buy

1. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council tenants have now taken advantage of the Government's right-to-buy policy.

The Minister for Housing, Inner Cities and Construction (Sir George Young): More than 1·5 million public sector tenants have bought their homes since 1979, of whom 1,140,000 have bought under the right to buy.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the extension of home ownership has been one of the great developments of recent times? Will he press forward with his large-scale voluntary transfer initiative and look sympathetically at the application from Castle Point borough council, under that initiative, to transfer the whole of its small estate of council houses to the private sector, where the tenants will be well served?

Sir George Young: On the first point, I can confirm that introducing the right to buy has been one of our party's greatest achievements—so great that others have been obliged to copy it. On the second point, large-scale voluntary transfers bring real benefits to tenants and local authorities. We have received 14 applications for next year's programme, including the one from my hon. Friend's local authority. I am looking at the applications at the moment and expect to announce next year's programme in mid-December.

Mr. Betts: Would the Minister be surprised to learn that I was informed by a major building society yesterday that it had not yet received a single inquiry about the Government's rent-to-mortgage scheme? Is it not time that the Government set aside such gimmicks, which do nothing for the provision of social housing? Should not the Government concentrate on putting resources into the social housing sector, rather than making cuts of £300 million to the Housing Corporation, which we heard about yesterday, which will destroy the opportunities for homeless families and lead to the withdrawal of funding by major institutions because they do not believe that schemes will be viable on that basis in the future?

Sir George Young: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, he may regret calling the rent-to-mortgage scheme a gimmick. It brings home ownership within the reach of those local authority tenants not on housing benefit. All the surveys that we have carried out indicate that such tenants would like to be home owners, and the scheme brings it within their reach. As with the right to buy, the Labour party will be obliged to do a U-turn on the rent-to-mortgage scheme and introduce it as part of its election manifesto. The rent-to-mortgage scheme only came on stream in early November, so it does not surprise me that the particular building society that the hon. Gentleman mentioned has not processed an application. The large majority of council tenants will find the scheme attractive.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, we will more than honour the undertaking that we gave in our manifesto commitment to provide at least 150,000 new homes through the Housing Corporation. That commitment will be exceeded by approximately 20,000.

Mr. Whittingdale: Is my right hon. Friend aware that local authorities in Essex are leading the way in taking advantage of the large-scale voluntary transfer scheme? I hope that, in addition to looking favourably at the application from the local council of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), he will approve the application that he will shortly be receiving from Maldon district council in my constituency.

Sir George Young: The assertion that Essex leads the way in this area was challenged by a number of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench who come from Suffolk, where there have been a number of successful large-scale voluntary transfers. I will look sympathetically at the application made by my hon. Friend's local authority. As I have said, I shall come to a decision on next year's programme in the middle of this month.

Mr. Pike: The Labour party has always been in favour of extending the advantages of home ownership to as many people as possible—*[Interruption.]*—as the record of the 1964-70 Labour Government shows. Does the Minister accept that many people who are buying their council houses believe that it would be right and sensible for their local authorities to be able to use those capital receipts for housing purposes? Why are the Government now stopping the use of those capital receipts?

Sir George Young: I can only admire the courage of the hon. Gentleman's assertion. Many of us were in the House between 1979 and 1983, when the right-to-buy legislation went through. The hon. Gentleman's party fought it tooth and nail.

The assertion that the Labour party has always nurtured an ambition to bring home ownership within the reach of more people bears no relation to the facts. It so happens that I have with me an article from *Roof* magazine, giving the views of a younger hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), expressed in 1981. The article is entitled "My Vision for Housing". The hon. Gentleman's first vision was expressed thus:

"Repeal the law which allows tenants to buy their council houses."

Charter Markets

2. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in response to his consultative paper on charter markets.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): We have received a variety of representations both for and against our proposals and are carefully considering whether to introduce legislation to remove from local authorities the right to object to the establishment of new markets within the common law distance of 6⅔ miles.

Sir Michael Neubert: Is my hon. Friend aware that a proposal in the name of competition to abolish without compensation the centuries-old charter rights of markets such as Romford market in my constituency while leaving intact the rights of private market operators would lack a certain conviction? Does not the rapid growth of unregulated temporary markets and car boot sales now provide a major outlet for the sale of stolen property? Is not that a much greater threat to fair competition, and should not dealing with it be the Government's priority?

Mr. Baldry: I think that there has been something of a misunderstanding. It is being suggested that the proposals would in some way remove such markets, which certainly is not the case: local authorities would continue to own and operate them. All that we are considering removing is the arbitrary power of local authorities to exercise a monopoly right over any rival operator who seeks to bring new trade to an area. I have no doubt that traditional markets that have stood the test of time over the centuries will continue to do so, and to compete with the best.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Does the Minister accept that the vast majority of local authorities oppose the revocation of charter rights? Will he confirm that he has received many representations from people who trade at local authority markets, and that those people are opposed to the revocation? As there is no evidence that local authority charter rights act against the public interest, will the Minister ensure that deregulation does not include their revocation?

Mr. Baldry: It is worth recalling that many local authorities—by my reckoning, well over 150—have no such market rights, but they seem to manage perfectly well using their planning powers. It is also interesting to hear Labour Members defending ancient privileges granted by the Crown.

Water Charges (South-west)

3. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the relative level of water charges in the south-west.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Tim Yeo): Water prices are a matter for the Director General of Water Services. However, the Government are aware that South West Water's charges for water and sewerage are among the highest in the country, and have been in discussion with the company and others about ways in which prices can be restrained.

Mr. Nicholls: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Will he acknowledge the real feelings of outrage that I, with other west country Conservative Members, have been expressing for the past three years about the level of water charges? Will he give an assurance that he will continue his efforts—particularly in any European context—to ensure that the burdens imposed on west country people are not greater than those people can bear?

Mr. Yeo: I am happy to give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance to that effect. I have been deeply impressed by his long-standing, determined and realistic approach to minimising the costs of providing consumers throughout the south-west with higher water standards. He and other Conservative Members from the west country were making a constructive contribution to this debate long before the Liberal party jumped on the bandwagon. I only regret that their realism is not shared by the Liberal party. I am, however, glad to be able to assure the right hon. Member for Berwick upon Tweed (Mr. Beith)—who, unfortunately, is not present—that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State resisted the demand made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), at a recent meeting at the Department of the Environment, for the costs of improving water around the south-western coast to be borne by constituents in Berwick upon Tweed.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister confirm comments made by the Secretary of State at a private meeting with the Liberal Democrats in the past week that he is considering ending the present extremely unfair water rate system and replacing it with another means of payment possibly, as we have suggested, based on the council tax? If so, will that system include discounts for those living alone and those on low incomes as we have proposed?

Mr. Yeo: It is a pity that the privacy of the meeting was not recognised by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, who immediately spoke to the press. The account that they gave to the press was inaccurate in almost every particular. While my right hon. Friend said that he would examine any possibility, he gave no assurance of the sort that has been described. It is clear that the Liberal Democrats are converting hypocrisy into an art form. The stench that the issue is causing is wafting beyond the Chamber to the homes of people throughout the south-west. First, the Liberal Democrats proclaimed a commitment to cutting green house gases and followed it with an absolute refusal to support any measure designed to achieve that. Now, even more fragrantly, they are demanding cleaner water and lower prices in the same breath.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of the reply, I shall seek a further opportunity to raise the issue.

Mr. Yeo: I shall be only too happy to debate the matter in detail with the Liberal Democrats——

Madam Speaker: But not now.

Pollution

4. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to meet his EC counterparts to discuss pollution.

Mr. Yeo: I am attending the Environment Council tomorrow and Friday, when I expect to discuss a wide range of environmental matters.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government will honour their commitment to ratify the climate change convention soon, even if other European Community members fail to do so?

Mr. Yeo: I am very hopeful that discussions at this week's Council will enable those countries at present obsessed with forcing a carbon energy tax on the European Union to overcome their difficulties and allow joint ratification to take place. If not, Britain will certainly honour its commitment to ratify the climate change convention before 31 December.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: When the Minister meets his EC counterparts, will he make them aware of the terrible pollution problems in Belfast as a result of coal-burning appliances?

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter and I am certainly ready to discuss it in the EC. I am glad to say that positive progress been made recently in Geneva in the sulphur-burning emission negotiations and I am confident that an agreement will be reached on terms satisfactory to this country and other countries in the next few days.

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is currently confusion in the EC about the definition of waste and that this is frustrating the work of many pollution-controlling and recycling businesses? I know that my hon. Friend is anxious to find a cost-effective way to clean up the environment and keep it clean. Will he continue to press for a more realistic definition of waste which identifies harmful material to be discarded and material to be reclaimed that can be successfully reused?

Mr. Yeo: I know of my hon. Friend's close interest in the subject. He has been to see me to discuss it recently. The definition of waste is a complex matter, as one man's waste may be another man's raw material and demand for recycled material depends on the state of the market and prices being held for recycled material at any time. I take note of my hon. Friend's comments.

We are wrestling with the complex task of reconciling our existing laws with the requirements of certain EC directives. In that context, I was glad to announce recently that we shall be introducing a waste management licensing system on 1 May next year.

Mr. George Howarth: Are not the Government seeking to weaken or repeal at least three important EC directives—on nitrates in drinking water, on sewage in bathing water and on nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere —and is not the cause of that nothing to do with any failure on the part of the directives but a failure on the part of the Government? On at least two occasions, they have been taken to court and lost cases arising out of those directives. Instead of wriggling out of their responsibilities, when will the Government face up to their responsibilities and clean up their act?

Mr. Yeo: In welcoming the hon. Gentleman to his new position, I express the hope that by the next Environment Question Time he will be better informed about the subject that he has raised. Our position on the drinking water directive is driven by two considerations. The first is the proper application of the subsidiarity principle which, if rigorously applied, would mean that there would be no need for a directive on drinking water. Secondly, given that we are trying to improve the drinking water directive, we intend to apply the latest scientific research results produced by the World Health Organisation. That is the only point of difference between us and the EC at present.

On nitrates—I am sorry, nitrogen—*[Interruption.]* I am getting the facts right: I was about to read them out. The fact is that the United Kingdom record compares remarkably well with that of the rest of the Community. In the period from 1988 to 1992, the number of infraction referrals in each member state was: Italy 12, Belgium 11, Germany 8, France 5, Greece 4, Netherlands 3, Luxembourg 2 and the United Kingdom 1. On that criterion, it appears that Britain has an exemplary record in the Community.

Energy Conservation

5. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department is giving towards the introduction of energy conservation in domestic households.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was able to announce yesterday an extra £35 million a year for the home energy efficiency scheme, which will bring the total amount provided through similar organisations to more than £70 million.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that the Government's energy efficiency and conservation schemes have been better than those of any previous Government and that the current one is the best ever? Will he confirm that some 500,000 homes are now eligible to receive benefits under the scheme and that that is good news for large numbers of pensioners and disabled people and for some 1,500 people who will find jobs as a result?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to praise the Government's record. Perhaps through a slip of the tongue he said that 500,000 homes were eligible. In fact, 500,000 homes will have the work completed in any one year. About 4 million homes will be eligible. The scheme will mean that any pensioner who has concerns about insulation will be able to seek support. It is a remarkable achievement and it bears considerable advantage over any achievement of any previous Government.

Dr. Lynne Jones: As the Secretary of State has confirmed, it will take at least 10 years to insulate the 5 million or 6 million homes that require such insulation. Has he done any work to estimate the length of time that it would take to bring homes up to the standard of heating and insulation that obtains in countries such as Sweden and Canada, which do not have the large number of excess deaths of elderly people in winter?

Mr. Gummer: I am surprised that the hon. Lady asks that question, as we are spending in real terms 17 times what the Labour Government spent in its last year. She should not try to mix the figures. She might also try to remember that there is a distinction between homes that are eligible and homes that need action. Obviously, many pensioners' homes have already had insulation work done to them or are already suitably insulated. It would be a

great pleasure for the people of Britain if occasionally the hon. Lady cheered when things were done well instead of constantly whingeing on.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend will have received the report of the Environment Select Committee on energy conservation published on Friday. We look forward to a response from the Government in due course. In the meantime, I welcome the doubling of the home energy efficiency scheme yesterday and the extension of its scope and, before that, the abolition of the client contribution. That was a terrific achievement. Does he agree, however, that the complacency of many better-off people and their failure to respond to market signals and the national commitment to the environment are a disgrace? Would we not be better educating them into improving their own performance?

Mr. Gummer: I must point out to my hon. Friend that the energy saving campaign that we have just introduced has been one of the most successful Government campaigns ever. It is one of the top 20 in recall factors, thereby showing itself to be a very effective advertising campaign to do precisely what my hon. Friend says. I hope that my hon. Friend will also agree that those parties represented here—particularly the Liberals, who always talk about taxation to deal with the overuse of energy—should stop being hypocritical and support the tax system, as it will reduce the overuse of energy while giving proper support to those who cannot afford it.

Mr. Chris Smith: The additional resources announced yesterday for the home energy efficiency scheme are of course welcome, but does the Secretary of State not realise that the Chancellor is devoting less than 1 per cent. of Exchequer revenue from VAT on fuel to the addition that was announced? Does the Secretary of State not realise that the HEES is very limited in the help that it gives? For example, it does nothing about cavity wall insulation. Moreover, at the same time as he trumpets that achievement, he has cut the green house programme by £45 million in the past year. And while we are at it, why do the Government not start by putting their own house in order? Is he aware that in the past year the Department of Trade and Industry increased its energy use by 24 per cent. and the Cabinet Office by 10 per cent?

Mr. Gummer: I think that it would have been more accurate if the hon. Gentleman had read out the whole list. He would then have seen that we are well on course for a 15 per cent. reduction overall and that green Ministers in each Department are committed to that—*[Interruption.]* The sad thing about Labour Members is that they are only interested in green matters when they think that they can win a vote or two. They are not prepared to pay the cost. The hon. Gentleman is in no position to talk about the amount of money that has been spent on energy efficiency when, as I mentioned, we have spent 17 times as much as the Labour Government did. The Chancellor is spending a very high proportion of the intake from VAT on helping those pensioners and others particularly affected by the cost of the scheme. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on social security, said recently that the Government should add to pensions to take account of VAT on fuel and that the Labour party

"could do it with an extra 50p on pensions."

That is precisely what we have done, and the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) should have the courtesy to thank us for it.

Local Government Reorganisation

6. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the process of local government reorganisation in England.

The Minister for Local Government and Planning (Mr. David Curry): The process for reviews of local government structure in England is set out in the revised guidance to the commission which was published on 22 November.

Mr. Nicholson: I hope that none of the threatened reorganisations will impede local authorities in pursuing the opportunities for energy conservation, as indicated in the Secretary of State's earlier reply. Apart from the abolition of Avon, which I think we all welcome, is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Somerset have a low level of interest in, and commitment to, revolution in administration in local government, apart from certain contrived write-ins? Will he therefore be cautious in pursuing that matter and listen carefully to the views that hon. Members in the areas affected make to him in due course?

Mr. Curry: I will certainly listen to the views of hon. Members. The fact that people have a low interest in something does not mean that it is not important to them. Local government spends £40 billion or £60 billion of taxpayers' money a year, whichever way one defines it, and is the form of government most in contact with people where delivery of service is concerned. It matters to people that they get local government which is effective, can be identified and is organised as rationally as possible. We seek to achieve that by the changes.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Minister aware of the anger in Darlington at his decision to overturn the Local Government Commission's recommendation for a unitary tier authority in the town? Does he realise that his decision rides roughshod over the overwhelming public consensus in Darlington, which backs the commission? Why did he not exempt Darlington from any further review, particularly as the commission's recommendation is in line with his new ministerial policy guidelines? Will he agree at least to meet an all-party delegation from Darlington to hear the concerns of local residents and to act on them?

Mr. Curry: If the recommendation is in line with the new guidance, I have no doubt that when the commission puts forward its revised proposal, it is likely to come up with something suitable for Darlington. That would be a sensible solution. I will meet anybody to discuss the matter, so long as people recognise that the commission's job is to make proposals, which we must then judge. I will not sit down and draw lines on a map, because that is not my job.

Mr. Dover: Does my hon. Friend accept that in Lancashire we see no need to start carving up existing boroughs and districts? Is it not in order for two or three to group together to share services?

Mr. Curry: We have made it clear that we do not think that existing districts will become unitary councils on their

own boundaries unless there are circumstances that make that common sense. We are looking for building blocks that will create effective and convenient local government, and district councils are clearly one of those building blocks. I have been speaking to district and county councils, and one of my arguments is that they should get to work locally and spend a little energy on making schemes that they think will work and be effective and that can be the starting point of the commission's deliberations. That is a sensible point from which to start.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister accept that there is something fishy going on with this local government review? He has set up this commission, apparently to give independent advice. In Derbyshire, it makes proposals; some Tory Members of Parliament do not like them, so they are changed. Most of the population want the status quo. Banham makes further proposals and now Ministers, including the Secretary of State, are telling him to have a third go. They keep changing the goalposts in Derbyshire just because they cannot get the right political result. The Minister wants those commissioners to act as Tory political apparatchiks. They should resign and show up the Minister, because he will not.

Mr. Curry: Although I am an optimist, the idea that the unitary authority created in Derbyshire from the three Labour authorities would be likely to fall imminently to the Conservatives is more than optimistic. Any idea that this is political gerrymandering is rubbish. We sent back the proposals because we had received many representations, which Sir John Banham had reported to us. Because the guidance had changed, the authorities wished to have their future considered in the light of the same guidance as will be used with every other authority. We have done that. If the commission wishes to come back and make a similar recommendation, it is at liberty to do so.

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend accept that many people in Staffordshire are deeply worried about the way in which the Local Government Commission has been operating in the light of the Derbyshire decision? I congratulate him on referring the matter back, for sound reasons. Because the Under-Secretary who replied to Question 2 did not answer the point about car boot sales in relation to the division of functions within local authorities, will my hon. Friend accept that there is deep disquiet about car boot sales, for health and safety reasons and because there are worries about criminal activities?

Mr. Curry: I note what my hon. Friend says. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary said in his answer, the Government are examining whether it makes sense to remove what most people regard as an archaic rule. The point of having a consultation is to hear what people say, and we are conscious that there is widespread concern about car boot sales. We are looking hard to see what protection local authorities have and what initiatives they can take. If we conclude that that is not adequate, we shall have to change it or look carefully at proposals. I can give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Minister happy with the current arrangements for public consultation, given that those arrangements seem to vary from place to place?

Mr. Curry: The commission's job is to produce proposals that will achieve effective and convenient local government. How the commission chooses to judge public opinion is something for it to decide, as is the internal management of the process.

The hon. Gentleman will be wise enough to know that often the answer to a question is the question one puts to begin with. In some circumstances, people fell back on a two-tier system because they did not like the first option they were given. We have asked local authorities and other people in the communities to get together to provide sensible schemes. By doing so, we want to create the circumstances in which there is a good starting point for the commission to come up with a scheme that reflects local opinion and delivers effective local government. All hon. Members have an interest in that.

Mr. Cormack: Will my hon. Friend give a cast-iron guarantee that no district council will be forced into a merger against its will and against the will of the people? Will he also confirm that there is no absolute minimum size for a unitary authority?

Mr. Curry: The Government have never said that there is a minimum or a maximum size for the new shape of local government. Flexibility must be retained by looking at local circumstances. Therefore, it would be perfectly silly to issue an arbitrary guideline which might not be sensible in the light of the particular conditions which prevail.

Mr. Straw: Is it not the truth that what could and should have been a judicious and impartial review of local government is being undermined by a series of inconsistent proposals from Sir John Banham and by incompetence and meddling by Ministers? Does not the Minister understand that having not one, not two but three reviews in Derbyshire and Durham has wasted the time and the money of local communities? Does he accept that that has also—quite unreasonably—destablised the staffs who were affected?

The review was only necessary to put right the effects of the 1972 reorganisation, for which the Secretary of State personally voted and which the Labour party correctly opposed. Will the Minister now confirm that the full cost of the review will be borne by the Exchequer and that local communities will not be forced to pay twice over for Conservative party mistakes and for the mess?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman has characteristically got hold of the wrong end of the stick. There have not been three reviews. The preliminary guidance clearly stated that the commission was to come up with preliminary conclusions, and later it was to come up with final conclusions; the Government then had the responsibility to accept the proposals, modify them or refer them back to commission. We have done nothing that was not spelled out clearly in the rules at the beginning of the procedure.

We have asked the commission to consider the matter again, partly because Sir John Banham suggested it and partly because people in the communities who saw that the guidelines had changed had said that there should be coherence across the whole review. We are seeking to achieve that.

Mrs. Gillan: Is my hon. Friend aware that my local county council of Buckinghamshire is anxious about the abbreviation of one week in the review period which has been made? The county council and the local district councils are working towards an agreed solution, which is preferable in all cases, and they are anxious that the time

has been taken out arbitrarily. Even at this late stage, will my hon. Friend examine the timetable and perhaps bring some influence to bear on it to reinstate the four-week period?

Mr. Curry: We accelerated the programme because everyone asked us to do so. People wished to have the uncertainty concluded.

I know that Buckinghamshire is a sensible part of world. If local people set about the task with a will, and if they are able to come up with the basics for a scheme, the commission will take a great deal of notice. The Government did what people wanted, but I have no doubt that sensible representations from Buckinghamshire to the commission would meet with an understanding reply.

Local Government Grant Allocation

7. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made as to the proportion of local authorities which will *(a)* raise council tax rates and *(b)* introduce cuts in local government services following the grant allocation for 1994-95.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to announce his detailed proposals for the local government finance settlement very shortly.

Mr. Cohen: Were not huge public spending cuts announced in the Budget? Does that mean that there will be big council cuts and big council tax rises during the next three years? Has not the Secretary of State failed to defend his Department and shown himself to be the wimp of the Cabinet, and should not he go?

Mr. Curry: One thing which is always endearing about the hon. Gentleman is his predictability. Council taxes and services depend on the decisions taken by local councils. That depends on their reserves, collection of deficit, tax base and collection rate. What we are hearing now, before anybody knows the facts, is the old Labour litany that this will be a catastrophe. I recall that we heard that about Birmingham last year, yet no catastrophe overtook it, except that it, apparently, spent a lot of money building pyramids.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend reflect on the announcement that local authority capping will be kept on this year? As, clearly, many electors up and down the country have been foolish in voting in Liberal Democrat and Labour councils, does my hon. Friend agree that they should get what they voted for and take the blame for having increased the council tax, rather than pass the blame back to the Government for being prudent, unlike those councils?

Mr. Curry: The Government have experience of no controls on local government expenditure and we saw some outrageous increases. Because of that and because of a need to curb public expenditure generally—local government expenditure is a large proportion of the total pool—we think it sensible and prudent to maintain those controls on councils. That does not mean that there is not reasonable discretion for local authorities to determine their priorities. Certainly, there is enough discretion for people to make their choice at the ballot box.

Ministerial Visits

8. **Mr. Benton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. Gummer: I have visited 45 towns and cities since my appointment, including Manchester, York, Coventry, Birmingham, Leicester, Cambridge, Liverpool, Portsmouth, Nottingham, Derby, Gloucester, Bristol, Rochester and Peterborough.

Mr. Benton: I note that the Secretary of State made no reference to Sefton on Merseyside. Is he aware that in my local authority, Sefton metropolitan borough council, the housing waiting list is now more than 8,000 and that in my constituency of Bootle applicants have to wait for about three years before they are first considered for housing? The hon. Members for Southport (Mr. Banks) and for Crosby (Sir M. Thornton) will testify that it takes about seven years in other parts of Sefton before housing applicants are considered for housing.

Will the Secretary of State please admit to the House that this problem does not just pertain to my part of the world and that we face a national housing crisis? Will he recognise the difficulty? Will he tell the House what he proposes to do about it, particularly in the light of yesterday's statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which he announced further cuts in public spending?

Mr. Gummer: Two of my hon. Friends have visited Sefton. Sefton has one city challenge scheme, which is a good example of local partnership, and I notice that that gives a particular advantage to Bootle. Therefore, a great deal is being done in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world. It remains true to say that we will more than meet our election pledges on building social housing. What is more important perhaps is that we have already announced new means of ensuring opportunities for people who want to move out of local authority housing that has become too large for them in order to leave the space for others who need it. I hope that that scheme will benefit the hon. Gentleman's part of the world. A considerable sum is still going into housing. I am happy to look personally at the particular points that the hon. Gentleman raises about Sefton.

Mr. John Marshall: My right hon. Friend was not able to include the London borough of Barnet among those towns and cities that he has visited. Does he accept that he would be welcome to come to Barnet, especially if the standard spending assessment that he announces takes full account of the facts that we educate many children from refugee families and that we have a large elderly population?

Mr. Gummer: As I have been to a large number of London boroughs and often visit Barnet privately, I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's comment. It is true to say that most Conservative-controlled boroughs in London educate many people from neighbouring Labour boroughs —including the children of some Labour Members who prefer their children not to be educated by a Labour council.

Mr. Vaz: It is a great pity that the Secretary of State's visits to our cities and urban areas have not given him a proper and clear insight into the problems that they face.

Why does he not have the courage to admit that the Government simply do not have a clear, coherent or credible policy for dealing with our cities and urban areas? Why has he failed to defend his Department's budget against the Treasury cuts for local government which were announced yesterday? By how much more is he increasing resources in real terms to our cities as a result of the city pride project? Is that initiative like everything else that he does on the subject—a cheap political gimmick and another municipal gameshow that insults the integrity and intelligence of those who seek to administer local government?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is a little out of date. He spent a lot of time, when we were discussing the setting up of the single unified budget for the great cities of England, telling us that there would not be the money for it. I am pleased to remind him that the £1·4 billion which I announced last year would be available is available this year. That is what we promised that we would deliver and what we have done. The hon. Gentleman first complains that I did not defend the budget; then when I do defend it, he repeats that I did not. He must get the figures right.

The Government have done more than any previous Government for inner cities in Britain. We should be proud of what is happening in our cities. We are improving them through a series of mechanisms, which the Labour party fought tooth and nail. City challenge has been a great success and we shall continue to fight to improve our cities.

Since taking on the job, I have made the cities a priority and shown that we need to revitalise our cities all over the country. We should do that by dealing with the planning system properly and ensuring that the life of our cities enables people not only to live there but to work, take their leisure and shop there.

Urban Policy

9. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on current Government urban policy.

12. **Dr. Berry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on current Government urban policy.

Sir George Young: The Government will continue to support urban regeneration through a range of initiatives, including the single regeneration budget announced by my right hon. Friend on 4 November.

Mr. O'Hara: The Minister will be aware that Sefton may have been awarded city challenge resources, but Knowsley, which neighbours Sefton and has similar problems that are no less severe, was denied the resources, despite an excellent presentation. Will he recognise that the consolation prize of £1 million-worth of urban partnership funding can be seen locally only as a sop when it is accompanied by a rapid rundown in urban programme funding? The authority used to receive that funding at a level of £4·5 million per annum and used it to address strategically a wide range of economic, social and environmental problems. Will the Minister give a commitment to restore urban funding in my borough of Knowsley to such a level and in such a manner that it will be able once again to address its many problems coherently and will not be forced reluctantly to indulge in an annual game of urban funding bingo?

Sir George Young: As the hon. Member knows, the urban programme is being phased out, but alternative opportunities are available to his constituency—for example, we are spending £10 million through estate action to remodel the Lickers Lane estate in Whiston. We are giving help to three local shopping parades—Liverpool road, Leathers lane and Hillside road. The hon. Gentleman's authority has received £20 million in urban programme resources over the past 10 years. Although it may not have been successful with city challenge, there has been a substantial investment in that part of the country by my Department in particular schemes, which I am sure has been of benefit to his constituents.

Dr. Berry: What plans does the Minister have for places like Bristol, where existing Government schemes are coming to an end? It has lost area task force money, it is losing the safer cities project money and it does not have the benefit of assisted area status. How will the proposed Minister for Bristol fit into the plans? Would not a better alternative be to fund properly a democratically elected local council?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman mentions all the things that Bristol does not have, but forgets to mention Bristol development corporation, which has just spent £47 million building a spine road linking the M32 to the A4. It is building a new shopping centre and a new business centre, and is helping to regenerate the whole area around Temple Meads station. For the hon. Gentleman to criticise the failure to win a number of smaller prizes when the area has the real help of that development corporation is to look through the telescope the wrong way.

Mr. Bates: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this year the county of Cleveland will benefit from £100 million from the Government for urban regeneration? Central to that will be the continued excellent work of Teesside development corporation, which has attracted 7,500 jobs since it was established. Does he agree that that success and investment would make Teesside an ideal location for the new headquarters for the Urban Regeneration Agency?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend's note of optimism strikes a much more recognisable tone on behalf of his constituents than do some of the Opposition complaints. It is certainly true that the development corporations in the north-east are transforming prospects and providing a much broader base for the economy and more jobs. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the part that he plays in further pursuing the work of the development corporation in his constituency.

Homelessness

10. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to combat homelessness.

Sir George Young: The figures announced yesterday will mean that more families can move into home ownership, releasing their present local authority or housing association home to homeless families and others in housing need. Some £30 million is being made available to local authorities to run cash incentive schemes; and more Housing Corporation resources will be provided for its successful tenants' incentive scheme. That is good news

for families in housing need, who will benefit from new lettings made available. It is good news for tenants and good news for the housing market.

The Housing Corporation estimates that, with the plans announced yesterday, we will comfortably exceed our target of 153,000 homes funded through the Housing Corporation over the first three years of this Parliament. We now estimate that about 53,000 homes will be completed next year, making a total of 173,000 over the three-year period.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Minister join me in congratulating the Edinburgh churches and other organisations that are arranging a sleep-out for homeless people on Friday in which I will participate? Does he recognise that the vast majority of people who have homes and incomes are appalled by the plight of homeless people and by the fact that the Government have presided over such an alarming increase in the number of homeless people and done so little to help them? What concrete measures does he propose to ensure that young single homeless are properly accommodated?

Sir George Young: It is not the case that homelessness is increasing in England. For the past four quarters, acceptances by local authorities of those who are statutorily homeless has fallen. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that. Fewer and fewer of those accepted as homeless are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. There has been a fall of 41 per cent. over the past 12 months in the number of families in bed and breakfast.

In terms of the single homeless, a substantial number of rough sleepers have been assisted by the Government's rough sleepers initiative in London, and the number sleeping rough on the streets has fallen from about 1,060 three years ago to about 360. I am determined to make further progress and to see that number fall yet further.

Mr. Hendry: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on those policies, which are bringing down homeless statistics for the first time since records began. Can he confirm that there are 800,000 empty properties, representing 13 empty homes for every family in temporary accommodation? The Government are right to target resources on bringing those homes back into use, and is not that exactly what my right hon. Friend is doing?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that there are 800,000 empty properties. He is also right to promote schemes to bring those properties back into action, such as, for example, the housing association as managing agent scheme. Everybody who wants to bring decent homes within the reach of more people should do all that he can to encourage such schemes to get off the ground so that those homes can generate income for their owners and provide decent shelter for those who might otherwise be in unsatisfactory accommodation.

Mr. Battle: Do not the Minister's replies demonstrate a shameful complacency? Everyone except the Government seems to agree that 300,000 new homes are needed in the next three years. Is the Minister aware that today, more than 200 homes will be repossessed, more than 500 families will be registered as officially homeless, more than 60,000 families are trapped in temporary accommodation and more than 8,000 will sleep out, not only in London but in towns and cities throughout the country?

Why, then, is the Minister backing a Budget that is hammering down on housing investment, cutting £500 million from housing associations and local councils and effectively, at a stroke, cutting out 10,000 new homes? Would it not be economic common sense to go for housing investment, to use the backlog of local councils' capital receipts to generate jobs in construction and manufacturing and to provide homes to rent that are desperately needed —or will the Minister now tell us that his Government have decided that in our society we shall be scarred by homelessness well into the next century?

Sir George Young: What really matters for those in housing need is not the number of new homes that housing associations built each year but the number of new lettings that housing associations provide. The Government are refocusing the resources of the housing associations into more cost-effective schemes, such as the tenants incentives scheme, shared ownership and do-it-yourself shared ownership. The number of completions next year, at 53,000, is roughly double the number of completions that were achieved in 1991-92. It is not the case that the Housing Corporation will not make a real impact. The Housing Corporation believes that, during the next three year, it will maintain the output that it envisaged completing at the beginning of the year.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that although Conservative Members welcome the reduction in the number of the homeless, Shelter claims that there are more than 2 million homeless people in England?

Sir George Young: A number of figures are bandied around in the housing world. The figure of 2 million homeless people which was produced by Shelter is one of the most absurd figures that I have seen in three years as Housing Minister. Shelter has included in the 2 million figure everyone who is on an assured shorthold. The assured shorthold is now the most common form of letting in the private rented sector. If one were to describe as homeless everyone who had an assured shorthold, one would include many hon. Members.

Air Quality Testing Stations

11. **Dr. Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to increase the number of air quality testing stations and by how many.

Mr. Gummer: My Department published consultation proposals on the development of air quality monitoring on 2 November. Decisions will be reached in the light of responses to that consultation.

Dr. Howells: Can the Secretary of State say why so few testing stations are currently operating and why, given the huge increase in asthma and the links between asthma and vehicle emissions, he does not have immediate plans to build new testing stations to have them operating wherever concentrations of population and traffic coincide?

Mr. Gummer: We have 42 continuous automatic stations. We are spending £4 million a year on that work. Anyone in the country can telephone his or her local number to find out the quality of the air in the place to which he or she wishes to go. That is especially valuable to those who have asthma problems. I have great sympathy with people who have such problems, as I am a former

sufferer. I am, therefore, pleased that we shall have a report by the sub-group investigating that topic. I hope to have that report in 1994 and to consider it in conjunction with the work that we have already done. I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising an important matter, which I shall not forget.

Mr. Spring: My right hon. Friend will be aware that much air pollution comes from the motor car. What plans has my right hon. Friend in place to reduce pollution from that source?

Mr. Gummer: The reduction in pollution that has already occurred because of the move to leadless petrol is a remarkable achievement. That has been extremely helpful and has made a major difference. It is one of the biggest changes that has occurred. Cars now have to have catalytic converters. We are seeking to tighten those arrangements and have been doing so for some time.

The matter is also under review in the European Community. My hon. Friend will know that I visited the motor show to look at the latest developments and I very much hope that we can press motor producers to do more. With that in mind, I spoke to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and I am pleased to say that I have had considerable support from that organisation to do what we all want to do—reduce the effect of pollution in towns.

Mr. Chris Smith: Far from being reduced, did not pollution from nitrogen dioxide in central London rise by 17 per cent. last year alone and is not the number of national monitoring stations for nitrogen dioxide in Britain seven compared with 200 in Germany? Given that one in every seven children suffers from asthma and that the number of sufferers has doubled in the past 10 years, is not the least we can do—and the first step we should take—to improve substantially the monitoring of nitrogen dioxide and air pollution so that we can take action to tackle the problem seriously?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong. Three times as many centres do that already. There are 21 stations monitoring nitrogen dioxide; the hon. Gentleman said that there were seven. The figures we put forward are the facts; the ones he put forward are his hopes. The hon. Gentleman is constantly trying to undermine what the Government are doing. What we are doing is very effective. I have said that I am not sure whether we are doing the job well enough. That is why I issued a consultation paper. I shall consider that consultation paper and act on the facts. If the hon. Gentleman were more willing to acquaint himself with the facts and seek our help on them, we would get much further.

Social Security Uprating

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, I would like to make a statement on social security following from my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget statement.

Spending on social security this year will amount to more than £80 billion. It will increase over the next three years to £83 billion, £88 billion and £92 billion. It is the largest increase of any Department and shows our commitment to the needy, the elderly, sick and disabled people.

Despite the intense pressures on public spending, we will keep our commitment to uprate benefits, keep our pledges to families and the elderly and keep our promise to give extra help with fuel bills.

Although inflation over the past 12 months was low, the cost of uprating all benefits to offset it would have been around £2 billion next year. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor for going beyond that, and providing substantial extra funds to help people with fuel bills.

Next year, that extra help will be worth nearly £400 million, and by the time the full rate of VAT has fed through, the total extra help will run at £1·25 billion a year. Over three years, the total additional help for VAT on fuel amounts to £2·5 billion pounds. That will be a permanent increase in the value of benefits to 15 million people.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor explained that I plan to give everyone on income support except pensioners and disabled people extra help next April before the higher heating bills arrive, so their benefits will be uprated by 3·9 per cent., which is higher than most people in work will receive. A further 2 million people above the income support level, who get housing benefits or familiar credit, will receive a similar increase.

I was also determined to help those who have worked, saved and earned modest pensions, and who normally get no extra help. So, from next April, on top of uprating for inflation, all pensions will be increased by 50p a week for single pensioners and 70p for couples. The following year, extra help for VAT on fuel will be £1 a week for single pensioners and £1·40 for couples. From the third year onwards, that extra help will be as much as £1·40 for a single pensioner and £2 for a couple. All those on widow's benefit, invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance and disability premium will get the same extra help.

In addition, I will increase cold weather payments by 25 per cent. over two years. To help those with high heating bills, the scheme to help insulate homes and improve fuel efficiency will be virtually doubled in value and extended to all pensioners and disabled people.

Yesterday, the Chancellor announced a new national savings pensioners guaranteed income bond which will provide regular monthly payments at a fixed rate of interest.

By any stretch of the imagination, this is a substantial package. It far exceeds what most people expected, and fulfils our promise to help those most affected.

We are determined to maintain proper support for all those whom the welfare state exists to help, but given the relentless growth of spending, we have to make sure that the money is spent to best effect. That is the aim of my long-term review.

My first priority is to make savings which do not affect benefit entitlements. That is why operational costs have been kept within last year's cash limit, despite the extra work load, and why I am intensifying the battle against fraud. I have created a new fraud board to step up prevention, deterrence and detection of fraud. It will be chaired by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security.

I am cracking down on order book fraud. The order book has been redesigned to prevent forgery. We have introduced secure delivery methods to prevent theft, and we are rewarding vigilant Post Office employees who stop false encashment of stolen order books. I am continuing to look at new ways of tackling fraud.

I am also stopping a number of abuses. I shall discourage local authorities paying housing benefit for unnecessarily expensive property. I shall stop councils paying housing benefits to people who entered this country on the express understanding that they would be no burden on public funds. I am also bringing in regulations today to prevent employers from avoiding national insurance by paying their employees in commodities like gold bullion. Those measures should save £500 million over 3 years.

We also need to make sure that benefits concentrate help on those whom Parliament wishes to help. I have been examining the social security system sector by sector. I am now able to introduce a fundamental reform of sickness benefits. The number of people on statutory sick pay, sickness benefit and invalidity benefit has almost doubled since 1979, from just over 1 million to almost 2 million, even though the nation has been getting healthier.

Britain has the second highest level of sick leave of any EC country. The level varies between companies even in the same business. Those differences reflect management's success or failure in motivating employees, caring for their health and monitoring absences. At present, the Government reimburse each firm 80 per cent. of the cost of its statutory sick pay. That largely removes the incentive to reduce sick leave.

From April next year, I propose to abolish reimbursement, except to small employers. Small employers usually have less sick leave but are harder hit by prolonged illness. Therefore, I intend to increase the help to small employers and extend it to more of them.

So far, we have been helping employers whose national insurance bill was £16,000 or less a year. I am raising that limit to £20,000. So far, we have been reimbursing 100 per cent. of statutory sick pay for absences of longer than six weeks. I shall start giving 100 per cent. help after four weeks. That will help an extra 50,000 employers, at a cost of £25 million. The new arrangements will help two thirds of all employers.

At the same time, I am cutting employers' national insurance rates by substantially more than they were spending on statutory sick pay. Indeed, the cut in national insurance will also offset the future extra cost of statutory maternity pay, which employers were expecting to bear without compensation. So employers as a whole will be no worse off. Indeed, their net costs will be reduced by over £100 million a year, and those who respond to the incentive to improve staff health will benefit even more.

There has been a particularly marked increase in the number of people claiming invalidity benefit in recent years. The number on this benefit has more than doubled

in the past 10 years and trebled in the past 15 years. That growth is particularly surprising, given improving health and better health care.

I therefore propose to introduce, from April 1995, a more objective medical test of whether people can work. I am issuing a consultation paper today, copies of which are available in the Vote Office, and I am forming a panel of medical experts and representatives of disabled people. They will be asked to help define what constitutes incapacity to work and how it should be measured.

The new test will apply to new applicants. Those drawing invalidity benefit are already subject to regular review. Under the present test, about 100,000 people each year are found to be fit for work and have their benefit withdrawn.

After April 1995, those on the highest "care" rate of DLA, those with terminal illnesses, those on a list of specified severe or chronic conditions and those currently on invalidity benefit who are by then 58 or over will no longer be subject to any review. But the new test will be used in reviews of other existing claimants. No one who is genuinely unable to work for medical reasons has cause for concern.

I am also simplifying the structure of all sickness benefits for new claimants from April 1995. At present, there are two rates of statutory sick pay. I propose to abolish the lower rate, which means that lower-paid workers will receive the higher rate of benefit, worth an extra £3·70 a week.

I shall also replace sickness and invalidity benefit by a new incapacity benefit that will be payable at three rates—the longer the period of sickness, the higher the rate. The lowest rate will apply during the first 28 weeks; the middle rate for the rest of the first year; and the highest rate after a year.

Those who are incapacitated early in life will receive extra help because they will have had less time to make additional personal provision for ill health. Additional payments will be made to those whose spouses are caring for children or are over 60.

New claimants will no longer be entitled to a state earnings related addition. Incapacity benefit will cease at pension age. Those already drawing invalidity benefit when the new incapacity benefit is introduced will continue to draw their benefit at existing rates and will not be taxed on it. Only those who come on to incapacity benefit from April 1995 will be liable to tax.

I am making a number of valuable changes for sick or disabled people. First, people on incapacity benefit will be free to do up to 16 hours voluntary work without losing their benefit. That will be widely welcomed by potential volunteers, voluntary organisations and those they help.

Secondly, from April 1995, people taking jobs with the help of disability working allowance will automatically qualify for free prescriptions and free dental charges. Thirdly, I am increasing the level of support to Motability, whose help for disabled people is so extensive that it now runs the biggest car fleet in the country. I am making a £1 million increase in the grant to the mobility equipment fund, which adapts vehicles for use by severely disabled people.

Overall, those reforms of sickness benefits will curb their rapidly growing cost; provide a more rational structure of benefits; encourage employers to improve the motivation and health of employees; and concentrate benefit on those genuinely unable to work. I believe that they will command widespread support.

The incapacity benefits are for people who cannot work. I now turn to benefits for people who are capable of work. Clearly, the best answer, wherever possible, is to help people to find jobs, but sometimes the rules lose sight of that aim. We currently have two benefits for the unemployed—unemployment benefit and income support—and they overlap. Some people are entitled to both, many switch between the two, and the benefit levels leapfrog because they are uprated by different indices. This year, single adults on unemployment benefit will get 65p more than on income support; next year, they will get 25p less.

The two benefits cover different periods. Unemployment benefit excludes Sunday; income support includes Sunday. They have different rules, which require different bureaucracies, offices and computer systems. That results in confusion for unemployed people, complexity for staff and expense for taxpayers. It is time for reform.

I propose to replace the two benefits with a new job seeker's allowance, starting in 1996, which will be more clearly focused on helping peole into work. The longer people spend on benefit, the more their motivation and skills decline, and the less chance they have of finding a job.

All unemployed people will be required to enter into a job seeker's agreement at the start of their claim, which will commit them to a plan of action to seek work. We will have a single set of measures for those who fail to take thee necessary steps to seek work, but we will give extra help to those who make the effort to find a job.

The new job seeker's allowance will have a single set of rates. We will provide help for unemployed people and their dependants according to their needs, and this will be paid for as long as they need it. People who have paid national insurance contributions will receive a personal rate for six months, irrespective of their capital or their partners' earnings.

Unemployed people currently cannot get income support if their partners are working for 16 hours or more. That problem emerged as a by-product of improvements in family credit last year. We will retain the current beneficial rules for family credit, but we will restore the limit for partners of unemployed people to 24 hours.

Going back to work can involve extra costs—for example, for clothing and transport. We will be testing a job finder's grant of up to £200 to help people who have not had a job for two years meet those costs. We said in our manifesto that we would do this, and I am pleased that we are now implementing that pledge.

I will also give very significant help to people with family responsibilities who want to return to work. Many people find it unattractive to leave benefit for a low-paid job, especially if they need to pay for child care. I propose to allow families with a child under 11 to offset up to £40 per week of child care costs against their earnings when claiming family credit and related benefits. It will be worth up to £28 a week; it will start next October; and it will be available to couples where both are working or one is incapacitated, and to lone parents. It will cover the cost of registered child minders or nurseries.

The change will give a powerful new incentive for parents to move into work. It will provide help for up to

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

150,000 families, including 50,000 whom we expect to take up work as a direct result of the change. The measure has been widely welcomed.

I am today publishing a White Paper on the equalisation of state pension age at 65. Copies are available in the Vote Office. The difference in state pension age for men and women is the last glaring inequality in our benefit system, and we are committed to phasing it out. It is essential to do so in order to provide a clear framework within which occupational pension schemes can comply with the European Court ruling that requires them to equalise their benefits for men and women.

It is right to equalise at age 65, for three reasons. First, women are increasingly playing a role equal to that of men in the economy. Women live longer, and increasingly expect to be able to work as long as men.

Secondly, people are living longer, healthier lives. As a result, by the year 2030 the number of pensioners will have increased by 50 per cent., and there will be fewer people of working age to support them. At present, there are 3·3 people of working age for each pensioner. That ratio was set to decline to 2·2 to 1 by 2030, but equalising at 65 will improve the future support ratio to a more sustainable 2·7 to 1.

Thirdly, throughout the world countries are equalising upwards or increasing pension age for both sexes. The majority of European Community countries have, or are planning, a state pension age of 65 or higher, and the United States is moving up to a pension age of 67. We cannot afford to reduce our competitiveness by lowering our pension age. Equalising at 65 will eventually reduce the pensions bill by £5 billion: it is the key to ensuring that the state retirement pension remains affordable.

Our proposals contain a number of features that will make this decision widely acceptable. We have given women and employers plenty of time to plan for the future: equalisation will be phased in between 2010 and 2020.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. It is not the custom for a Secretary of State to give way while making a statement.

Mr. Lilley: So women now aged 44 and over will not be affected; only those now aged 38 or under will have a state pension age of 65. Furthermore, the pension entitlements of millions of people—mostly women—will be very significantly enhanced.

We plan to extend home responsibilities protection to the state earnings-related pension scheme. That will enable women—and men—who take time out of the labour market to care for children or disabled people to build full SERPS entitlement in as few as 20 working years. That will be a very substantial benefit, enhancing the value of women's pensions by around £2 billion by the year 2020.

In addition, to help those on low earnings, family credit and disability working allowance will count as earnings in the calculation of pensions. Finally, we are extending the period of flexibility during which people can choose to start drawing their pensions. At present, they can defer drawing retirement pensions for up to five years, and for each year of deferral their pensions will increase by 7·5 per cent. In future, the increase will be 10 per cent., and people will be able to defer for as many years as they like.

The best support for an improved social security system is a vibrant free enterprise economy. That is what creates the wealth to pay for benefits, generates jobs and provides opportunities for people to support themselves. To nurture economic growth, we must curb borrowing and ensure that the social security system does not outstrip or undermine the nation's ability to pay for it.

All the reforms that I have announced are intended to strengthen our welfare state, to adapt it to modern needs and to make it affordable into the next century. I have been able to announce a generous package of help for those most affected by the imposition of VAT on fuel; reforms to concentrate help on those who are genuinely unable to work; incentives for employers to improve the health and motivation of their staff; a more rational structure of help for those seeking work; help for working mothers to cope with child care costs; an equal state pension age; and help for women and the low-paid to build up better pensions in the future. I commend these measures to the House.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): My constituents will of course be grateful for the knowledge that it will be harder to avoid national insurance contributions by taking payment in the form of bullion. I must add, however, that that is not the test that they are likely to apply to either the Budget or the uprating statement.

This Budget endangers what even the most optimistic and bullish commentators have been describing as a fragile recovery. The 1993 Budget represents the biggest tax hike in history, taking £24 billion out of the economy in higher taxes in just over three years. It is, as I am sure Secretary of State recognises, a pay more, get less, Budget in which 95 per cent. of households will lose and yet see cuts in the services and benefits for which they have paid.

It is astonishing that the Minister who styles himself a low-tax advocate is partly responsible for a tax debacle. Half a million people on low incomes have been trawled into the income tax net as a result of the double freeze in personal allowances.

National insurance contributions are rising by 1 per cent.—a tax that will raise £300 million more than a penny on income tax, precisely because it bites at a lower level of income and hits half a million people who are too poor to pay income tax. In return, national insurance benefits are being cut.

There is little to cheer low-income households in the uprating statement. The Minister has done the essential minimum by uprating in line with indexation, but even here, there are hidden barbs of misery for those who look at the fine print.

Why, in the context of the general uprating, has the Minister chosen to cut the value of the severe disabililty premium paid with income support? How can the Chancellor have claimed to give extra help to the disabled on income support to compensate for VAT on fuel—a tax that we know from research hits the severely disabled more than other group?

When the right hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Lilley) has clawed back all that help and more with a cut of 58p to the benefit of a single disabled adult and of £1·16 to the benefit of a severely disabled couple, does he not recognise that the country will see that as mean and unnecessary? Does not the Minister recognise that, despite his remarkable complacency, the VAT compensation scheme is a con?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): What a ridiculous statement.

Mr. Dewar: I shall explain that to the hon. Member for Dover. Simply, the Chancellor's 50p will not meet the extra fuel costs when the VAT bills roll in. The Clarke gap means financial pain for many. Pensioners are already saying, "I'm frightened to put on the fire." That fear will grow as the harsh arithmetic emerges. For poorer families on income support, the 0·4 per cent. uprating is a miserable prospect. Has the Minister seen the research from York university published this month that tested the 0·4 per cent. figure and found that 97 per cent. of a sample of 5,000 households on benefit lost financially?

If Conservative Members are happy with what is to happen will the Secretary of State defend the fact that a married couple on income support with two children under 11 will be struggling to make ends meet from April on £113·05 a week because they will have the princely sum of 45p to deal with VAT costs? Go and ask constituents in that situation whether 45p a week is a generous settlement that will cover additional outlays that they will face.

How does the Secretary of State defend the situation in which a single disabled person over 25, who will receive £65·15 income support a week from April, will get only the Chancellor's 50p? Can he confirm that many thousands of disabled people will get no compensation at all, such as those who are in receipt of the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance? If that is so, how does the Minister explain it?

VAT will cost the average household £1 a week or more in 1994-95 and £1·30 a week if there are children in the family. Government figures make that clear. In the weeks ahead, the message that Back Benchers will get from pensioners in the country is that 50p is not enough—and they will be right. Ministers cannot buy off the old and cold for 50p.

The disabled seem to be remarkably singled out as Budget losers. I understand that the Secretary of State is obsessed with the growth in invalidity benefits. Does he remember that his own Department argued with great vim and pertinacity with the Public Accounts Select Committee that the principal reasons for the increase in invalidity benefit were demographic factors and the rise in unemployment to which it was directly linked? Perhaps the Secretary of State should re-read that evidence. He should also recognise that, if he tries to tell the House that invalidity benefit has been a soft touch, he must explain why, last year, 53 per cent. of appeals to independent tribunals against the refusal of invalidity benefit succeeded.

Does the Secretary of State recall his Department's estimates that between 10 and 20 per cent. of invalidity claimants would lose entitlement to benefit as a result of the introduction of the so-called objective test? Does he remember that the estimate was that between 30,000 and 60,000 claimants would be affected? That was a working document, but can he tell me whether that will be largely the effect of the test, as he is now introducing it? If not, how many people who would have qualified if they had applied under the old system will not qualify under the new system? We are entitled to know that.

The Secretary of State will remember the example of the 55-year-old builder with angina, who was unable to walk on the flat for more than 200 yards because of constant pain? He would be deprived of invalidity benefit. Is that the type of person who will find that he does not qualify for the new benefit?

I accept that we shall have to study the documents, but the Secretary of State will recognise that we shall want to examine closely the new test that he is introducing. I understand that it takes the form of a points league table —a form in which the Government seem obsessively interested.

In one section, we shall be invited to consider whether someone is unable to handle a book in order to read it. If he cannot, he will get 25 points. If he cannot lift and push an unladen wheelbarrow, he will get only 4·5 points. If he cannot pick up and carry a 5 lb bag of potatoes in either hand separately, he will get 9·5 points.

We shall want to examine the test. I hope that the Secretary of State accepts that objectivity sounds all very well, but that, if it translates into a lack of sympathy, there will be absolutely no public support for what I believe is ultimately a cost-cutting exercise.

How will the changes in invalidity benefit fit in with the proposed changes to statutory sick pay? The larger employers will no longer be reimbursed for sick pay costs. Does not the Secretary of State accept that that will create a disincentive to employ people who may have a bad health record? Therefore, people will lose entitlement to the new incapacity benefit and at the same time discover that another barrier has been placed in their way as they search in a difficult job market. The Government assume in the Red Book that unemployment will remain at about 2·75 million over the next three or four years.

It seems to me that a Government who are determined not to introduce anti-discrimination legislation to protect disabled people are going in for a little discrimination themselves. Did the Secretary of State see—just to reinforce the point—the Budget taster on the front page of the *Daily Mail* today, which carried the simple message:

"Sick pay: Can you afford to be ill?"

That may turn out to be remarkably prescient.

The taxing of invalidity benefit is certainly not the place the Opposition would have started in looking for additional revue. Am I right in thinking that, of two people living in the same street, in the same physical state and in the same social and financial circumstances, one could be in receipt of invalidity benefit and the other could be in receipt of the broadly comparable but presumably reduced incapacity benefit? One would be taxed and the other would not. That would create a great deal of bitterness and misunderstanding. It would reduce taxation policy to something of a lottery, based on the point at which one falls ill. I hope that the Secretary of State will give some thought to that.

I turn now to the proposed job seeker's allowance. We have been told that there will be a single benefit for the unemployed. We have been told by the Chancellor, in one of his rather broad brushstrokes, that he will cut through the bureaucratic maze. I am not sure whether he was referring to the efforts of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security over the past few years or to his colleague in the Department of Employment, but we shall want to know in some detail whether it will mean an integration of services between the Department of Employment and the Department of Social Security and, if so, exactly how it will work, and what the job implications will be.

Our suspicion—I think that many people share it—is that, while the ringing cry is, "It's time for reform," when that comes from the Secretary of State, it can be roughly

[Mr. Dewar]

translated into, "It's time for a cut." The people who will suffer are those who are at risk and who are looking for work.

I ask the Secretary of State to comment specifically on the impact on, and implications for, the contributory principle. He will remember that there have been many fine ministerial defences of that principle over recent months. What we have here is a situation in which people who have built up their entitlement through contributions over many years see it halved at a stroke. They will have not unemployment benefit for 12 months, but a job seeker's allowance for six months.

That seems to me to be a significant shift in Government policy, and it rather underlines what we know from documents that we have seen about a reconsideration of the Government's approach to the contributory principle. That is a serious and important point, and I hope that the Secretary of State will deal with it.

My worry is that, on the one hand, in some Bonnie and Clyde situation—I shall leave it to the two Ministers to decide who is who—people will have to pay 1 per cent. more in national insurance contributions. That is £300 million more for the Chancellor than a penny on income tax. At the same time, the unemployed and the people looking for work are being kicked as they leave by that remarkable reduction in their rights.

The new job seeker's allowance appears in a fine new livery. It has been beautifully repackaged, but at the end of the day it means paying more for less. It is a bad day for those of us who believe in fundamental and civilised provision on a co-operative basis.

How many will be removed from entitlement to benefit as a result of the cut from 12 months to six months? The figure is bound to be substantial, and has been put at 200,000. Will the Secretary of State confirm that? If I am wrong, how many will there be?

As it will be of interest to the House, will he tell us what the effect would be on the current unemployment figures if his proposed scheme were operating now? I believe, as do many, that one reason why it is so attractive to the right hon. Gentleman is that he can evict people not only from benefit, but from the unemployment totals.

I must conclude soon, so I shall deal with the massaging of figures, but in particular the assertion by the Chancellor that raising the retirement age for women to 65 will make a

"considerable difference to the affordability of the modern welfare state in the next century."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 927.]

We shall all want to analyse that sentence in the period ahead. Perhaps the Secretary of State could draw his colleague's attention to figure 7 of his Department's discussion document "Options for Equality in State Pension Aid". It sets out the impact of the national insurance fund and national insurance contribution rates of equalising the state pension age in 2025, when the Government's proposals will be fully in force.

With a pension age of 60, the combined rate of employer/employee contributions necessary to keep the fund in balance would fall from 23·4 per cent. now to just 19·2 per cent. According to the table supplied by the Department, with a common age of 65, the combined national insurance contribution will fall to 15·7 per cent. There is an important debate about the best way forward, but it should not be taken on scare stories and inaccurate information, which are designed to stampede people in one direction.

The reason for those dramatic figures is that the Government have been cutting the basic pension as a percentage of average earnings steadily over a long period. It will soon no longer be the "cornerstone of the welfare state", as the Chancellor rather imaginatively described it the other day. It is important that we recognise that we must look at providing choice for people in retirement as in every other part of their careers.

The Government talk about choice, but all too often fail to deliver. Under the proposal, everyone will have to wait until they are 65. It is particularly worrying for women, who will have to wait an extra five years. If the Secretary of State feels that that is the last glaring example of inequality for women in the social security system, I am prepared to supply him with something of which he is quite fond—"a little list" for him to examine.

The tragedy is that there is so little evidence, even in that proposal, that he is earmarking any of the savings to help women to find their way in a system in which, because of their careers as mothers and their employment patterns, they are often severely prejudiced.

We must get away from a set retirement age, which sits ill with the modern labour market and the needs of the future. As the Secretary of State knows, the Labour party is committed to a flexible decade of retirement. The guiding principles should be choice, adequate provision and security. Those contemplating retirement should be able to decide what is right for them according to their circumstances. We shall conduct the debate on that basis.

It was a bad Budget. I do not want to be ungracious, because there were some good things in it. For example, I welcome the proposals for a child care provision for those on family credit. It is a limited concession, worth a maximum of £28 to a small client group of about 200,000 families. It is particularly welcome because it is in sharp contrast to the arid and unpleasant scapegoat politics that we have seen when we have discussed lone parents in recent months and in which, I am afraid, the Secretary of State has taken a rather disreputable role.

The final point I welcome is the fraud board. I want to mention that because I am often accused of forgetting about fraud. I do not do so. I believe that it should be struck at on all occasions. I welcome the fraud board because it is obviously needed. Will the Secretary of State say whether that move is a response to the Public Accounts Committee report of the other day, which pointed out that there was not even a decent computer system for the fraud section and that fraud was often not detected early enough?

The uprating statement is a stage in the drive towards a vision of the welfare state that nobody on this side of the House shares. It is not a case of the Secretary of State being a victim of the Chancellor. I fear that he is obtusely marching in the wrong direction. He wants to shrink the welfare state. He wants to withdraw the Government from some sectors of provision. It goes with the contracting-out move and the obsession with privatisation. That policy, unchecked, will see the basic pension fall to under 10 per cent. of the average wage. We do not share that vision, and we shall continue to fight it.

Mr. Lilley: I apologise for the fact that my statement took nearly as long as the questions from the hon. Member from Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

The hon. Gentleman began by ridiculing the closing of loopholes in the tax system. I agree that it would be foolish to base an entire economic policy on that, and I trust that he will have a word with the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) about it.

The hon. Gentleman went on to attack parts of the Budget for which I am not responsible, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is well able to look after himself. The hon. Gentleman attacked the national insurance contributions bill that is to flow from the Budget earlier this year. He then got on to a part of the Budget that I am unable to identify in any of the upratings. If he will write to me about the premium that he thinks we have cut, I shall respond to him, but I am not aware that that is the case.

At long last, the hon. Gentleman got on to the compensation for VAT on fuel bills and said that it was a con, and inadequate. I remind him of what he said in *The People* on 21 November:

"The Government has to add something on to take account of that"—

the increased impact of VAT on fuel—

"and they could do it with an extra 50p on pensions."

We have done rather better than that. In the first year, the figure will be 70p for a pensioner couple, rising to £1·40 in the second year and £2 for the poorest pensioners in the third year. I am, of course, always sensitive to suggestions that I am spendthrift.

The hon. Gentleman then said that the Government were not giving enough help to those who are on income support. Their benefits will be increased by 3·9 per cent., which is more than most people at work are getting. The child care measure will help many people get back into work who were previously dependent on benefit.

The hon. Gentleman asked for clarification on the severe disablement allowance. That is being increased by 50p in the same way as pensions, to ensure that disabled people who are reliant on benefit will get the same help. It is nonsense to say that the disabled are losers from the Budget—far from it. It is particularly absurd to say that the reforms of invalidity benefit, and its replacement by an incapacity benefit which has a proper objective test, will harm anyone who is disabled. The test is designed to concentrate help on those who are genuinely unable to work, and to make sure that the people who are excluded from benefit are those who are able to work.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked how many people were likely to fail the incapacity benefit test. That will depend on the precise terms of the test, and those will emerge from consultation and evaluation. It is likely in broad measure that around 70,000 people a year who would have received benefit will no longer do so.

He said that we should look closely at the test, and suggested that it was somehow to be ridiculed. I will remind him that the basis on which we are working to build a test is precisely the basis of the survey of disability by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. That survey has become the sacred text of those in the disability world. It is widely respected, and we are building upon it.

The hon. Gentleman described the decision not to reimburse statutory sick pay while compensating employers by reducing national insurance contributions by more than an equal amount as a disincentive to employ disabled people. I will remind him that disabled people have generally a better attendance record and lower levels of sickness and absence from work than do other people.

The Government look on the measure as an incentive to employers to improve the health of their employees, and they will realise that it is in their interests. Good employers already do it, and more will do so and take an interest in that aspect of the well-being of their employees. The hon. Gentleman has not told us what the Labour party's thinking in that area is. Does he believe that the present system should be pickled in formaldehyde, and that nothing in the welfare system should ever be changed, regardless of whether there are obvious abuses and issues which need to be addressed?

The hon. Gentleman then came on to the job seeker's allowance and asked whether we envisaged an integrated delivery. That, of course, must be the objective. My Department, together with the Employment Service, is investigating how that can be best achieved in the long term. That is in the interests of the beneficiaries, as much as in the interests of efficient delivery.

He talked about the Government undermining the contributory principle by the changes which are proposed in the job seeker's allowance. I will again remind him that the Commission for Social Justice, which was established by the Labour party, has issued a document which puts the whole contributory principle in doubt. It suggests that it should be determined whether the principle should continue at all. It is rich for him to suggest that changes to particular benefits threatens that principle.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): That is not Labour party policy.

Mr. Lilley: The Labour party has not got a policy—that is the problem. The party has put it out to commission.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked how many were likely to be removed from benefit as a result of the measure. The figure is likely to be half that which he talks about. Two thirds of all unemployed people get back to work within six months. We hope that the associated changes which we are making will improve that proportion, as will the recovery of the economy.

The hon. Gentleman turned to the state pension age, and implied that somehow we could afford to equalise at a lower age, and that that would not cost much. Equalisation at 60 would cost £12 billion a year more than it would cost at 65.

If he believes that the optimum use of £12 billion is to pay out unconditionally a pension to people between 60 and 65 whether or not they are working and whatever their means, he must have a strange set of priorities, especially when he knows that the one group that will not benefit are those with the lowest means who are already on income support, which is set at a higher level than the statutory pension.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomed, albeit grudgingly, the changes that we are making to child care incentives for those on family credit. They have been widely supported across the board and across the political spectrum. They will show their value when they come in before too long.

The hon. Gentleman ended with the ritual accusation that I believed in shrinking the welfare state. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who are not prepared to reform cannot preserve the welfare state and ensure that it is affordable into the next century. Because we have the courage to take the necessary decisions, we are the true friends of welfare provision in the country.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Those initial exchanges have taken 50 minutes. Often, when a Secretary of State makes a statement, the House seems to believe that it can move into debate mode. Statements are not the beginning of a debate; they are made so that the Secretary of State can be questioned on what he has said. I caution the House now that I am not prepared to hear statements from hon. Members on either side of the House. I am here to listen to pertinent questions to the Secretary of State's statement. I want brisk questions and brisk answers.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, which clearly honours the Government's manifesto pledges. In particular, I welcome the Government's decision to equalise——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is the first offender. Let me hear her question, please.

Mrs. Roe: I note that home responsibilities protection is to be extended to SERPS. What measures are the Government taking to help women to build up a good pension entitlement, which, of course, has been denied to them in the past because of family commitments?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. By extending home responsibilities protection to SERPS—it already exists for the basic pension—we will enable women who work as few as 20 years to get full entitlement to SERPS. This will be as if they had worked the same number of years as others without domestic responsibilities do to get full entitlement. That is of great value.

We will also take account of family credit and disability working allowance in assessing people's entitlement to pensions, treating both as earnings. That will help in particular those on low incomes, predominantly women, to build up their entitlement into the next century. That is worth about £100 million extra to women's pensions next century.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the Liberal Democrats welcome the proposals for child care allowance? Will he recognise that his compensation package for VAT on fuel is £300 million short of the figure recommended by the Social Security Advisory Committee, and that, by compensating those on benefit but not those on low pay, he is creating yet another poverty trap? Will he acknowledge that many disabled people will have additional fuel costs? Will he tell the House his estimate of the number of such people and what proportion of them will not be assisted by his support mechanism for VAT on fuel?

Mr. Lilley: I would have been happier, had the hon. Gentleman come clean on Liberal Democratic party policy on imposing taxes on energy——

Madam Speaker: Is that a statement or an answer?

Mr. Lilley: It is a riposte. I am not sure where that comes.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes our position on child care. It is absurd of him to suggest that the VAT package is inadequate. It vastly exceeds what most people expected and asked for.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency we have an enormous number of old people and that the proposals to compensate them for VAT on fuel will be welcomed? The proposal that compensation will not be restricted to those on income support will be particularly welcomed. In general, old-age pensioners will benefit from the proposal. Does he not agree that it is churlish of the Opposition to criticise the proposal, when the cost will be no less than £1·2 billion a year? That is a generous settlement, and it will be welcome throughout the country.

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that he is right about the wide welcome that the proposals will receive. It was important that help should extend beyond those on income-related benefits to include pensioners, those on invalidity benefit, widows and those on severe disablement allowance. I am glad that that has such wide support.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): How many people would be taken off the dole queues if the new benefit were introduced today without one extra person finding a job? Given that we have a Treasury team that boasts about being so tough with the estimates put before it, is it right to assume that the Secretary of State has estimated the cost of the new scheme in 1996? If so, will he tell us what the unemployment level will be in the year that the new scheme is introduced?

Mr. Lilley: On the hon. Gentleman's last question, I am afraid that I have to rely on the fact that we work with a stylised assumption of the level of unemployment over the survey period—I think that it is 2·75 million people. That is the standard way in which it is done. Working on the assumption that unemployment will be roughly the same then as now, savings in the first year of the new job seeker's allowance, which will not start until 1996, will be about £100 million, and twice that in a full year.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a major package of measures. Will he confirm that total payments to the long-term sick and disabled have trebled under the Government and that the new disability working allowances will benefit even more peolpe as a result of the changes that he has announced?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. The caseload of invalidity benefit has trebled. No Government could ignore that or fail to consider whether it was justifiable. We concluded that it was right to introduce an objective medical test. I believe that that will have the support of the medical profession.

Most doctors find it invidious that they have a responsibility to the state to act as the gateway to that benefit, while also having a duty to and natural sympathy for their patients. The new policy wil remove them from that difficulty. Disability working allowance will be enhanced by allowing people on that benefit to have free prescription and dental treatment. Those people will welcome the proposal, which will remove any hesitation that they may have about taking up a job with the benefit of the allowance.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the job seeker's agreement be entered into freely or will failure to sign the piece of paper mean that the unemployed applicant will be denied even the first six months of

benefit? Will the £28 child care allowance be paid while parents are seeking work or only when they have obtained work?

Mr. Lilley: Obviously, the child care allowance is for those on family credit, and it influences the amount of family credit to which they are entitled. Therefore, it will be paid when people return to work or take up a job—that is the intention. The idea that we should pay child care allowance to people who are out of work would go further than anyone could reasonably suppose.

The job seeker's agreement is intended to be in the interest of job seekers and to help them systematically to get back into work. Therefore, of course it will be a requirement of the benefit that job seekers take part in that process. I hope that they would do so and would be encouraged to do so by the hon. Lady.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I welcome my right hon. Friend's benefit reforms—invalidity benefit, benefits for unemployed people and the pension age. I particularly welcome the fact that he has addressed one of the most absurd features of the current——

Madam Speaker: Order. I took on the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) when she started making statements. I am asking for questions from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Willetts: I have a question about one of the most unsatisfactory features of the current regime for unemployed people. If one partner loses a job, the other, who may be in work, promptly has to give up work to obtain any entitlement to benefit. Will the Secretary of State explain how the new improvement in the rules on income support will help people in those circumstances?

Mr. Lilley: That problem has emerged largely as a result of the reduction in the hours rule, from 24 hours to 16. We propose to restore the rule to 24 hours so that people will be able to work up to 24 hours without their partners losing income support. Therefore, there will be no incentive for them to give up working, which was sometimes the case. That will be a sensible change when we introduce the job seeker's allowance.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): How much good-quality child care does the Secretary of State think can be bought for £28 a week?

Mr. Lilley: The average for those paying for child care is less than that. The average for those who use registered child minders and nurseries is roughly £40 a week. That is the amount that we are allowing people to offset against their earnings. Because of the taper, they will effectively benefit to the tune of £28.

We are saying that, effectively, the working mother—it is usually the mother—will benefit from the taxpayer to the tune of £28, and will contribute up to £12. The level we have set recognises that many people do not work the full 40-odd hours a week. However, that is what they choose to do and to spend. The amount is in line with that and is reasonable. That is why it has been so widely accepted by everybody in the field, apart from the hon. Lady.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his characteristically excellent statement. Will he confirm that, once again, he has shown that the control of inflation is particularly beneficial to those on lower incomes?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People do not realise that high inflation erodes benefits every month between upratings. Now that we have low inflation, benefits are holding their purchasing power between upratings, and that is good for claimants. None the less, it is still expensive to uprate, even with inflation as modest as it has been over the past 12 months. It will cost us more than £2 billion to do so next year, before the extra help that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor is giving to uprate additionally to cope with VAT on fuel.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): What is the difference between the compensation that is offered and the increased cost of VAT on fuel? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there will be an inevitable fall in fuel consumption which will hit the poorest hardest, with an estimated 9 per cent. fall among the poorest in our community, compared with only a 1 per cent. fall among the richest? How can he justify the unfairness of that?

Mr. Lilley: As I have said, we have made a generous contribution towards the cost of VAT on fuel for the least well-off, for pensioners and others. In addition, we are offering help to those with higher fuel bills by nearly doubling the home energy efficiency scheme, which helps with insulation and fuel efficiency and will help people to reduce fuel costs without reducing the temperature in which they live. That is desirable, and it is now extended to pensioners and the disabled, irrespective of whether they are on income-related benefits. They will welcome that, and it helps to square the circle to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there will be a widespread welcome for the measures that he is introducing to encourage employers to have a greater concern for the health of their employees and to reduce absenteeism? Does he agree that the main reason for the growth in the number of claimants for invalidity benefit has been the difficulty that people have had in getting off the benefit by returning to work?

What are my right hon. Friend's thoughts, therefore, on how employers can be encouraged to recruit and retain chronically sick and disabled employees? Will the Government, for example, reconsider the requirement that employers should pay 50 per cent. of the cost of special aids for disabled people, and will my right hon. Friend look constructively and sympathetically at the case for anti-discrimination legislation?

Mr. Lilley: Of course, we do not envisage the test forcing people who are genuinely chronically sick and disabled to give up invalidity benefit, or the new incapacity benefit to which they will remain entitled if they are medically unable to work. We envisage that those who are able to work and are receiving a benefit which is not the appropriate one would be guided and helped back into work by the new job seeker's allowance and other such arrangements.

We certainly want—there is a proposal but not yet a compulsion—employers to bear some of the costs of employing disabled people, but we are enhancing and making more attractive the disability working allowance, the principal help that we give people whose earning

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capacity is impaired by their disability but who want to work and who find jobs. I hope that that will be increasingly used by people in those circumstances to get back into work.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Who will administer the job seeker's allowance? Will it be the Benefits Agency or the Employment Service or some other agency that has not yet been created? Will young people aged less than 25 receive the same amount of job seeker's allowance as those aged over 25? Currently, the arrangements are that people on income support aged less than 25 receive less money than other people.

May I advise the Secretary of State that the 1991 census return demonstrated that 40 per cent. of the unemployed people in Liverpool had never worked? There is a huge number of young people who are genuinely seeking work and for whom there is none.

Mr. Lilley: In response to the first question, about who will administer the job seeker's allowance, a joint study is taking place involving the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service—our two Departments—to consider how best we can integrate the delivery of the job seeker's allowance. I envisage that they will report to me some time in the spring.

As to the value of benefits, we envisage their being rationalised on the basis of the income support levels. I appreciate the hon. Lady's concerns about people in certain regions of the country who, often for several generations, have had no employment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is keen to tackle that problem, and has brought forward specific measures that will help long-term unemployed people back into work.

Ultimately, as I said, the health of the economy is vital to provide job opportunities as well as the measures that we can take through the social security system, and I believe that we are better placed to make progress on that front than any other country in Europe.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his package, and especially on the scope and extent of compensation for VAT on fuel. Can he clarify the position of a pensioner couple, where there are two entitlements to pension in the household?

Mr. Lilley: We are proposing that, in the first year, a single pensioner will get a 50p increment over and above the basic uprating to cope with VAT on fuel. When that pensioner has a dependent spouse, he or she will get 70p. When both pensioners in the same household have pension entitlement in their own right, they will get two 50ps—they will be £1 better off in the first year. There will be an increase, likewise, in subsequent years.

Mr. Cryer: Can the Secretary of State confirm that his concern about invalidity benefit is not borne out by the medical examination on which invalidity benefit depends? Can he tell us, for example, whether any doctors have been reproved, dismissed or disciplined in any way because of mistakes made in the past when they were making decisions about invalidity benefit? If that is not the case, and no one has been disciplined, why is he so anxious to change invalidity benefit and put people in jeopardy?

Does that confirm that the Secretary of State has abandoned his unscrupulous and unprincipled attack on single mothers as the sole cause of the economic ills of the Government, and that the real cost of social security is so high because of the economic failures of the Government, which have produced unparallelled levels of unemployment, which he has admitted will continue for year after year after year? Is it not true that it is a failure of capitalism?

Mr. Lilley: There we have it. The hon. Member will recall that, earlier this year, the medical journal *Monitor Weekly* conducted a survey of doctors, about two thirds of whom said that they had given people chits to get them on to invalidity benefit even though they knew that they were capable of work.

I, however, have never criticised doctors in that context. I have made it clear to the House that I believe that, if we create a situation which puts doctors in an invidious position; where the rules are unclear; where it is not entirely clear, as a result of the original drafting and the subsequent interpretation by the courts of the laws, quite what assessment should be made and what factors have to be taken into account in deciding whether someone is medically unable to work; it is the duty of the House and the Government to propose measures to change and improve that.

That is what we shall do by introducing an objective medical test. The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. I believe that we will produce a sensible test. It will show that some people who have been getting the benefit should not have done, and it will also ensure those who should get the benefit get it in future.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would have been impossible to provide such a generous measure of support for those who will be affected by VAT on fuel had we not also looked at measures to limit the growth of social security into the future? Do not those measures go hand in hand, and would it not be impossible to continue to care for those who need the help unless we take the tough decisions that we need to take?

Mr. Lilley: Well, yes and no. Essentially, the revenue to finance the extra VAT package comes from VAT itself. It is self-contained, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and his predecessor considered that necessary both to raise revenue and to meet our commitments to reduce emissions under the Rio agreements. However, we certainly have to make changes in the growth of benefits to make sure that the system does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay or undermine the working of the economy on which the social security system ultimately depends.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): While I do not wish to take away from the welcome parts of the Minister's statement, is he aware that all the insulation in the world will not be effective unless heat is already in the house? Is he happy that he has got the balance right between the amount of money that has been allowed to overcome the VAT on fuel and the insulation part of the statement?

Mr. Lilley: I believe that we have the balance right. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment have agreed to a near doubling of the money. An extra £35 million will be spent on financing additional work on insulation and fuel efficiency. That will enable us to extend

it widely. It was a sensible contribution to the overall package, while the benefits system provides uniform help for all pensioners, long-term sick and other groups.

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that people should be encouraged to take out insurance policies to provide themselves with a better standard of living in the event of unemployment or to help with their mortgage payments during such a period? What reaction has he had from charities to his welcome announcement that people on incapacity benefit will be allowed to work for 16 hours a week for a voluntary organisation?

Finally, has he seen in the booklet produced by the benefits agency that people who apply for incapacity benefit score 23·5 points for being frequently muddled and confused? Therefore, should not the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) be eligible for the benefit?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot say precisely how the hon. Gentleman would perform under the new tests, but we could ask him to participate in the evaluation exercise. What was the first question? *[Interruption.]* I will participate in the evaluation exercise as well.

As far as insurance is concerned, we certainly encourage people to make provision for retirement over and above the state pension scheme. Of course, people frequently take out provision which will top up their ability to maintain their standard of living if they have any long-term sickness. That would be on top of the basic provision that incapacity benefit would provide.

There is less case for such insurance to deal with the short-term difficulties that my hon. Friend mentioned. However, when I introduced the limit on the mortgage income support help we give, I mentioned that there was a case for people looking to whether they should take out insurance of their mortgages against unemployment to make sure that they had help while they were finding their way back into work. Obviously, I hope people will do that.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): If the Minister has such a genuine concern for those who legitimately claim invalidity benefit, why does he continue to refuse to accept the judgment of Commissioner Skinner in April 1992? *[Interruption.]* The Minister may smile, but it is an important issue.

Commissioner Skinner made a judgment in 1992 that women aged 60 to 65 should be allowed to claim invalidity benefit. He said that the Government's position infringed the European directive on equality of treatment. Why does the Minister continue to refuse to implement that sound judgment? Why has he sought a further postponement of his appeal against that judgment before the Master of the Rolls? Why this obduracy?

Mr. Lilley: We normally take decisions on whether to contest rulings of the courts and tribunals on the basis of legal advice rather than an attempt to change policy. Policy is better altered in this place, rather than by the courts reinterpreting things which originally meant something else. Obviously, we look at the results of court cases to see whether the cumulative effect would require a change in the law. It is on the basis of legal advice that particular decisions to contest are taken.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, on the basis of the plans he has announced today, social security expenditure in Britain will probably reach £100 billion a year by the end of the decade? Does that not show a substantial commitment by the Government to meeting the needs of those in genuine need? Would it be possible to meet the needs of pensioners, the disabled and others who need help and assistance without clamping down on fraud and abuse which the Government are tackling well?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right to say that the bill for social security is still rising, despite our commitment to ensure that the money is well spent and concentrated on those in need. At present, the £80 billion bill that we have to meet means that, on average, every working person has to contribute £13 every working day just to finance social security. Obviously, it is right that we should rein in that growth before it becomes unbearable for people to pay.

In particular, we have to make sure that fraud and abuse of the system is ruled out, because no one wants to waste a penny in that way. That is why I attach such importance to bearing down on fraud, and why I have introduced reforms in the management and organisation of the fraud effort in my Department to make sure that it is as effective as possible.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Is it not true that 200,000 or more working people at the lower end of the wage scale will be brought into paying at least £1 a week in tax because of the freezing of the personal allowance? Is it not also true that the Budget has been one of the biggest hikes in taxation that Britain has ever seen?

Mr. Lilley: I am not going to take any lectures on taxation from a party that is wedded to increasing taxes and expenditure and whose every proposal and question today has implicitly meant that taxes would be higher to finance higher expenditure. Where would it get the money?

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the new single benefit, the job seeker's allowance, will help focus benefit on those most in need and make it easier for them to claim? Will he also confirm that, unlike in the Labour party, the concept of contributory benefits still exists?

Mr. Lilley: I agree with my hon. Friend that the job seeker's allowance will be more rational, better focused and accompanied by better help to get back to work, which is what the benefit should be about. As my hon. Friend rightly says, it contains a contributory element, and he is perfectly correct to say that the Commission for Social Justice, in which the Labour party privatised its policy formulation, has been considering the total abolition of the contributory principle, although it has not yet had the courage firmly to reach that conclusion.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Secretary of State understand that disabled people are not looking for crumbs from the Tory table but are looking for a fair deal? Many of them do not wish to be a cost to the state—indeed, they would love to have the opportunity to work. Why does the Secretary of State not get together with the Secretary of State for Employment and introduce legislation to levy a charge on those employers who do not fulfil the quota under the 1944 Act? Incidentally, that would include his own Department.

Mr. Lilley: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the motivation and aspirations of most disabled

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people. Of course, it is to help those who are in a position to get back to work that we established the disability working allowance. We are reviewing the present quota system to see whether it can be improved or whether changes need to be made. Obviously, until that review is complete, I cannot comment on the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to some stories being put about today, disabled people in receipt of benefit will get the benefits of the VAT compensation package?

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm that the more generous help that we are making available will be extended to everyone on invalidity benefit, those on severe disablement allowance, or on the disability premium in income support —which automatically feeds through into other income-related benefits. That covers virtually all disabled people.

I believe that an assessment has been made which refers to people who are not entitled to the benefits that we are talking about, or indeed to any disability benefits, because they have a lower level of disability and were the group identified in the survey of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, which extended to a lower level of disability than is covered by DLA.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can the Secretary of State confirm that it is the Government's policy to continue reducing the value of the state old-age pension as a proportion of average earnings? Can he explain why he now believes that it is necessary to raise the retirement age for women to 65, when any civilised society would look towards reducing it by equalising retirement age at 60 for both men and women?

Mr. Lilley: As for the final question, virtually every country in the world is considering, or has implemented——

Mr. Corbyn: That does not make it right.

Mr. Lilley: Of course it does not make it right. But it suggests that, as a test of civilisation, it would be unreasonable to rule out all other countries in the world from the civilised community. Other countries are doing it for sensible reasons. The number of pensioners is set to increase worldwide, and the size of the working population is set to diminish. Therefore, anyone is driven to the conclusion which we reached, that equalisation at 65 was the sensible route.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that fuel prices have fallen by some 18 per cent. since 1983? Is he further aware that, in the midlands, prices have fallen by about 4 per cent. over the past 12 months? Does he agree that, taking this into account, the generous package that he has proposed will protect the majority of pensioners from the imposition of VAT on fuel?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Over the past 10 years, there has been an 18 per cent. decline in average fuel prices, relative to the general price level. Recently, we have seen some absolute cuts in gas and other prices. Since privatisation, the trend in both gas and electricity prices is down in real terms. That is good news for the longer term. As long as those competitive pressures continue to operate, they will feed through to the benefit of pensioners and others, and will mean that the money that we have provided will go even further.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Secretary of State accept that, whatever the arguments about the inadequacy of the compensation scheme for VAT on fuel, he has offered no compensation whatever to families in which the wage earner is in low-paid employment? Those families will have to pay the full cost of VAT on fuel.

Does the Secretary of State accept that those families will have to choose next winter among paying for fuel, paying for food and paying for clothing? Does he further accept that, by doing that, he has worsened the poverty trap? People seeking work may well find that they will be worse off financially if they get a job, and the proposed measures will have contributed to that.

Mr. Lilley: No. That is not the case because the impact will feed through to those on family credit and on housing benefit, and therefore they will get extra help. By definition, those who are not on benefit cannot be helped through the benefit system. The benefit system is there primarily to help those who are least able to cope. That is what we have done.

We have done much more than the Opposition spokesman on social security, the hon. Member for Garscadden, suggested we should do. He suggested that it would be sufficient to compensate for the increase in VAT. I am surprised that he gives such a grudging welcome for something which must have exceeded his expectations and those of other people.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Does the Secretary of State agree that, notwithstanding his statement that "we keep our pledges to families", the combined impact of the cut in married couple allowance and a few pennies only for child benefit means that the Budget will hit families with children much more than single people? In a year of growing concern about the family, is this not sadly an anti-family Budget?

Mr. Lilley: No. That is certainly not the case. Of course, the married couple allowance does not depend on whether there are children. My right hon. and learned Friend made the changes for the reasons that he gave in his Budget statement. The most significant change in the package of measures announced in the Budget, which was also in my statement today, was the child care disregard in family credit, which will be of great benefit to those with family responsibilities who have the prospect of work—possibly low-paid work—and who will be enabled to work and enabled to pay their child care costs. It will be a boost to the incomes of those who are already working and will encourage perhaps 50,000 people back into work. That is good news for them and for the economy.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): Can the Minister tell us what effect cheating the unemployed of six months' benefit will have on the unemployment figures? Is it the case that many people will not be able to claim income support and therefore, apart from depriving them of much-needed money, this will simply be the 31st fiddle of the unemployment figures?

Mr. Lilley: I do not envisage that it will have any measurable impact on the unemployment level, because most people will be entitled to the means-tested element of the job seeker's allowance, or they will register as unemployed to get the credits for their eventual retirement and therefore will appear in the figures either way.

Points of Order

4.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I should like to apologise to the House and to you in particular for my rudeness yesterday in using a somewhat inappropriate term when I raised the need for an apology from the Secretary of State for Education for his discourtesy to the House in breaching the Budget deadline, for which you reprimanded him. I regret my verbal misdemeanour—it does not happen very often. I trust that you will accept my extended apologies.

Madam Speaker: I am much obliged to the hon. Gentleman. Of course I accept his apology.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Over the past few months, I have written to the Secretary of State for Social Security with inquiries about Government policy with regard to the operation of the Child Support Agency. I know that other hon. Members have done the same. Those inquiries have been passed to the Child Support Agency for answering, and the replies have been totally inadequate.

Last week, I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking him to list the number of inquiries the Child Support Agency has dealt with since its inception by constituency order. I received a reply yesterday, which states:

> "I understand from Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive of the Child Support Agency, that information in the form requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 429.]

Is it in order for Ministers to avoid answering questions in this way? What steps can you take to ensure that information requested by hon. Members is provided and that Ministers are accountable to the House on Government policy?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that the content of answers is not a matter for the Chair. I simply tell him to seek opportunities to pursue his complaint with Ministers. Perhaps I could draw his attention to the fact that there will be an Adjournment debate on that issue tomorrow.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is with reference to your earlier strictures on a somewhat lengthy statement. First, may I compliment you? You called all hon. Members who sought to catch your eye. Nevertheless, I should like to know whether you are ever given any indication of the likely length of the presentation of a statement before the Minister goes to the Dispatch Box.

Madam Speaker: I am concerned not simply about the length of statements but also about the length of replies to statements and the time taken by Back Benchers to put their questions. The whole exchanges during Question Time and following statements concern me. Although I am very anxious to call all Members who stand—I cannot always do that, but I do my best—it is possible only if I have brisk questions and brisk responses from the Minister concerned.

BILLS PRESENTED

Social Security (Contributions)

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mrs. Secretary Bottomley, Mr. Secretary Redwood, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Mr. William Hague presented a Bill to increase primary Class 1 contributions payable under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992; to correct the provisions as to the appropriate national health service allocation in the case of such contributions; to clarify what reliefs are to be taken into account in assessing Class 4 contributions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Redwood, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Mr. William Hague presented a Bill to remove the right of employers other than small employers to recover sums paid by them by way of statutory sick pay; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 3.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [30 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies, acquisitions and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

5 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Today we are discussing the imposition of tax rises from April next year, which now amount to the biggest tax demand in history.

Tax rises have been imposed not just through VAT and national insurance but three changes in income tax push people's income tax bills up. The Chancellor announced three new taxes: on home insurance; car insurance; and holidays.

Those tax rises are the result of promises that have been broken unfairly and without regret, shame or apology. Promises on taxes have now been broken side by side with promises on public spending. Tragically, those promises have been broken merely to pay for the mistakes of the past, in a Budget that has no clear strategy, direction or leadership for our future.

With private investment still falling this year, the Budget now leaves public investment falling next year. The Chancellor now accepts that growth has been lower than forecast and will be lower than forecast next year, as inflation starts to rise again. Despite all his boasts yesterday, the Budget does nothing about the central revelation, admitted by the Secretary of State for Trade only few days ago, that our productivity is 25 per cent. below that of our competitors. But contained in the statement was the Chancellor's admission that 3 per cent. growth in our economy was well above the sustainable growth rate that we can expect.

Let us look at exactly what the Chancellor has done. First, income tax rises will come in March, April and the following April. But let us recall for a minute the promise that the Prime Minister made during the election campaign. He said:

"I have no doubt that we will be able to make further reductions in the rate of taxation. We will make further reductions in the rate of taxation but perhaps not at the rate of a penny per year but we will be able to make reductions year on year at a smaller rate."

Yet what do we have in the Budget? We have three separate increases in our income tax bills from April next year and from April 1995.

First, personal allowances have been frozen for two years at a cost of 34p. Secondly, married couples' allowance has been cut, at a cost of £1·85 this year and another £1·65 thereafter. Thirdly, mortgage tax relief will be cut in 1994 and again in 1995, representing a further £2·24 in the first year and nearly £5 by the end of the second rise, despite the promise in the Conservative manifesto that mortgage tax relief would be maintained.

In total, the income tax bill for a typical family will be £5 a week higher next year, with another £1·65 on top the year after. That is from a Prime Minister who said at a press conference: "All mine, all mine." In his election manifesto he said that lower taxes were necessary to encourage people and create a more productive economy. He said that lower taxes would transfer power from the state to the people and that high taxes kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

That is why the country will never trust the Conservatives on tax again. The Budget finally broke any residual trust that even the most ardent Tory could have in the Government over taxation policy.

Some 500,000 new taxpayers will be drawn into the income tax net, 300,000 of whom will be women. Some 95 per cent. of British households will lose money as a result of the Budget's cumulative effects. So Conservative Members must explain why they went to the country on election manifestos promising not just no tax rises but tax cuts, whereas the Budget Red Book says that taxes will rise next year from £220 billion, eventually reaching £271 billion in the next few years. I want them to explain their promises of tax cuts year on year, given that taxes will rise from 35 per cent. of national income to 37, 37·5, 38 and then 38·5 per cent.—the biggest share of national income, and higher than under any Labour Government.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman but he has just come into the Chamber and I shall not give way to other hon. Members who have just done that.

Mr. Townend: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. I understand his opposition to tax increases. If the Labour party disapproves of the tax increases introduced by the Government, how would it deal with the budget deficit? Would the hon. Gentleman deal with it all on the spending side? Would that not mean savage cuts? Will he specify in which areas he would introduce cuts?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman forgets that his party went to the electorate and promised no tax rises. I recall an exchange between my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Gentleman in a previous debate, when the hon. Gentleman stood up and boldly said that he had not promised that there would be income tax cuts in his manifesto. So he did not even believe the Prime Minister's comments at the last election.

Let us be absolutely clear about what the Budget means for home owners. Mortgage tax relief will be cut as people pay more for their homes; VAT on fuel will be imposed so that people pay more to heat their homes; a new tax on home insurance will mean that people pay more to protect their homes. None of those taxes were ever mentioned in the Conservative party manifesto.

For car owners, the Budget means more tax on licences, petrol and car insurance, and motorists will soon pay to travel along motorways as a result of the imposition of tolls.

Is it not amazing that even rising crime becomes a tax-raising opportunity for the Government? Home insurance premiums have risen by 500 per cent. because of the rising cost of crime under the Government and now they impose a tax on it as a revenue-raising opportunity. Because of crime, car insurance premiums have risen by 260 per cent. and taxes will put those up a further 3 per cent. as a result of the Chancellor's announcement.

Not only income tax will rise. As a result of the two Budgets this year, we are now being asked to pay more for less because of the rise in national insurance. Let us remember—it should be recorded in *Hansard* so that people can see it—that on 28 January 1992, before the election, the Prime Minister stated clearly:

"I have no plans to raise . . . the level of national insurance contributions".

During the election campaign, when it became an issue, the then chairman of the Conservative party issued a statement saying that a rise in national insurance would be a "back door stealth tax". Who has implemented a back door stealth tax?

People are being asked to pay more national insurance, but they are to receive less. I can think of no bigger blow to the unemployed than that people in work must now pay more in national insurance contributions knowing that, if they lose their job in future years, the unemployment benefit available to them will be halved.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): As the hon. Gentleman does not even approve of those modest tax increases, what public services would be cut if his party were in office? The public need that information to make sense of his attack.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman was almost inaudible because of the noise in the House. He went to the electorate and said that he would cut taxes and that taxes would not rise. We should have an apology from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman said that he could not hear what I was saying because he was trying to find out from his leader what the answer was. He is now inviting me to apologise. Surely he should give way to see if I am willing to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. It is for the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to decide whether he will give way.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman, as I understand it, asked about what he called modest tax increases, which will mean £10 a week more for the typical family. We will again vote against the imposition of VAT on fuel. We will bring the matter to the House and give the hon. Gentleman a chance to support us. If he is to honour his promise to the electorate, he should vote with us.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: No, I will not give way again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard the hon. Gentleman say very clearly that he is not giving way again. I am sure that hon. Members also heard him say that.

Mr. Brown: I will give way to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin).

Mr. Jenkin: Do we understand that the opening section of the economic policy that will be expounded in the next Labour manifesto will start with the sentence "We will not start from here"?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we will not start from here. We warned the Government about the impact of recession and about failing to take action on unemployment. The hon. Gentleman should warn his Front-Bench colleagues that he made a promise when he stood at the general election for Colchester, North. He said:

"There are 10 good reasons to vote Conservative."

And what was reason number four? "Low taxes". We can see what has happened to his promise.

Let us recall what was said about VAT:

"We have no plans and no need to extend the scope of VAT."

What about the council tax? The Chief Secretary admitted on "Newsnight" last night that council tax bills were likely to rise as a result of yesterday's announcement. There will be rent rises as a result of the cuts in housing that were announced yesterday.

What about all the promises that the Conservatives made about taxes and charges during the election campaign? The Chancellor, in his own personal manifesto, said in Rushcliffe:

"Only the Conservatives believe in keeping tax down to give incentives to enterprise and investment."

The Chief Secretary said in Enfield:

"The Conservatives want to cut your taxes."

People would not know that from what has been done in the last few months.

The Chief Secretary is nodding because he obviously believes it. He also said:

"Higher tax and national insurance would hit those who work harder and do overtime."

So why is he imposing rises in national insurance and breaking all the promises that have been made? [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us why."] When the Chief Secretary goes back to his constituents in Enfield to answer their questions about his failure to keep his promises, will he remain seated there?

The promises that have been broken by the Government are not only on income tax, VAT, and national insurance, but on public services. We are witnessing, in the public spending announcement that came with the Chancellor's budget yesterday, some of the biggest cuts that we have seen in our public investment and public spending budgets.

What did the Prime Minister say about that at the general election campaign? I have gone through the transcripts of the Prime Minister's many press conferences during the election campaign. I have no doubt that Conservative Members will want to discuss with the Prime Minister the views that he put to the electorate on the question of public services. Cutting public spending, he said, would not be "economically right":

"If we were going to cut public expenditure we would have done it before and I don't believe it's economically right. I have said that in the past, and there is no need to do it whatsoever. So you can rule out any prospect of that."

He said that it was not possible that public spending might rise or fall, and that there was no prospect of the public spending cuts that we now have as a result of Government decisions.

Is it any wonder that the country will never again believe the Conservatives? Those are broken promises, not only on tax but on the fabric of our social services.

At another press conference during the election campaign, the Prime Minister said:

"We will stand by the figures in the Red Book. I see no reason why we should not meet our promises as we have allocated our reserves. We have seen these concerns in the past, and it will not be necessary to change plans."

I do not think the Prime Minister will easily forget that, if he survives for another general election campaign. Either the Government were incompetent on a massive scale that beggars belief, or they were deliberately misleading us throughout the general election campaign.

The Government could plead guilty to broken promises and ask for their incompetence to be taken into consideration, but how could they make the commitments in the election manifesto that have now been overridden by yesterday's statement?

In 1992 the Government said:

"Over the next three years we are committed to the biggest investment in Britain's infrastructure in our history."

Why was that commitment followed by an 8·3 per cent. cut in the transport budget? They said:

"We believe that the railways can play a bigger part, and are investing accordingly."

Why has the external financing limit of the railways been cut?

The Government said:

"The Conservative party's commitment to the environment is beyond doubt."

Why was the environment budget reduced by 13 per cent. yesterday? Why is it that local government is down 1·8 per cent., employment down 3 per cent. and housing down 8 per cent., with the accompanying risk to many homes and construction jobs?

It is not only the promises made during the election campaign that have been broken. At the time of the last autumn statement debate, the Chief Secretary said:

"I believe the protection of investment within the public spending round is the best way to boost private investment, the best way to create growth in the short term and in the long term as well."

Why has public investment been cut from £23 billion to less than £22 billion as a result of the announcement made today?

What about compensation for VAT? When the country realises that a family of four on income support will receive only 45p per week to make up for a fuel bill that every expert estimates will be more than £1·20 a week, and when single pensioners understand that they will get only 50p a week although their fuel bills will be much higher than that, no pensioner or family will accept that they have not been short-changed by the Government as a result of yet another broken promise.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the remarks made 11 days ago by the Opposition's social security spokesman, who said that 50p per week on top of the pension would be adequate compensation? Does he agree that 70p per week, which is what we have put forward for single pensioners, will be more than adequate?

Mr. Brown: That is not what my hon. Friend said. Let me put a challenge to the Conservative Members who signed the early-day motion calling for compensation for all pensioners. They said that compensation had to cover in full the VAT rise. Why is it not doing that?

Hon. Members: Answer the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is no use hon. Members shouting "Answer the question" if nobody can hear the hon. Gentleman attempting to do so.

Mr. Brown: We should also be clear about what has happened to invalidity benefit. The country and a wider audience should know that invalidity benefit will be cut. A faxed document issued by mistake by the Department of Social Security to the Press Association a few months ago said that the assessment—that is, of the people who would lose benefit—would include a retired builder with heart disease and angina, who gets pain in the chest after excessive bending, is unable to walk on the flat for more than 200 yards before he has to stop and cannot climb stairs. These are the types of people who will lose their invalidity benefit.

If the Chancellor announced today that the business expansion scheme was to be closed, and no more tax shelters created for people to make money out of the miseries of repossessed homes, he would save £100 million before Christmas.

What is the choice that the Government must make? Is their priority to close the tax loopholes that I have identified, or to hit people on invalidity benefit?

What is the Chancellor's record? At the Department of Health he picked a fight with the ambulance workers: at the Department for Education he picked a fight with the teachers; and at the Home Office he picked a fight with the prison officers. But when he was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, did he pick a fight with the City establishment and tax avoiders? Now that he is at the Treasury, is he more likely to be toughest with the weak —strongest with the least able to defend themselves—or will he stand up to people who have been avoiding tax systematically for a long period?

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again.

That is the Chancellor: strongest against the weak, fearless with the disabled and tough on invalids. That is the message that comes from the Budget. As for the Chief Secretary——

Mr. Forman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again. I have given way on numerous occasions, and on each occasion I have to remind Conservative Members of their own manifesto commitments, which they have broken.

Mr. Forman *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is clearly not going to give way. I will ensure that both Front Benchers and Back Benchers on both sides of the House are given a fair hearing in reasonable quietness.

Mr. Brown: Let us examine the Chief Secretary's record. He now tells us that he supported the Prime Minister in the leadership election, not necessarily because the right hon. Gentleman was his personal choice. In a Sunday newspaper, he commented:

"The recommendation of Mrs. Thatcher was very clear"—

moving away somewhat from the idea that a decision was made very quickly.

What happens when the Chief Secretary makes statements on tax?

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again. I have given way a number of times, and were I to do so again I would have to remind the hon. Gentleman of his own election manifesto commitments.

What did the Chief Secretary say in his Enfield manifesto? He not only said that national insurance payments should not rise; he said:

"I offer you a vision for the 1990s. It is a society prosperous enough to provide for those in need and invest in public services."

That is the Chief Secretary who has made some of the biggest cuts in public services that we have seen.

What has the Chief Secretary said about tax in the past? He is the man who told us that the poll tax would be an election winner for the Conservative party. Let us remind ourselves of what he said:

"Far from being a vote loser, with your help the poll tax will be a vote winner."

A few months after the tax was introduced, he said in a speech:

"If this is what the community charge can do for the Conservative party after just one month, think what it can do for us after one year."

The Chief Secretary is a man of few words on tax, almost all of them wrong.

I consider, however, that the Chief Secretary's highest point on the question of tax was reached when he published a pamphlet—only a few months ago, before he became Chief Secretary. It was entitled "A Vision for the 1990s", and one of the main chapters was entitled "Towards an Ultra-Low Tax Economy"—not a low-tax economy, or a very low-tax economy; an ultra-low-tax economy. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) cheers the idea of a low-tax economy. I assume that he will be voting against the Budget on Tuesday.

The Chief Secretary said that lower taxes were "a total political commitment". It might be thought that, if that political commitment was not being met by the Government in which the right hon. Gentleman served—given that it was a total commitment—he would give up, saying that he could not be part of that Government any longer. He said:

"Our European competitors lack the political willpower to introduce low-tax policies."

What about the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary himself? Do they not lack the political will power to deliver low-tax policies now?

The right hon. Gentleman also said—I believe that this will resonate throughout the country as we move towards election time—

"There is no point in going through a Parliament delivering every little promise you made and failing on the big promises."

What are those little promises? Promises about income tax, about national insurance, about VAT on fuel, about public services and about the social security budget? Those are

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not little promises; they are promises that affect the lives of millions of people. The right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself.

Conservative Front Benchers are virtually incapable of keeping their promises, whether those promises relate to tax, spending, recovery or youth employment—or, indeed, to the supposed end of the recession the day after the general election. I believe that they are incapable of telling the difference between truth and falsehood—incapable of telling the truth, or even recognising it; incapable, perhaps, of distinguishing between right and wrong.

How can the Front Bench explain this astonishing record of personal irresponsibility? Recently, the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have spoken out on moral decline and personal responsibility. Like them, I would resist any tendency to place the blame for breaking promises and being unable to tell the truth elsewhere. As the Home Secretary said:

"We should have no truck with trendy theories that try to explain things away by saying someone else is to blame."

That is the view that the electorate will take.

Will the Government now blame the Church of England for the breaking of promises following what they said during the election? Was it the absence of a father figure during the war that prevented their promises from being kept, or is it the tragic loss of a mother figure as recently as 1990 that prevents them from telling the difference between right and wrong? Let us be absolutely clear: the Government are repeated offenders in the business of making and breaking promises. They went joyriding with the British economy, they crashed out of the exchange rate mechanism and they left a trail of destruction and chaos behind them.

The Chancellor began his term of office by admitting that the country was in a dreadful hole. His Budget, however, fails to understand that our problems relate not to too high a quality of services, but to insufficient growth during the period of Conservative government. It fails to recognise that the root of our problem is the smallness and the diminished capacity of our economy. It fails even to appreciate that the problems of trade deficits, unemployment and inflation will return again and again as long as the Government do not tackle these basic and fundamental issues.

This Budget cannot even begin to recognise the importance of the Government's role in helping to secure the investment in people, industry and our social and economic fabric that we need if we are to have a high, sustainable rate of growth. As a result of this Budget, we are worse off today without the slightest prospect of being a great deal better off as a nation tomorrow. It is a Budget without a strategy for jobs, industry and long-term growth, because it cannot begin to address the foundations of the Government's failure.

We wanted a Budget for employment, and the Government cut the employment budget. We wanted a Budget for industry, and the Government cut the industry budget. We wanted a Budget for investment, and the Government cut public investment in our economy. We wanted a Budget for fairness, and the Government ended up penalising 95 per cent. of the population.

This Budget does nothing for fairness, jobs, industry and investment in the way that the country needs. For that reason, it will not commend itself to the country.

5.27 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Michael Portillo): Towards the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) threw down a challenge. He asked whether Conservative Members had political will power. He asked whether my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had it; whether my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer had it; whether I had it; and whether our party had it. The answer to those questions is yes, yes, yes, yes and yes. Yesterday's Budget demonstrated the existence of that political will power.

Did the hon. Gentleman have the political courage, in a speech lasting half an hour, to mention even one of the Labour party's policies? It was a policy-free zone of a speech, in which the hon. Gentleman did not dare to offer a single thought about what his party would do. This is an unserious shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, trying to address himself to serious problems that Conservative Members are considering seriously. The hon. Gentleman—who sits practising his smile, because he has been told that that is what he ought to practise—is a man who does not allow a single serious thought to enter his mind, or a single serious comment to pass his lips.

While the hon. Gentleman sits there practising his smile, my hon. Friends have been asking him whether he believes that the deficit is too high. Does he believe that spending is too high? Does he believe that we should put up taxes? What is his party's monetary policy? How will he create all the jobs that he is always going on about? What is his answer to all those questions? When it is not evasion, his answer is to say that it is all being referred to the Commission on Social Justice. That commission is the greatest example of contracting out there has ever been, of which any Conservative council would be proud because all Labour party policy has been subsumed by the Commission on Social Justice.

The commission has now been in operation for a year and in the past few days it has produced its second report on the important subject of social security. What does the commission say after a year of deliberation? It says:

"Over the next 6 months we will publish a series of papers explaining some of the tough questions which we believe the country faces: setting out the advantages and disadvantages of different options."

My God. What courage the Labour party shows. What determination it is showing to address our problems. What extraordinary bravery is being shown by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East and his party, and I shall tell the House why.

It is because the hon. Gentleman knows that his predecessor, the former shadow Chancellor, devised an economic policy and it was a disaster. It was the policy that cost the Labour party the general election. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East now lives in cowering terror of developing a single strand of policy.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way in a moment when I have given the hon. and learned Gentleman something to which he can reply.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East has learnt the wrong lesson. The lesson is that if he devises policies that blow the election for his party, he will take over and become the leader of the Labour party.

Mr. Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether Conservative Members kept the promises that they made about taxes at the general election?

Mr. Portillo: We are keeping the most fundamental promise of all—*[Interruption.]* That is to deliver sound public finances, on which the Labour party has not a clue, because——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I recently pointed out to the House that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will get a fair hearing. The Opposition spokesman got a reasonable hearing; the Chief Secretary will get that same fair hearing.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Is the fundamental commitment to which the right hon. Gentleman refers not just a fundamental commitment of the Conservative party to lie its way into power and a fundamental commitment to cling to power at all possible cost?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman clearly wants to get into the headlines by being thrown out of the House of Commons for using the word "lie". I shall treat his question with the contempt that that word deserves.

The Budget which my right hon. and learned Friend produced what was he rightly describes as a "no nonsense" Budget, because we face serious problems and the Conservative party put forward a serious solution. I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend has delivered a Budget which, after all, had to be tough. He was not able to deliver a lollipop Budget but had to present a lollipop-free zone at a time when we had to tighten the fiscal position. My right hon. and hon. Friends were strongly supportive of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor because the Conservative party is serious about dealing with the problems of the deficit. That is the major contrast between the Conservative party and the Labour party which the electorate will not fail to see when we next face them.

Of course, the problem that we face is a deficit of £50 billion.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way later. I want to make some progress. The House will be aware that we have a national debt of £200 billion. The public sector borrowing requirement of £50 billion is serious because it represents one quarter of the national debt. If my right hon. and learned Friend and his predecessor the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) had not taken steps to deal with that, obviously there would have been a danger of doubling the national debt over a short period.

Ms Harriet Harman (Peckham): Why is the PSBR there?

Mr. Portillo: I must tell the hon. Lady some of the areas in which the Government have spent money. In the three years up to 1992-93, the Government have increased spending on the health service by 5·5 per cent. in real terms every year. Over the past five years, they have increased spending on education by a quarter in real terms; they have increased spending on national roads by 60 per cent. in real terms; and they have trebled investment in British Rail in real terms.

On each of those occasions, the Labour party said that we were underspending, that we should spend more, that the health service was underfunded, that we were not investing enough in roads or education and that we ought to invest more in British Rail. Now the Labour party asks why we have such a large PSBR. It says that the Government are to blame and that we should spend more money.

The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) was at it again on "Newsnight" last night, advocating that the solution to our problems was to spend more money. It is some sort of rich joke that the Labour party appoints the hon. Member for Peckham as its shadow Chief Secretary. It is rather like——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chief Secretary has made it clear that he will not give way and hon. Members should take note.

Mr. Portillo: The irony of putting the hon. Lady in charge as the shadow Chief Secretary is like appointing Joan Collins to buy costumes for an impoverished amateur dramatic club. Tackling the deficit is important for restoring confidence in the economy and ensures that the Government are able to provide the conditions for recovery.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way to the hon. Lady in a moment.

During the past year, when the Government have had to borrow £1 billion a week, we had stable short-term interest rates and, in the past week, we saw them fall. We have also seen long-term interest rates falling. The textbooks on economics say that a large PSBR puts upward pressure on interest rates. That has not materialised, because the Government have established medium-term economic policies for dealing with the deficit, on spending and taxation.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames announced the extension of VAT to fuel and power, many Conservative Members were worried about the timing of that announcement and believed that the delay in its introduction would make lobbying against that proposition more intense. I say to my right hon. Friend and hon. Friends that it was extremely important when the recovery was still delicate and when many were rightly arguing that the economy was not in a state to bear higher rates of taxation, that the Government should give an assurance that over the medium term they would tackle the deficit. It was necessary to offer that reassurance. The funding crisis of 1993 is the funding crisis that did not occur because there was confidence in the Government's medium-term policies in the markets. It was the dog that did not bark.

Ms Armstrong: The Chief Secretary gave a list of spending increases as the reason for the deficit. Was he not aware of that at the last general election? Why did he and his Prime Minister promise that there was need neither to cut expenditure nor to raise any taxes?

Mr. Portillo: I am perfectly happy to answer that question. We thought that the recession was coming to an end in early 1992. But the question that cannot be answered

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by the Labour party is why, in any circumstances, it believes that we should spend more on all those things. Why does the Labour party always urge that we should spend more and that interest rates should be lower than whatever the Government set? Why did it promise high taxes at the last election but now it says that it has no plans for high taxes? Why does the Labour party refuse to answer a single question about its economic policy?

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: I shall give way in a moment.

In devising their policy, the Government have faced along the way an escapist tendency. It comes in various forms, but the great mottoes of the escapist tendencies are, "Why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?" and "Even if it's broke, don't fix it." There are various types of escapist. There are those who say that there is no need for the Government to take action because the recovery will cure all. The recovery will not cure all. Even those elements of spending that are driven up by the cycle during the recession do not necessarily unwind themselves at the end of the recession when the recovery comes.

For example, if the Government build up a higher level of indebtedness, that indebtedness is not swept away by the very fact of recovery. Other escapists say that we should, indeed, take action, but that the time is not ripe. But then the people who say that the time is not ripe are the people who believe that there never is a ripe time for taking firm action.

Then there are those who say that we should take effective action, but that there are spending cuts that can be made and tax rises that can be imposed which carry no pain and no difficulty with them. I have to tell those people that they are wrong. It is not possible to address the problem without facing tough decisions. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has faced them. The Government are not a member of the escapist tendency. Despite my ethnic origins, I am not in favour of "mañana". I am in favour of taking action today—timely action to put right the deficit that the Government face.

Mr. Turner: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his credibility among the Opposition is mightily stretched in as much as he is here today telling us about tax increases when he has always argued for tax cuts? How does he square that with the public outside, who have read his speeches, not over many months but over many years?

Mr. Portillo: I am realistic enough to know that unless we control the deficit and make sure that the burden of debt does not rise and unless we control the amount of interest that we pay on our debt, it will not be possible for us to reduce taxes. I believe in reducing taxes. I believe in the policies of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I believe that they will lead us to lower taxes in due course.

What is stretched on the other side of the House is not my credibility; it is comprehension. Yesterday, the Labour party was in deep disarray. The Leader of the Opposition was attacking us for our savage cuts. Yet I had the fortune to wander in late in the day to discover the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) saying that there had been no reductions in public spending and that the whole thing had been done by smoke and mirrors and an adjustment to the reserve. I intervened in the hope that he would not make a speech that was so embarrassing to his Front-Bench team or one that was so foolish.

I want to make the position perfectly clear because I have to be fair to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West and say that he was not the only person in confusion. There has been some misunderstanding of the position with regard to the reserves. My hon. Friends will understand that we set reserves for the three years ahead. The reserves in the second and third years of the public spending period are sums of money that the Government fully intend to spend within their plans but that have not yet been allocated to any specific programme. As the third year becomes the second year of a new survey and the second year becomes the first, the portion of the reserves allocated for that year —a third of the total reserve—is drawn down and allocated to programmes.

In this year's Budget and public spending round, we ensured that as the second year became the first year we did not allocate that reserve to programmes. We allocated it in such a way that we could reduce public spending. What we saw in operation was not smoke and mirrors or fiddles but the exercise of resolution by the Cabinet and the Government. It was the exercise of absolute discipline on public spending.

We have allocated as reserves for the next three years £3·5 billion in the first year, £7 billion in the second year and £10·5 billion in the third year. The previous plans included reserves of £4 billion, £7 billion and £10 billion. The House will recognise that the total for the three years is exactly the same. So the hon. Member for Cardiff, West was wrong. I am not surprised that members of the Labour party are not able to recognise discipline when they see it and are not able to recognise resolution and collective action by the Cabinet in making sure that the public spending is under control.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: Last year, when we reviewed our plans for 1994-95, we took £4·75 billion off the new control total —the plans for 1994-95. This year, in revisiting those plans, we took another £3·6 billion off the plans for what we were going to spend in 1994-95. The plans for the new control total over the next three years are reduced by a total of £8 billion. That means—I know that my hon. Friends will be pleased with this—that we have the new control total so firmly under control that in the next three years its average rate of growth will be 0·25 per cent. in real terms each year. The House will recognise that that is a good distance below the maximum target that the Government set themselves of 1·5 per cent. growth in the new control total year by year.

Not only spending within the so-called new control total is under control and is being reduced; a virtuous circle is being established because we are seeing that debt interest will be reduced by £1 billion a year from 1996-97.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Portillo: In a moment.

Cyclical social security will also be lower as the recovery comes through. That means that, in the figure of total public spending—the grand total of public spending

known as general government expenditure—we are seeing a reduction over the next three years of £15 billion of public spending. That is what has enabled us to reduce the proportion of our national income which is taken and spent by the Government from 45 per cent. to 42·5 per cent. over the period of the public expenditure survey.

That is the way in which we shall meet the important promise that we gave in the Conservative manifesto that the Government would reduce over time the proportion of national income that was taken and spent by the Government. That is a fundamental Conservative pledge and one which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor succeeded in delivering in his Budget yesterday.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): Before the Chief Secretary embarks any further on his virtuous circle, does he recall the commitment which the former Chancellor made in the autumn statement last year to 78 public/private finance projects? How many of those are currently under construction?

Mr. Portillo: We have seen some good progress, but as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said, it has fallen short of what we hoped for. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend yesterday moved in with some radical new proposals to ensure that the private finance initiative delivered good results. We have seen bridges built, important projects in the national health service and an important contribution to the Jubilee line.

My right hon. and learned Friend put great impetus into his initiative yesterday by announcing, for example, that the west coast main line would be a subject of the private finance initiative. That statement is welcome to Conservative Member, even if the very mention of private finance is anathema to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson).

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman has been very persistent so I give way to him.

Mr. Campbell: The Chief Secretary talks about the deficit. How was it created? If my memory is right, I remember the £100 billion from North sea oil which went down the drain. I remember the money from the nationalised industries. It was an enormous amount. We had billions from there. I remember the poll tax fiasco—nearly £4 billion. I remember Black Friday, where we lost £5 billion in one day. The Chief Secretary is the one who has caused the mess-up in the finances of the country, not us.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman has inadvertently, I am sure, stumbled into quite a good point. During the 1980s, North sea oil revenue was contributing about 4 per cent. of gross domestic product in tax receipts to the Government. Today, it produces only half of 1 per cent. of GDP. That is an important difference. That is one of the reasons why my right hon. and learned Friend thought it appropriate yesterday to build new elements into the tax base—to broaden it—by introducing two new taxes: an insurance premium tax and an air passenger duty.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the typical family will have to pay almost £10 a week more in taxes from April? Will he now apologise for breaking the promises made by himself and the Conservative party over taxation at the election?

Mr. Portillo: I do not know what a typical family would be described as, but I must say this to the hon. Gentleman, and then the contrast between our seriousness and his flippancy will be evident: it is not possible to cure a public sector deficit of £50 billion without some restriction on public spending and some increases in taxation.

It is banal of the hon. Gentleman to get up all the time and so glibly tell us that taxes have gone up. Of course they have gone up, because we are serious about putting right public finances. The hon. Gentleman is not serious about anything and the contrast shows. He is under-performing for somebody in his position.

Ms Harman: So is the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Lady may say that, but she is held inside the shadow Cabinet by the safety net of political correctness; otherwise, she would not be there at all. That is not my judgment about who is under-performing, but that of the Labour party.

Mr. Brown: If the Chief Secretary is performing well, will he now answer my question? Will the typical family pay £10 a week more in taxes next April, and will he apologise for breaking promises on taxation at the election?

Mr. Portillo: Different families pay different amounts, and I am not disguising the fact that people will pay more in taxes. Does that satisfy the hon. Gentleman? We are taking serious action to put right the problem. He continues to pretend that no serious action needs to be taken. His is a position of profound irresponsibility.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): The Chief Secretary has just said that everyone knows that it is not possible to deal with a £50 billion deficit without increasing taxes or cutting public expenditure. Why did he not say that at the time of the general election? In his previous answers, he said that he thought that the end of the recession would come earlier and that that would provide the revenues. In answer to my hon. Friend a few minutes ago, he said that only people of an escapist tendency believe that growth could cure the £50 billion deficit. Where is the consistency in that argument?

Mr. Portillo: I was talking about views taken at different times. At the beginning of 1992, it appeared not just to the Government but to all major commentators, and the Labour party, that the recession was about to end. In late 1993, it is not possible to take the view, with the deficit having risen to where it is, that recovery on its own will be sufficient to deal with the problem.

I should like to deal with the way that the Government will approach the cost of running the Government. At a time when people in the private sector have had to go through severe restraint, when they have seen their incomes under great pressure during the recession, it must make sense for the Government to ensure first that their running costs are firmly under control.

That is why there will be no increase in the cost of running the Government between this year and next year. I do not mean no increase in real terms; I mean no increase

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in cash terms. We shall have to fund any pay increases that there are in the public sector from efficiency gains and savings that we make inside the public sector.

That will be possible because we set demanding efficiency targets for the public sector and public bodies. We normally expect them to be achieving a 2 or 3 per cent. improvement in efficiency each year. Out of those improvements in efficiency must come any pay settlements that are made in the public sector.

As a result of that, over a period, we shall see a reduction in the proportion of public spending that the Government spend on running themselves from 8·2 per cent. down to 7·4 per cent. That is an important reduction in the amount that the Government are taking away from taxpayers to spend simply on running themselves.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Is not one of the most important features of the Budget the emphasis on enterprise in small businesses, and is not that the means whereby we can regenerate the economy to pay for so much of the public expenditure that is required? Is not another essential part of the budget the rejection of the Delors package and of the movement towards the policies advocated by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and others—to increase public expenditure as a means of getting out of the problems that it merely precipitates?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right. All we have to do is look at what happened as we recovered during the 1980s. The engine of our recovery was the small business sector. It was able to expand in that way because of the flexibilities that existed, particularly within the British labour market. I believe that it will be the same during recovery this time around.

My right hon. and learned Friend has taken a series of important measures to help the small business sector. As a Government, collectively, we have taken a united stand against all those who would wish to impose on the British economy the rigidities and extra costs that would be the death of that effort to ensure that small businesses can again be the engine of our recovery, as they were during the 1980s.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton): My right hon. Friend has received may challenges from the Opposition Benches tonight about election promises. Is he familiar with my election address in the 1992 election in which I stated categorically to my electorate that we would build on the 20 per cent. tax band, which is enormously important to low-paid workers in my constituency, and that we would maintain sound money? It would be difficult for me to go back to my constituency and hold my head up under that promise if we were to implement some of the suggestions that have come from the Opposition Benches tonight.

Mr. Portillo: I have read my hon. Friend's election address less frequently than I would wish, but equally I have read "War and Peace" only once in my life, so she must not be offended. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There will be further progress with the 20 per cent. tax band from April 1994.

My right hon. and learned Friend has set out clearly what his monetary policy is. He has made it perfectly clear that he will not follow the policies advocated by the Opposition.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Portillo: No. I am going to finish.

For the Conservative party, sound public finances are the predominant economic policy that we must follow. It is the policy that takes precedence. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that, in 1981, in pursuit of sound public finances, we faced a Budget from Lord Howe that required us to take heavy tax increases. As a party we accepted that because, for us, sound public finances were the most important of all our economic objectives.

I share my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment that he made yesterday about the speed at which he reduces the PSBR. I congratulate him profoundly on being able to achieve the reduction that he seeks with so much emphasis on the control of public spending and with so little raising of taxes, particularly in the year ahead.

The Conservative party believes in low taxation and keeping down the rates of taxation, because we believe that high rates of taxation have a profound effect on incentives. As rates of direct taxation are raised, they tend to drive out of the country those people who create wealth.

The search for extra revenue by raising the rates of direct tax usually proves elusive, because the people who create the wealth up sticks and go somewhere else to do their business and take their wealth creation with them. We are a country that is profoundly concerned about competitiveness. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) said a moment ago: we are profoundly concerned about competitiveness. The country attracts one third of all inward investment from outside the Europen Union, yet 45 per cent. of our national income is spent through the Government. In the United States, the figure is only 38 per cent., and in Japan only 32 per cent.

To be an internationally competitive nation, we must keep public spending as a ratio of national income down to an internationally competitive level so that we can enjoy internationally competitive rates of taxation. Thanks to the policies of my right hon. and learned Friend, we are enjoying internationally competitive rates of taxation for both personal and corporation tax, but we must still reduce the proportion of our national income that is spent by the Government.

My right hon. and learned Friend has pointed the way in which that will be achieved and charted the steady progress that we shall make in reducing the proportion of national income taken by the Government. Not least for that reason, I commend his Budget to the House with great enthusiasm.

6 pm

Mr. David Rendal (Newbury): It is a great honour for one who has come to the House comparatively recently to be able to speak so early in the Budget debate. I imagine that a number of hon. Members who have been here longer than me will feel envious of my opportunity. I have some advice for them, which I have given to many other people: they should join the Liberal Democrats because that gives one a better chance.

We are in danger of going into great detail about the Budget when there are one or two critical points about it

that should be brought to the attention of the House and public. As a result of a combination of the Budget in March and yesterday's Budget, next April we are due to have the largest tax hike in history. The Government cannot get away from that. Nobody expected it after their promises in the election and they should be deeply ashamed of it.

The Government would no doubt like to believe that the taxes are mainly indirect, and there are indeed a number of indirect tax increases in line. They have always said that, as long as tax was taken indirectly, it would not matter and that the important thing was to reduce direct taxation.

I shall begin by reminding the House of some of the indirect taxes that will be put into effect. First, there is the obnoxious imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. We have all heard a great deal about that over the past year, and, sadly, it was clear from the Chancellor's statement yesterday that he failed to listen to the pleas of electors who told him what should have been done—cancellation of that tax. The reaction of the electorate has been shown in Newbury, in the council elections, in Christchurch and in council by-elections ever since the imposition of the tax was first announced.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is it not true that at the last general election the Liberal Democrats fought a campaign based on an energy tax? Can the hon. Gentleman explain what that energy tax would have been?

Mr. Rendel: I shall come to that point later.

The important point is that the imposition of VAT has been rejected wholesale by the people. As I was saying before I was interrupted, people have made that rejection clear in the council by-elections since May, in which the Conservative party has succeeded in losing two thirds of all the seats that it fought. That is an unbelieveable and unprecedented record of electoral failure.

It is true—we have said it plainly and we have been extremely honest about it—that we believe that there should be fuel tax increases; but they should be introduced in the right way. Time and again, the Liberal Democrats have made it plain that they are prepared to support energy taxes when they are aimed at reducing pollution and not simply at cutting the Government's deficit. Such taxes should be introduced in a way that would help those who are worst hit by them.

The second of the indirect tax increases is that on petrol tax, which was introduced yesterday. That was the second huge increase in nine months. I well remember at the last general election the Conservatives in my constituency, and no doubt elsewhere, putting on the frighteners and saying that people should not vote Liberal Democrat because we would increase petrol tax by as much as 10p a year.

We had honestly and openly said that we believed that there should be a petrol tax increase of 10p a year. We did not believe in an increase of 30p in a year, which is what we have had from the Conservatives. That is a huge increase, which will bear most heavily on those in rural communities, who have suffered from bus deregulation and who have now lost all public transport services and are totally dependent on the use of their private cars for transport.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: I have already given way once, and that should be sufficient for the hon. Gentleman.

Those who have lost their public transport services in rural areas will be those most hard hit by the increase in petrol tax. In the last general election campaign, the Liberal Democrats made it plain that we would introduce a scheme to help such people before any petrol increases were introduced by our Government. Such a promise was notably absent from the Chancellor's statement in spite of the fact that he must know, as we all do, how hard people in the rural communities will be hit.

Thirdly, the Budget introduced an indirect tax on insurance premiums. One would have thought that insurance premiums were close to the heart of the Conservative party. Have not the Tories said that people should stand on their own two feet and look after themselves? Surely one way in which members of the public can look after themselves and make sure that they do not rely on the state to finance them when disaster strikes is through insurance policies, but here are the Government discouraging people from insuring themselves.

Fourthly, there is the tax on air passengers, with all the disadvantages that that will bring to those who are trying to export and those who wish to travel abroad to get more sales for our goods in foreign parts. Again, one would have thought that the Government would do their best to encourage rather than discourage exporters.

It is important to add that, in the past, the Liberal Democrats have said—I come here to the intervention of the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold)—that we support a carbon tax. Recent figures on the European proposals for a carbon tax show that, as they now stand, they would cause a petrol tax increase of about 6p a gallon —a great deal less than the increase that the Conservatives introduced yesterday.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: I have already allowed the hon. Gentleman to intervene, and I have now answered his question.

Let me now deal with direct taxes. While the Conservatives have always claimed that the one thing they would not do was increase direct taxes, whatever happened to indirect taxes, that is what they have done. Not only did the last Budget effectively introduce a 1 per cent. increase in tax on everybody's wage packet through the increase in national insurance contributions—an increase that hits all except the super-rich who do not pay national insurance on the top slice of their earnings—but personal allowances have been frozen. In real terms, even if not in cash terms, that effectively means an increase in the income tax take.

There will also be the reductions in mortgage interest relief, which will take place both next April and the following April, and a similar decrease in the married couple's allowance and in all the allowances that go with that. Those will mean real cash losses for many families. All the direct tax increases—which the Government promised they would never introduce—will hit hardest the public sector employees who have no extra money with which to pay them because of their zero increase in pay next year. Is the Conservative party a tax-cutting party, as it has suggested? Frankly, what hypocrisy. The Conservative party has raised tax more quickly than has ever been done before.

[Mr. Rendel]

For what are all the tax increases intended? First, of course, they are intended to reduce the Government's debt which has resulted from their gross mismanagement of the economy. We have heard a lot about the Government getting public sector finances right. Are the Government really going to pretend that they were aiming at sound public finances when they ran up a public sector debt of £50 billion? Again, what hypocrisy.

The Government, despite their tax-raising measures, are not investing in our future by investing in education. We heard nothing about investment in nursery schools, despite the fact that we have been told time and again that, for every £1 which is invested in nursery schools, the state will eventually reap £7 in terms of reductions in crime and social security pay-outs and the increased profitability of our economy. That £1 would release £7, yet we heard nothing about investment in nursery education in the Budget.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): The hon. Gentleman has made clear his opposition to the £50 billion deficit. Given that at the previous general election his party said that it would put one penny on income tax to pay for education—therefore, that must be taken out of the equation—will he tell the House exactly what other taxes he would levy to get rid of the deficit?

Mr. Rendel: My party said at the election and has said recently that we would raise income tax by one penny to make sure that the educational needs of the country were met. We have produced also a number of further proposals to put people back into employment. That is the most important way in which we can reduce the deficit in future, as I shall show later in my speech.

There are other areas of expenditure where the Government have failed to make the necessary investment. We are seriously under-investing in our infrastructure, our public transport, our roads and our housing.

It is also highly significant to examine the public sector net worth. Figures produced recently by Gavyn Davies, one of the Government's advisers, show that the public sector net worth increased year after year until the early 1980s. By that time, it had reached—depending on how one calculated the figures—between 70 per cent. and 100 per cent. of GDP. The net worth increased consistently under both the Conservatives and Labour until that time. Since then, it has fallen consistently, until it is now only 10 per cent. of GDP and is still falling. Indeed, in a few years the net worth is likely to become negative. In practice, we would then have a Government sector with a net worth of zero—effectively bankrupt.

A result of that can be seen in a survey by the World Economic Forum of 22 modern industrialised countries. Britain comes 22nd in infrastructure investment, 20th in quality of education, 21st in commitment to research and development, and 22nd in number of qualified engineers.

There was some good news in yesterday's Budget statement. I commend the Chancellor for his promise to study the matter of interest on late payments. That excellent idea was produced in the Liberal Democrat manifesto at the election and has, like so many of our good ideas, been pinched. Sometimes it takes the other two parties some time to pinch our best ideas. On this occasion, it has taken the Government two years even to get around to thinking about it.

It is a pity, perhaps, that the idea was not in the Government's manifesto at the election. Come to think of it, that might have been the kiss of death, as they have turned over most of the other things which were in their election manifesto.

I will now talk about housing. The Budget statement contained a cut in the housing budget of over £500 million, or about 10,000 new homes between the Housing Corporation and the local authorities. Of course, the construction industry has been particularly hard pressed during the recession. There are few better ways of bringing us out of recession and into recovery than by investing in housing to get the construction industry off its knees.

There is another important reason for investing in housing. The Conservatives claim to be the party of the family, in spite of the Chief Secretary's admission just now that he did not know what an average family was. Housing is one of the main causes of family break-ups. A lack of housing and poor housing are two of the main reasons why parents do not stay together.

I should like to tell the House about one family in my constituency, and perhaps theirs is the saddest case I have yet to come across. The family has six children. The parents and the youngest daughter were living in one of the three bedrooms. Four children lived in the second bedroom. I was told that the four children shared a couple of bunk beds. I assumed that there were two pairs of bunk beds, so each child could have one bed, but that was not so. When I went upstairs, I discovered that the four children shared one pair of bunk beds.

In a third room, another daughter who was married lived with her husband and their one son. Needless to say, the family was under considerable stress. I fought to get them rehoused, or at least the eldest daughter and her husband and child. Sadly, I was not successful and eventually the parents had to evict them. [HON. MEMBERS: "Was it a Liberal council?"] At that time, the Liberal Democrats were not in charge of Newbury district council. We have been since, perhaps as a result of the incident about which I am talking.

The young couple were evicted by the parents. The couple were, of course, temporarily housed as an emergency priority case by the council and they eventually moved into other accommodation. Sadly, that was not before the family had broken up. The husband could stand it no more, and moved out. The Conservatives call themselves the party of the family. Yet they refuse to put money into housing which is needed to make sure that such terrible cases of family break-up do not continue.

Local government is the other area for which I have special responsibility for my party. Standard spending assessments have increased this year by 2·3 per cent., a level far too low to allow local government policies to remain even at the levels they are at now. Services will have to be cut again next year. The services which will be cut will be especially those which councils are not statutorily required to provide, because it is those that the councils will find easiest to cut.

One of the services which I suspect will be cut first is crime prevention. That is not at present a statutory requirement, but it is a service on which the best local councils are trying to concentrate. That service will be almost certainly cut and, as a result, we can expect crime

to increase. The Government have claimed that they want to do something about the rising crime rate. Why will they not give local government money to invest in crime prevention?

Another interesting point about local government which came out of the Budget is the question of capital receipts. For a long time we have known that local government capital receipts have not for the most part been fully used. Certainly many are in the hands of local government but cannot be used for further investment or revenue spending. What a contrast, then, between what local government is allowed to do with capital receipts and what the Government allow their Departments to do with them. Yesterday we heard that the Ministry of Defence will sell a lot of its housing. The money will go directly into reducing the amount of net revenue spending. That is not something that it will be allowed to do; it is something that it will be forced to do—in complete contrast to what happens in local authorities.

It is not just that there will be a huge hike in taxation; there are also huge cuts in spending. How will that help us to recover from the recession? What should the Chancellor have done? He should have cut unemployment, not unemployment pay. That, surely, is the main answer to his problems. Unemployment costs nearly £10,000 per head per year. Instead of cutting unemployment by means of the investment measures necessary, he attempted to balance his figures—just as, he told us, he did at the general election—by some fanciful forecasting, instead of getting the figures right, and by cutting other parts of the social fabric.

This country needs a Government who are prepared to invest in our future, our children's education, in housing, infrastructure, public transport and all the other areas of Government spending where investment has been so low in the past. This Government have consistently disinvested. That is why the Chancellor's Budget is a failure and why the House should reject it.

6.21 pm

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has mapped out the path to restore balance to our public finances and, of course, he had to do so. Otherwise, our public indebtedness would have driven us back into high inflation and high interest rates, which would have meant a harsh future of worse unemployment and poverty.

My right hon. and learned Friend has sought to be fair in his tax increases. He has recognised that the strong should help the weak. Substantial tax increases are to be laid on the better-off. The thresholds for higher rate income tax, inheritance tax and capital gains tax have been held. The measures against avoidance, against people who get paid in gold bars or pretend that a sale is an exchange to avoid stamp duty, are right, particularly when the Government are also, rightly, tackling social security abuse. The insurance premium tax will fall progressively on the better-off.

Although the Government have had to announce spending cuts that we would not ideally have wished, notably in the housing programme, my right hon. and learned Friend has found substantial savings in planned expenditure while protecting the welfare state. He has been able to reduce the contingency reserve because of the fall in inflation, which means that a smaller cash sum is needed to purchase a given volume of activity and enables the cost of debt service to be reduced. These are rewards of the disciplined approach to economic management that the Government have pursued and that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and, these days, even the Tribune Group know to be necessary.

I am pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend ignored some of the more draconian counsel offered to him. He has not cut spending programmes massively. He has increased taxes, but he has also somewhat eased monetary policy, and he is strongly placed to ease it further if growth should falter. I hope that he will be disposed to do so. He has stressed his commitment to growth. That is the only way to restore balance without pushing us back into recession and all the social damage that goes with it.

Above all, we need to generate jobs, more jobs and better jobs. My right hon. and learned Friend's macro-economic strategy is well designed to enable that. There is also a series of micro-economic measures which will support job creation.

My right hon. and learned Friend stressed the crucial role of small businesses in generating new jobs. I welcome his raising of the profits limit for small businesses paying corporation tax, his significant increase in the turnover threshold for VAT registration, his measures to encourage venture capital, and his help for small businesses on late payments.

I also welcome the reduction in national insurance contributions for employers in respect of lower-paid employees. Although our objective should be not low pay but high pay well earned, above all, it is important to help people to get jobs. The human as well as the economic waste of unemployment is a basic challenge to our society and to the Government.

My right hon. Friends are right to be troubled by the size of the social security budget, not because we should not support people in poverty as generously as we can, but because high spending on social security is an indicator of systemic failure.

A large proportion of social security expenditure derives from unemployment. A decent society and a properly functioning economy aim to involve everyone —all our people—and not to leave some of our people isolated on the margins of society, eking out a meagre existence on benefits. Moreover, the more we spend on the relief of poverty, the less we have available to spend on other decencies and necessities—better health care and better education.

I am pleased, therefore, that my right hon. Friends are seeking to tackle the roots of the problem of high social security spending by setting out to remove the obstacles to employment. I am very pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor yesterday declared unequivocally his commitment to the welfare state and reassured us that the Government do not intend to dismantle it.

He has found extra resources for training and education. I welcome the new apprenticeship scheme and the Government's commitment to extending opportunities in further education. The French, too, have responded to economic difficulties by increasing their investment in education. If we are to be competitive, we can do no less.

I particularly welcome the disregard for child care costs of up to £40 a week that is being introduced into family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. The Government have already made

[Mr. Alan Howarth]

significant advances in reducing the poverty and unemployment traps. We need to go considerably further still.

However, for many people the costs of child care have been the final and decisive obstacle to getting into paid employment, thereby achieving the release that they want from dependence on benefits. My right hon. Friends have done the right thing here, and I am glad that they dismissed, as of course they must, the harsh fantasies with which some toyed, about cutting benefit for children of lone parents.

With this measure of support for child care costs, my right hon. and learned Friend has shown that he is willing to spend more money in the short term to recoup public expenditure in the medium and long term. He is fully justified in that approach. There is no reason to think that the markets will not tolerate borrowing to finance public expenditure, which is part of a convincing programme of investment.

I welcome the new presentation of figures in the Red Book, which separates borrowing for purposes of current expenditure and borrowing for investment. The figures presented as borrowing for investment represent sums intended to be spent on physical capital investment.

For me, the most interesting section of the Red Book is contained in paragraphs 5A.15 to 5A.19 on page 111. In paragraph 5A.15 it is acknowledged that

"some spending that is conventionally considered as current, such as that on education and training, research and development, or health care, can be considered to produce a stream of future benefits in much the same way as purchase of physical assets."

Very fairly, the Red Book continues in paragraph 5A.17:

"assessing the investment element of such spending raises some extremely difficult measurement questions."

However, the conclusion which so much encourages me is in paragraph 5A.18, which states:

"it is important to bear in mind that future productive capacity in the economy is supported and developed by spending that is not covered by the normal capital spending definitions."

My right hon. and learned Friend is right to pursue with determination a policy which eliminates borrowing for current expenditure, which is just that, particularly if it is wasteful expenditure. He should also be prepared, however, to increase investment in human capital. As rapidly as, in his judgment, the understanding and tolerance of the markets will allow, he should invest not only in child care, but in high-quality play facilities and well-trained play workers.

Recent terrible events have underlined the horrors of what children's play can mean in circumstances of trauma and neglect. Conversely, good play facilities and guidance offer enormous benefits to early learning and to the development of personality. I hope that the Government and local authorities will provide more support for such provision, particularly in areas of social deprivation.

We should also invest on a larger scale in nursery education. I was encouraged to gather that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister personally attaches importance to that. We should invest more fully in the whole of our education system, building on the progress that we have made. In particular, we need a proper system of support for part-time students. The Government are right also to maintain their support for civil science and technology.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor should maintain a sizeable programme of investment in so-called human capital. The Government are justified in borrowing to invest in that programme, in the same way as a private enterprise borrows to strengthen the capacity of its work force and its ability to create wealth. Investors will support investment of that type in the public sector in the same way as they support private sector investment.

I do not like the term "human capital", any more than I like the term "consumer". Those economist's metaphors suggest a limited view of humanity. I prefer to think in terms of us acting together to support our fellow human beings to develop their strengths and to enable them to contribute more to our society.

In that spirit, I hope that my right hon. Friends, as they consider the future of the welfare state, will not feel constrained, either by economic imperatives or by their social vision, to place further emphasis on means testing. In a year in which employees' national insurance contributions are to rise, I am sorry that contributory benefits will be cut with the proposed introduction of the job seeker's allowance and incapacity benefit.

I hope that my right hon. Friends will proceed cautiously and sensitively on the issue of invalidity benefit. I know that they have commissioned research into the operation of invalidity benefit, and I believe that they have yet to receive its findings. Therefore, I am not clear on what basis my right hon. Friends contend with confidence that significant sums are being paid in invalidity benefit to people who are not genuine invalids. In eight out of 10 claims referred to the Benefits Agency medical service, I understand that the general practitioner's decision to certify eligibility has been upheld.

The Department of Social Security commissioned research by Erens and Ghate, which makes it clear that the reason for the growth in the numbers of invalidity benefit claimants is not that more people are coming on to the benefit, and it finds no evidence of extensive abuse. It shows that it is difficult for people to get off invalidity benefit.

The rational policy response is then to help employers to keep chronically sick and disabled people in work, and to encourage employers, particularly previous employers, who are the most likely to do so, to recruit them back to work. I fear, however, that the measures on statutory sick pay and the previously announced requirement that employers should pay 50 per cent. of the cost of specialist equipment for disabled people, will tend in the opposite direction.

I fear that they will frustrate the Government's intention to reduce their spending on invalidity benefit and incapacity benefit. Will the Government also consider carefully the case for legislation to outlaw discrimination against disabled people in employment?

Against the background of plans to reduce expenditure on invalidity benefit, I am glad that my right hon. Friends have considered other ways to help disabled people into work. They have removed disincentives—the loss of free prescriptions and help with dental care—which have prevented take-up of disability working allowance. They have also applied the child care disregard to disability working allowance recipients. That is good.

At no extra cost, the Government could also allow social services departments to make direct cash payments to severely disabled people instead of providing help in services. In that way, disabled people, through their added independence, would have a better chance of entering employment.

I urge my right hon. Friends to reconsider the virtues of universal benefits as against targeting. The arguments have been rehearsed many times. Means-tested benefits are complex for recipients and administrators; they create unemployment and poverty traps; their take-up is poor; and they fail to provide security. The uncertainty that attends them means that they discourage efforts at self-help. Unhappily, a stigma goes with them. With little constituency of support among the better-off for improving means-tested benefits, those benefits are less than generous.

By contrast, universal benefits are secure. They provide incentives to work, since there is no penalty of withdrawal. They are easy and cheap to administer, and take-up is high. Contrary to what is often said, they are also targeted, as they effectively redistribute income from better-off taxpayers to people on middling and low incomes, and redistribute income over the life cycle to help people in times of greater need. Some 75 per cent. of expenditure on child benefit goes to families on incomes of less than £200 per week. Most importantly, universal benefits give all of us a stake in a shared system.

For the same reason, we should not erode the contributory system, which is the most effective way to commit us all to support each other through decent benefits.

The welfare state is affordable. As Mr. John Hills recently explained in "The Future of Welfare":

"even if benefit levels kept up with overall living standards, the total net effects on public finances over the next fifty years would add up to an addition of about 5 per cent. of GDP—no more than the increase (mainly due to the recession) over the past three years."

We cannot, indeed, afford not to sustain and strengthen the bonds of our society.

I do not, of course, argue that everything must be provided directly by public expenditure. I do not argue at all against reform of the welfare state. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on his willingness to promote a rational debate on the future of the welfare state. I agree with him that welfare provision should not be monopolised by the state, and that we should think, as Beveridge did, in terms of a welfare society. We should promote the generous virtues, not only through the agency of the state.

I welcome the sensible and overdue decision to encourage the participation of private capital in public works—not only roads, but hospitals and schools. I want the Government to develop this philosophy of mutual support and cohesion.

Their vision of the role of the voluntary sector remains to be developed. I welcome the new provision that a person on incapacity benefit will be able to do 16 hours of voluntary work without losing the benefit. Could the Government bring that provision forward ahead of 1995? Are the Government applying a similar concession in relation to unemployment benefit and the job seeker's allowance?

I was sorry, however, that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor did not have something to say in his Budget speech about the role of the voluntary sector. While I appreciate that this is not an easy time for the Government to provide more fiscal relief for the voluntary and charitable sector, if the Government want that sector to work in partnership with statutory services—sharing responsibility for programmes in the public interest—they must develop a clear and consistent set of principles for enlisting it. They must not load an extra tax burden on that sector, as both this year's Budgets have done.

I offer these thoughts in a constructive spirit, which I hope matches the generosity of spirit of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. He balances intolerance of what he characteristically calls "nonsense" with a recognition that the Government exist to help us all achieve the good purposes that we cannot achieve either individually or in private groups.

Wealth does not simply trickle down: we have learnt that, I take it. The rebalancing of our public finances should also be the rebalancing of our society, between public and private, and between rich and poor. To balance competition with mutuality, discipline with compassion, and the individual with society, is the true Tory tradition.

6.38 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth), who made a sensitive and—I do not want to embarrass him—thoughtful speech. I was sorry to hear that he intends to support his right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Division Lobby. I was unable to detect much by way of support from the hon. Gentleman for the proposals from the Government Front-Bench team. Of course, that is a matter for the hon. Gentleman. He made some thoughtful and enlightened comments, especially about the need for public sector welfare provision.

I shall not pursue the hon. Gentleman's line in support of the Budget, because I and my hon. Friends intend to oppose it. It does not provide a strategy for future economic growth; the Budget is about paying for previous Government mistakes.

Some aspects of the Budget can be given a modest welcome. For example, the efforts to close tax loopholes are welcome, although the Government could have gone significantly further. We also welcome the increase in tobacco duty, but the Government's credentials on health issues would have been substantially advanced if they had also proposed a ban on tobacco advertising.

The new child care allowances are a welcome step, and I was intrigued to hear that the Government are to introduce proposals to boost investment in the west coast main line. That issue directly concerns everyone in the north-west, and we look forward to hearing from the Secretary of State for Transport about a specific timetable for that investment. We have heard many promises and we have pressed the Government on previously publicised private-public sector investment programmes, but we are still waiting for progress on many of them.

The Government's overall strategy is fundamentally flawed, and the Budget strategy reflects that fact. I doubt whether it could be said that the Budget has any overall strategy, other than short-term and immediate political imperatives. The proposal about compensation for VAT on fuel bills has caused considerable concern. Careful news management has created the impression of great generosity towards pensioners and those on benefit, but it is undeniable that the measures still will not cover the full increase in electricity and gas bills. People should be aware of that reality.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said that the imposition of a tax on insurance premiums was

[Mr. John Hutton]

progressive. It is regressive, and will have a bad impact on families and householders on fixed incomes. It will be a serious penalty on families who have the misfortune to live in high-crime areas, and particularly in inner cities.

It could be described as a tax on the victims of crime, because people who live in high-crime areas constantly worry about their insurance on home contents. As people who live in inner cities will testify, through no fault of theirs, the cost of that insurance is extremely high, and a tax on the premiums is a tax on the innocent victims of crime. That is extraordinary when viewed against the background of the Government's much-trumpeted policy on tackling law and order and, in particular, the Home Secretary's claim to put the victims of crime at the centre of that policy.

The Opposition have welcomed a limited number of measures in the Budget, but, as I have said, the Budget is not a comprehensive strategy for growth, investment and jobs. The limited measures that we have welcomed are helpful but, sadly, they lack any overall shape or strategy. The Government do not have a policy to boost investment in the public and private sectors, and it is not clear which part of the Budget will stimulate economic growth. Such growth seems merely to be assumed rather than underpinned by any specific, concrete measures.

According to estimates from the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, capital spending by the public sector has slumped from over 9 per cent. of GDP in 1975 to an unbelievable 1·5 per cent. in each of the past two years. Nothing in the Budget addresses that fundamental decline in investment.

The Chancellor said much about the merits of public and private sector collaboration. That is a welcome development: we have been pressing for such schemes for many years. However, we need to recognise the valuable contribution that the public sector can make in that field. Sadly, the Government are intent on pursuing their familiar prejudices against all things public.

Business investment is also in a bad way. There should be further capital allowances to bring forward new private sector investment decisions. The Budget should have built on and advanced some of the measures in the previous Budget. The Engineering Employers Federation called for that. I noted the comments of Graham McKenzie, the president of the federation, who said today that he regretted that the Government had wasted an opportunity to improve on the measures in the last Finance Act.

The proposed new measures to help businesses are strictly limited. The proposed enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital trusts will have to be carefully monitored if they are not to become devices for tax evasion. The budgets for key Departments such as Trade and Industry and Employment, contain further evidence of the Budget's contradictions.

According to the Red Book and the other literature that accompanied the Budget, the budget for the Department of Employment is to rise by £145 million next year, and £117 million of that is accounted for by transferring the careers service to the Department. On my figures, that means an increase for the Department of only £28 milion, which represents a real-terms cut in the Department's budget for the next financial year of 3 per cent.

How will the new and much-heralded apprenticeship training scheme be financed from that dwindling budget? Have consultations started on implementing it, when will it start, and what will the trainees be paid?

I have a particular interest in that issue because of the collapse of apprentice training in my constituency. The VSEL shipyard used to employ 400 16-year-old apprentice trainees every year to learn vital engineering skills. The shipyard has not done that for nearly three years, and that is a ruinous waste of skills and talent. I hope to have some assurance from the Government that they will start to replace those lost skills. I hope that the Government's proposal is not another bogus trailing of a scheme that will fail to materialise.

If I am right, and the Department of Employment's budget is to fall by 3 per cent. next year while at the same time we are promised 30,000 additional engineering apprentices, where is the money to come from? The scheme needs to be properly supported, and there is no evidence whatever in the Government's documentation that proper financing will be provided.

Many hon. Members have expressed concern about the attack on social provision that is at the heart of the Budget. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon reflected some of the concern among Conservative Members. Some of the Budget measures will have an extremely serious effect on the social fabric of our society.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon spoke about the reduction in the value of unemployment benefit. People have been paying into a national insurance scheme for many years, and their contributions are soon to rise. It is extraordinary that those people have now been told by a Government who have always prided themselves on their handling of public sector finances, that because they are in such a hole, the pay-out from the scheme is to be halved. That is a betrayal; there is no other word for it.

I understand that nearly £1 billion will be cut from the grant to the Housing Corporation over the next three years. That is bound to have a dramatic impact on the provision of social housing, and it is an appalling and cynical measure. If the Government are able to maintain the delivery of social housing to the extent that they have promised, that cut in grant is at least bound to affect rents, and that is greatly to be regretted.

The taxing of invalidity benefit is incomprehensible. It is an unfair extension of the tax base, and I agree with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon that the Government have not made any credible case for saying that there is irregularity or fraud at the heart of the scheme. That case has never been made.

For years and years, GPs have been applying the regulations that the Government have laid out for access to the invalidity benefit scheme. There is no suggestion, I hope, that local doctors and consultants are somehow conniving in a conspiracy to defraud the taxpayer, which is what, ultimately, the Chancellor of the Exchequer implied yesterday. There is nothing irregular about access to the invalidity benefit scheme; in fact, many of us would argue that the eligibility criteria are far too strict.

The increase of the state retirement age for women to 65 is another significant and serious issue. It is estimated that that will save the Exchequer nearly £5 billion. Perhaps it should have been a priority for the Government to use that £5 billion to improve the range of pension benefits that are

available to our senior citizens, and not to regard the harmonisation of the pension age as an excuse to cut public spending.

An opportunity was wasted on increasing the state retirement age. It would have been far preferable to discuss a more flexible approach to retirement, which would have reduced the age at which there was access to the state pension to 60. It is a mistake, and it will be shown to be so in the years to come.

It has been said—the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) drew attention to it, rightly in my opinion—that the Budget conceals a significant cut in grants of nearly £1 billion to local authorities, which will clearly have an impact on a range of important social services, including education, housing and social services. That is another matter of serious concern, and it should be to Conservative Members.

Today, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of District Councils and the Association of County Councils have all predicted serious consequences of that cut in support to local authorities. I shall return to that subject when I discuss the new child care allowance, because it will have an impact on that provision as well.

The Budget also proposes further changes to the student loans scheme. That is a sneaky way for the Government to raise extra financial resources. That too will hang around the necks of Treasury Ministers in the run-up to the next general election.

I wonder how we can take seriously the Chancellor's assertion that he will not dismantle the welfare state against the background of evidence such as that. Why does he allow the Chief Secretary to continue his tirade against public welfare provision, unless he shares the same basic agenda and is quite prepared for someone else to make the running? There is a particular risk that those wider cuts will also negate the effects of other measures in the Budget.

I now return briefly to the subject of the proposed child care allowance. There must be a worry, because nursery education is a non-statutory provision, that it will bear the brunt of any reduction in local authority spending. There can be little doubt about that. There is no doubt, at the same time, that nursery education, properly planned and properly delivered, can form a coherent part of an overall strategy for child care provision. If there is, as a result of those cuts in local authority grant aid, a reduction in the availability of nursery places in our communities, what then are we supposed to make of that £28-a-week allowance for child care?

I wonder whether anyone has properly advised the Chancellor about the true cost of child care for many families. Of course £28 a week is better than no provision at all, but it will not meet the realistic cost of child care provision for many working parents. If we add that to the possibility of a decline in the number of nursery places, we get a better flavour of the Government's commitment in that area.

In essence, it is once again the sick and those who are out of work and on benefit who will ultimately pay the price for the Government's economic mismanagement. Some things never change.

There must also be concern throughout the country—because of the enormous tax hike that those two budgets represent when they are added together—about the combined effect of the last two Budgets on consumer confidence. We are told that, during the next three years, £23 billion will be taken out of circulation. That is an enormous tax hike—the biggest in British fiscal history. No one can predict its effect on consumer confidence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has already starkly drawn attention to the details of those figures. A typical family will be £16 a week worse off as a result. That is bound to have an effect on consumer confidence and consumer spending. If we are talking about growth in the economy, it is difficult to see where else that growth is likely to come from in future.

It certainly will not come from public spending on vital new capital investment projects, because we are witnessing an overall reduction in public spending. That economic growth is not likely to come from an export-led regeneration of British manufacturing, given the problems of the wider European economy. The Government are proposing, therefore, effectively to take £23 billion-worth of consumer spending out of the economy. I would like to hear some assessment from Treasury Ministers of the impact on consumer confidence of such a measure.

While we are discussing export-led growth, it has struck me, and, I am sure, many of my hon. and right hon. Friends on the Opposition Benches, that, throughout the Chancellor's lengthy Budget speech, we did not hear a reference to the trade deficit. We did not hear anything from the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the appalling imbalance of trade that has grown up, not just between Britain and the European Community but between Britain and the rest of the world.

Those are serious economic issues, and the problem with the Budget is that, instead of the serious analysis of them which we were led to believe that the Government would give us, we have had a ritual chanting of mantras that ultimately mean nothing. When we consider the evidence—the experience of 14 years of Conservative government—we are entitled to say that those mantras mean nothing.

Now I shall mention one aspect of the Government's public expenditure round which has not been mentioned so far in the debate—the reduction in defence spending. Once again, I have to say that that issue is of direct relevance to my constituents. In Barrow-in-Furness we have the highest dependency on defence-related contracting of any travel-to-work area in the United Kingdom.

The announcement of a further £800 million-worth of defence cuts was received, and is being received, by my constituents very badly. We have already suffered a loss of 8,000 jobs in the shipyard in less than three years. That is an unsustainable loss of skills and jobs—and employment opportunities—for any single community to expect to deal with on its own. There is no end in sight to that.

We need some information—and we need it quickly—from the Secretary of State about what the Government are now planning in terms of future procurement decisions. I fully support the idea, and the proposal, that the Government should conduct a review of the country's defence policies. That is long overdue.

I am also interested to hear the Secretary of State say, as I understand that he did to the Defence Select Committee today, that the bulk of that £800 million can be saved by means of efficiency measures. If that is the case, why were not those defence cuts proposed before? Are the Government simply saying that they have been overspending in terms of the running costs of that Department to the tune of £800 million? What a scandalous waste of taxpayers' money that would be.

[Mr. John Hutton]

I think that the reality is that there will be significant procurement cuts, especially in the budgets of the armed services. I very much hope that that is not the case, and I hope especially that the Government will announce that they still intend to procure replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid in the very near future. We need those ships, not just to maintain the ability to deploy the armed forces safely and securely around the world, but to secure vital employment in the shipbuilding industry.

When all the hype and froth is stripped away, the Budget will be seen for what it is—a giant confidence trick. We are all being asked to pay more for less. The fundamental weaknesses of the British economy have not been tackled by this, or any other Tory Budget for the past 14 years. The sick and the unemployed are being hit once more.

Perhaps the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) had it about right when he commented in the *Evening Standard* today:

"It could be cheers today, but tears tomorrow"

for the Tories. I agree with that assessment.

6.58 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton). He talked about the need to stimulate growth, but the fact is that growth is in revival in the country, and it is in revival because we have a combination of low corporation tax, low inflation and low interest rates. That sets our record apart from those of the other countries of Europe, and the economy is certainly in revival.

I also listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). Coming from the county of Suffolk, which is now experiencing a combination of the Liberals and Labour in government at a county level, I can see the wish list of goodies very much in evidence.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spring: I see that my hon. Friend agrees with me.

Sometimes, those who are practitioners of economics or politics can lose sight of what economic policy is all about. It is, of course, to provide a framework in which sustained economic growth can lead to decent living standards and secure employment prospects for our people.

As always, every Budget is a balancing act, but this historic Budget has succeeded very well in bringing together all the disparate elements which make up a coherent budgetary package. The result yesterday, for the whole House to see, was the floundering performance of the Leader of the Opposition. I have to say that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) did not even reach the beach.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) summed up the predicament of both the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party in a press release some months ago:

"We have nothing to say across the whole range of macro-economic policy, on exchange rates, on interest rates, fiscal policy, demand management and public spending".

As one looks back at the long history of the House, there can be no time in history when the Government have been faced with an Opposition more ineffective and economically illiterate. Yesterday and today, they had nothing to say. They know it, and we know it too.

During the summer, I visited Japan and Taiwan with the Employment Select Committee. Japan may have its difficulties, but Taiwan regards itself as in recession with a growth rate of some 6 per cent. Our much-improved export performance is due to the substantial increase in exports to the Pacific rim countries. All that is good for jobs and economic growth.

We have been the major beneficiary of Japanese and other foreign investments in Europe. The effect has been profound. Rover now outsells Mercedes Benz in Europe; Toyota is moving its local content in the United Kingdom from 60 to 80 per cent.; the productivity of the work force in Britain is identical to that of Japan; the days of Friday afternoon cars and Monday morning cars are clearly in the past.

When we visited the Ex-Im bank in Tokyo, which monitors investment flows, it was disappointing to hear that investments from Japan into Europe are very small compared with those to other parts of the globe. Why is that so? Time and again, we heard about the adverse cost structures in Europe and of employment costs that are simply pricing Europe's goods and services out of the world's markets.

There is no point in talking about education, NHS, transport or defence spending if we cannot produce what the world wants. The consequence is that Europe is paying a bitter price. There are 17 million people unemployed in the European Union, potentially rising further in the years to come.

In that gloomy European picture, Britain stands out, with falling unemployment, low inflation and low interest rates. Each and every other EU country has a minimum wage policy—either statutory or collective—and it is no coincidence that, where there is a statutory wage provision in the larger EU countries, there is chronic unemployment, among young people in particular. In France, it is 23 per cent. and rising; in Spain, it is 33 per cent. and also rising. The inflexibility of their labour markets has caused real economic destruction and personal misery.

Britain, like other industrialised countries, has to grapple with a sizeable budget deficit. I am glad that my right hon. and learned Friend has not shied away from it, and I applaud him for tackling it with his characteristic panache. I believe that the unified Budget will be seen to be as important as the Budget of 1979, which brought down confiscatory taxation and abolished foreign exchange controls; and the tough 1981 Budget, which set the scene for a sustained period of economic growth unparalleled since the war.

One reason why the Budget is so important is that it addresses important aspects of welfare spending. It is not a party political issue—nor, indeed, is it confined only to this country. Some 25 million Britons out of 55 million are in receipt of benefit. In each of my surgeries, I try to help people, often with limited resources, because, all too frequently, the system benefits those who do not need it.

The Budget is especially important because it has put down markers for dealing with these problems, while retaining the essential integrity of the welfare state. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security took the matter up so well this afternoon.

I was in my twenties in 1976, when the country went bankrupt. I remember feeling anger that I was going to be

bequeathed a country which had become a byword for industrial anarchy, and the laughing stock of the world. Today, I have children of my own. It would be fundamentally wrong to bequeath them an economy laden down with a debt which would be difficult for them to service and pay off, and we should never be forgiven if we did not rise to the challenge.

The key element of the Budget is the disappearance of the budget deficit by the end of the decade. It is the most critical component of macro-economic policy.

During the boom years of the late 1980s, the vast majority of new jobs came from small businesses. It is important to remember that 96 per cent. of our enterprises in Britain employ 20 people or fewer. I therefore greatly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's measures to help small businesses.

In rural communities such as my constituency, dozens of businesses exist which are the lifeblood of the west Suffolk economy. Many have been hard hit during the recession, but there are now clear signs of recovery. My right hon. and learned Friend's announcements will be a considerable boost to them. Only yesterday, I was talking to a number of my constituents involved in small businesses, and how pleased they were that they would now no longer have to register for VAT due to the increase in the threshold.

Businesses in that category will no longer suffer the costs and irritation of a statutory audit. Many of my constituents will benefit from a welcome measure for which the Small Business Bureau has been campaigning for many years. We should look carefully at what the attempts will be to cut red tape and help small business.

The audit requirement for small businesses has been significantly relaxed. The requirement will be abolished for most companies with a turnover of below £90,000. For companies with a turnover of between that figure and £350,000, the audit will be replaced with a simplified process which will help some 500,000 businesses, all potentially involved in job creation.

I greatly welcome the immediate lifting of the VAT registration threshold to £45,000. Some 70,000 traders will be able to opt out of VAT—greatly to their benefit. The Budget is of great help to the small business community and therefore to job creation.

There are many reasons why we seem since the war to have been bedevilled by a rollercoaster ride of interest rates. One has been the distortions flowing from our national propensity to put money into bricks and mortar rather than other economic activities. The restriction in mortgage tax relief is welcome, and I personaly hope that, over a period, my right hon. and learned Friend will consider phasing out altogether that distorting relief.

In particular, I applaud my right hon. and learned Friend for initiating the new enterprise investment scheme and a new venture capital trust, and I am personally gratified that any investments potentially will not be property-related. In looking at measures for enterprise, and therefore job creation, the enterprise investment scheme will provide income tax for individual investors of 20 per cent. on up to £100,000 of qualifying investment per year.

Companies will be able to raise up to £1 million per year under the scheme. That is greatly to the advantage of entrepreneurial activity in our country.

The new venture capital trusts will pool savings for investment. That means that investors will receive dividends and capital gains free of tax. That is a useful way of spreading risk and encouraging entrepreneurial revival and activity, and therefore further job creation. In that context, I greatly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's efforts to reduce red tape and bureaucracy.

As our public finances get into better balance, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will begin to re-examine certain income tax cuts. I hope that in due course he will take more people out of taxation altogether and continue to broaden the 20p tax band. We have seen the fruits of low corporation and income taxes being good for growth and inward investment. However, too many people in Britain are still paying tax too soon—there are too many people in the grey area that overlaps with welfare payments. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend never to lose sight of the benefits of a 20p basic tax rate.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General is on the Front Bench this evening. In the drama of a Budget, the avalanche of figures and their enormity, the impact of it on distinct groups can be overlooked. Ten days ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment visited my constituency, notably Newmarket, the racing capital of the world.

The racing industry generates considerable employment in my constituency. The industry had been in catastrophic decline. However, as a result of the spring Budget, the number of owners coming back to the industry has started substantially to increase, and the number of horses in training has increased as well.

There has been a quantum leap in confidence in Newmarket in the western part of my constituency. We are now seeking to upgrade the quality of training for young people in the industry. With the benefit of hindsight, nine months on I express the gratitude of my constituents to my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) and my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General for effecting those changes, which have dramatically changed the fortunes of many of my constituents.

Yesterday's Budget will put the seal on the recovery that is now in place—a recovery that will ensure in due course that we will win the next general election. The winter of recession is now over—or, to use an expression that I learned at an early age:

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

7.12 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I want to consider the interaction between health and the Budget. In particular, I want to look at the direct damage that is caused to people's health by the Government's deliberate actions. Earlier the Secretary of State for Social Security bewailed the doubling of the number of people on sickness benefit and invalidity benefit since 1979. He said that that had happened although "the nation is getting healthier". Clearly he accuses a large number of people of malingering.

The Secretary of State's answer is to look for devices to disallow benefits and claims. Not only does he think that people are malingering—apparently he thinks that doctors are conniving at it. On the contrary, the number of people on sickness benefit reflects a real increase in illness. The nation cannot be said to be getting healthier when the number of people claiming sickness benefit has doubled in 14 years. Certainly the nation is getting more polarised so that the rich and the fortunate become even more rich and fortunate, and the poor get poorer.

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

Fourteen years of Tory government are making people sick in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense. But what if the Secretary of State were right? Why does he not ask himself why 14 years of Tory government should produce a nation of malingerers? Surely there is something wrong with that as well. Why were people not so sick or so given to malingering in 1979 as they are after 14 years of Tory government? Could it possibly have something to do with bad housing, a lack of jobs, insecurity and casualisation of work, more money worries and more stress, and a culture of cruelty deliberately induced by the Government which encourages the weak and the vulnerable to be pushed to one side and enshrines greed and selfishness? Could that have produced the situation that the Secretary of State bewails?

Government supporters sometimes say that the national health service is a sort of bottomless bucket which will require limitless resources. That will be true if we continue to have a Government who damage people's health with their savage social policies. Bad housing is a major cause of bad health, especially respiratory diseases which are increasing, stress-related illnesses and mental breakdowns. In Preston, I see many children suffering directly from inadequate housing. I see many babies and toddlers who never seem to have been properly well.

What is the Chancellor's response to the housing crisis? He has looked at housing as an area in which to make what he calls savings. He has even cut the resources that go to his chosen instrument, the housing associations. Housing associations were supposed to be able to provide social housing so much better than local authorities. The Chancellor cut local authority housing, and he has now cut resources for housing associations. He says that that will produce savings. However, it is the most crass and cruel false economy. The cut in housing finance epitomises the Budget. We will need to continue spending more on picking up the casualties which the Government have created.

What are the Government doing to the national health service? With a twin-track strategy, they are creating a situation in which there is no boundary between the public health sector and the private health sector. We have gone far beyond the simple contracting out of health jobs. Public money is being used to buy treatment in private hospitals, and people are driven to private insurance to get treatment in public hospitals. In both those cases, public health suffers, and public facilities are abused by the process. I regard it as contrary to the philosophy of the national health service.

On the one hand, the Government are making people more ill by making their social conditions worse and, on the other hand, they are making it harder for people to get the treatment that they need when inevitably they become casualties. When the Government look at the number of people who are claiming benefits and the doctors who are signing the sick claims, they say, "There are too many of them." They ask not how they will correct the situation, but how they will push people to one side. What new scrap heap will be created for those people to inhabit?

The Budget, for which we are all supposed to be so grateful, is a disgrace. In 1993, it is a disgrace that the biggest boast of the Government who have been in power for 14 years is that they have not increased taxes on food or children's clothes. Their claim to fame is that we were all trembling that they might tax books, clothes or food. We are supposed to be overcome with gratitude that those things have not happened and that families' conditions will not be worsened in that way. I noticed today that one tabloid even spoke of "Santa Clarke". Santa Claus's mantle sits ill on the figure of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): He has the girth.

Mrs. Wise: Yes, he has the girth, but no other attribute.

It is a redefinition of "gratitude" to suggest that we should be grateful for the Budget. I am amazed that pensioners are supposed to be overcome with glee that they will be given back half the loaf that is being stolen from them through the imposition of VAT on fuel. People will not be overcome with glee. They can recognise when they are being robbed, even if the thief gives back to them some of the proceeds. Their gratitude will be distinctly limited.

Although I despair of the problems that the Budget will continue to cause people, the only silver lining or hope that I can derive from it is that it will further expose the hollowness of the Government's claim to have a right to govern the country.

7.20 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) obviously feels strongly about her constituency. She advocated spending but did not say how she would raise the money. I disagreed strongly with her remarks about the health service, which is doing an excellent job. Her description sounded like the decay that existed in the 1970s rather than the vibrant country that we have now.

I welcome the Budget. It is tough but fair and it shows a genuine commitment to the welfare state. I listened with interest to the wholly negative speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). Opposition Members are evidently not prepared to take tough decisions. The sum total of their policies can be described as a decision to defer a decision, in a Micawber-like hope that something will turn up, and a policy to hunt for the phantom loophole. It would be pleasant if difficult choices never had to be made. It would be pleasant if the sun shone all day and it rained at night. But that is the stuff that fairy tales are made of, and this is reality.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary reminded the House that sound finance was the Budget's underlying theme, and the continuing recovery is already helping to reduce the deficit. But I welcome his decision to tackle expenditure and the deficit so positively. If left unchecked, they would result in an increasing debt burden in future years for the next generation to pay. I believe in passing on to the next generation not liabilities but sound finances and a strong economy.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) said that the combination of this Budget and the last one was detrimental and would affect confidence. I remind him that the United Kingdom is the only European country with falling unemployment and rising output. We are moving steadily out of recession, unlike our European partners. A recent survey of 1,000 companies in the east midlands, published at the beginning of this month, showed that more

than two thirds were expecting sales to increase, and strong signs were reported of improving trends in employment, profitability and confidence.

In the past few days I received a letter from the managing director of a company, Guy Birkin, in my constituency, which is the oldest registered lace company in the world. He wrote:

"During the last five years the company has more than doubled in size; a strong sales drive into Europe has been highly successful . . . A major investment programme has been undertaken with over £20m spent on the latest technology . . . The push forward by the company has been supported by a very flexible and enthusiastic staff . . . All this has led to international recognition of the company, increased employment, improved opportunities and working conditions for our employees, a good return for our investors, and increased business for the companies who supply us with goods and services."

That is one of many examples of a highly competitive British company that is succeeding in world markets. It is prospering because of low interest rates, low inflation and the economic conditions in this country.

The Budget will be judged not just by the specific measures that it contains, or by the instant comment that has resulted, but by the contribution that it makes to keeping the economy moving out of recession, reducing unemployment, which is still too high, and reducing the deficit.

The Budget is a strategy for long-term growth and it helps business, jobs and recovery in a number of ways that are widely supported by the business community. In my constituency of Erewash, nearly 45 per cent. of the work force is employed in industry, which outstrips the average for the country, the east midlands and the county of Derbyshire. The measures relating to industry are therefore particularly relevant to my constituency. After all, it is industry which creates wealth and jobs. Big companies are the engine of the economy and small companies are the spark plugs. Some 35 per cent. of all jobs are in small companies, and growth in employment comes from them.

The past two Budgets have held the increase in business rates to the rate of inflation, which has been widely supported by business in my constituency. This year, the maximum increase in business rates will be halved and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) referred to some of the benefits of that. Coupled with that are the changes to corporation tax. These measures will assist successful companies that are contributing to the growth of the economy.

The reduction in audit requirements has been mentioned. Small companies have wanted such a measure for some time. Audit requirements have often been out of proportion with the size and profit of the business and there is a heart-felt welcome for this deregulation.

Raising the VAT threshold benefits sole traders in particular and will drop many out of the VAT requirement altogether. But late payment of debt is a significant problem that adversely affects small companies and I have had most complaints about this problem. It has often been highlighted in the House and, in his speech yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor proposed two options: either a payment performance standard or a statutory right of interest. I urge the latter course, with responsibility to a high level in the company, and continuing measures to strengthen the small claims court.

Finance for small companies is yet another continuing problem. Although I appreciate that the banks have been looking more favourably at ways of financing small businesses, based on their prospects and business plans rather than simply on the amount of collateral that the owner can put up, it is still common for a small company to operate with its cash flow financed by an overdraft and its expansion by a second mortgage on the home. That is not a long-term way for small businesses to operate.

I therefore welcome the venture capital trust and the enterprise investment scheme proposals. I trust that attention will be paid to detail, to ensure that small businesses, which often seek modest loans, are helped by these two proposals.

Assistance to business and the need for good infrastructure go hand in hand. The public-private sector partnership that the Treasury is promoting will bring forward schemes that otherwise might not have been introduced so quickly. It was extraordinary that Opposition Members appeared to shrug off the proposals when the Chief Secretary mentioned them today.

Many of my hon. Friends were delighted yesterday at the announcement of the improvement to the west coast line and I look forward to the day when my right hon. and learned Friend can announce a partnership that will bring about the electrification of the midland main line, which is another important railway link that connects the manufacturing heartlands of Leicester, Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield. Like other hon. Members, I have a further list of projects which I look forward to seeing come to fruition as a consequence of that partnership.

Let me turn to some of the other issues in the Budget and to the concerns that have been expressed about the continuing rise in the social security budget and the need to control it. Currently that budget is spending £13 per person for every working day, which is an extraordinary amount.

There is clearly a pressing requirement to prevent fraud and to spend where spending is necessary, but not indiscriminately. Realistic changes have to be made to ensure that we have a system that is affordable, that helps people to find work, and that properly helps people in need.

I join with my hon. Friends in welcoming the measures to assist those on low incomes and pensions in paying the increases in their bills when VAT is added to domestic heating. I am surprised that those proposals have not been welcomed by the Opposition.

A few days ago the Opposition's social security spokesman said that the Government must add some something to pensions to take account of VAT, and that they should add an extra 50p to pensions. Not only have the Government proposed an extra 50p; they have proposed more for future years. It is an excellent measure.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) poured scorn on the proposal to put VAT on fuel and power, but the Liberal Democrats' document entitled "Costing the Earth", advocated as a first priority the imposition of a tax on energy. It continued:

"for example, by ending the anomalous zero rate of VAT on fuel."

It is strange that the hon. Member for Newbury did not comment on that tonight.

The Government believe in helping those on low incomes and pensioners. I welcome their proposals.

The addition to social security will be of considerable assistance. Gas and electricity prices have been falling—down by 3·5 per cent. in the east midlands this year—and that will also have an important impact.

[Mrs. Angela Knight]

I expect that the granny bond will have a widespread appeal. I also welcome the extension of the home energy efficiency scheme, particularly to pensioners. It is a low profile scheme, somewhat unsung, but it gives grants to insulate homes, which results in lower fuel bills. This Friday, I am helping to publicise the scheme by helping a pensioner in my constituency who has received a grant and is insulating the property accordingly.

Mr. Tony Banks: I see a press release coming on.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am getting a little tired of seated interventions. The rule of the House is quite clear: if Members wish to intervene, they must seek to do so. Muttered commentaries are not acceptable.

Mrs. Knight: Yesterday my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the pension age for men and women will be equalised at 65 by the year 2020, but that it would affect only women under the age of 44. Further details were given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security this afternoon. I must declare an interest in this matter because I am not yet 44. I suspect that I am one of an exceedingly small minority of hon. Members who will be affected by this measure.

The demographic changes in the country are well known, and by the year 2020 there will be many more people than now who are over retirement age, and far fewer of employment age. If no change is made, the financial burden on those in work would substantially increase. Just as I believe that it is not right to pass on a deficit to the next generation, so it is not right to pass on a heavy financial burden to my children.

The measure will have a long phasing-in period—and rightly so—and changes are proposed to the state pension scheme which will particularly help women. I hope that further attention will be paid to occupational pensions, particularly for women, who go in and out of work more regularly than men as a consequence of their family commitments. Occupational pensions provide not only additional financial security but give individuals a flexible choice of when to retire.

The announcement on the retirement age reflects the changes in our society. More women now choose to work, and with the encouragement given by the child care proposal in the Budget, even more women will come into the work force.

The Budget has put the Government's finances on a sound footing and clearly helps both businesses and jobs. It decisively tackles head on the difficult economic problems that must be solved in order to ensure a long-lasting recovery.

7.34 pm

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): As the Chancellor was making his speech yesterday, I was looking for two things in the Budget. First, I was looking for a commitment to help the major manufacturing plants in my constituency to maintain employment in the steel industry. Secondly, I was looking to see exactly how the Government were going to translate their oft-quoted phrase "traditional family values" into the preparation and presentation of their Budget.

I came straight to the debate from a meeting with the Sheffield branch of the Engineering Employers Federation, where, as a South Yorkshire Member of Parliament, I heard a very worrying description from the major employers in our region about the extreme fragility of the recovery in their economic fortunes, if any.

When I talk about the steel industry, I am not talking about a frothy, "easy come, easy go" manufacturing sector, but about a core industry of special steel manufacture. The representatives were complaining about their competitiveness with other European steel industries. They said that they were at a disadvantage—that there was an uneven playing field—because they had evidence that other European Governments were giving their steel industries incentives and assistance in the form of help for capital investment, for environmental issues, for training, for easy finance and for land deals.

It is more sensible for us to say to our Government, "It is not fair that you are not helping our basic industry to compete in a very competitive world," than to say to a European Community country, "It is not fair that you are helping your basic industries to compete."

One issue that members of that federation feared, when the Chancellor presented his Budget, was that they would have to carry extra costs such as sick pay. So I was very disappointed that sick pay was included as an extra cost for these core industries. That is not to say that the federation does not welcome many of the incentives and issues that the Budget gives for small business investment and expansion, but we cannot use that expansion to invest in a basic steel industry, as that does not come within the scope of a small business. Some 75 per cent. of the Sheffield engineering employers would be outwith that kind of help.

While I fully support many of the proposals to assist small businesses, I have a nagging worry, which the Government should address urgently. They make great play of having closed a couple of tax avoidance loopholes, but I fear that in doing so they may have opened the door to 22 more. I believe that they have done that in a range of ways, when relaxing requirements for accounting and auditing procedures in smaller unquoted companies.

I was particularly interested to learn how the Government intended to translate their oft-quoted insistence on traditional family values into the Budget. Over the past few weeks, I have observed an underlying assumption every time that phrase has been used—the assumption that such values include a substantial amount of unpaid work on the part of women at home. When the phrase "traditional family values" is linked with the phrase "back to basics", there is a specific reference to the role of women 40 years ago.

The hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) mentioned one obvious implication of the Budget in that regard: the equalisation of pension ages at 65. It should be admitted that the £5 billion that that will save is £5 billion taken out of women's benefit. That will not be very popular among women of 40, 44 or, indeed, any other age, who will lose their entitlement to many other benefits at the age of 60, as well as their pensions.

I should have preferred the Government to make really significant strides by extending equalisation of pension entitlement to part-timers and short-term contract workers. That is crucial to giving women real equality with men when they reach retirement age. At present, female pensioners are substantially less well-off than men in terms of income.

I welcome the Government's admission in the Budget that it is very difficult for a single parent to become involved in the job market without easier access to child care. The provision of a child care allowance for single parents was certainly a start. However, another oft-quoted phrase was fundamental to traditional family values in the context of the Budget—the Government's frequently stated intention of moving from a system in which income is taxed to one in which spending is taxed.

I believe that the real burden of the Budget will be experienced sharply at the household spending level. Who takes the responsibility for such spending? The figures are interesting. In households in which the men work, who does the household shopping? Four per cent. of men do it; in 42 per cent., it is done mainly by the women. In households in which women are not in paid work, the shopping is done by 57 per cent. of women and only 5 per cent. of men. In households as a whole, only 8 per cent. of the men do most of the household shopping, which is done by 45 per cent. of the women.

The role of women, however, is not simply to go out with the shopping basket. Who organises the household money and bills? That is a more significant question. Again, it is mainly women who take on the responsibility: in 45 per cent. of households, they are chiefly responsible for such organisation. The effects of the Budget will be felt most markedly in that regard. The imposition of VAT on heating bills, for instance, will affect a central aspect of household budgeting.

Although welcome help has been given to households receiving income support, the Government should not imagine that that will be sufficient, given that the imposition of an 8 per cent. and then a 15 per cent. levy on heating—a crucial household commodity—will be felt next year and the year after. They will have to think again, as the spending power of households is increasingly eaten away.

Insurance of homes and household goods represents another crucial spending element, especially—as has been pointed out—during the current period of rising crime. The cut in Housing Corporation grant will result not only in fewer houses being built for rent, but, inevitably, in substantial rent increases, which will have a major effect on household bills. Those moves follow other increases —for instance, the 26 per cent. increase in water costs over and above inflation since privatisation in 1985, and the extra cost of car licences and insurance.

Yesterday, the Chancellor said:

"people should be allowed to keep as much of their own money as possible."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 936.]

That, it seems, is the reason for shifting the burden of taxation from income to spending. I do not believe that households with tight budgets will have the freedom to spend their own money in the way they want; the basic household bills will have removed all their spending power.

In the past few weeks, we have heard a good deal about another element of "traditional family values"; the importance of the head of the family in spending terms —usually the woman—in taking in single parents or students back home. Increasingly, they are young people studying at university, who have been caught by the massive cuts imposed on students in yesterday's Budget. The cuts in maintenance grants may not affect the numbers, but they will certainly change the type of student who can enter higher education.

There has been a shift in class structure among university students. It is very difficult for young people —and even more difficult for mature students—to go into higher education at a time when grants are being cut, and local authorities are being squeezed so that discretionary grants are almost a thing of the past.

In describing the reason for the cuts in student grants, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said yesterday:

"Why should the bus driver . . . pay higher taxes to finance all the living costs of tomorrow's lawyers?"—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 929.]

Why should not today's lawyers, and for that matter, today's trust managers and quango directors, pay through income tax to finance, help and invest in the skills of tomorrow's generation?

As well as the extra burdens on the household budget, we heard in the Secretary of State for Social Security's statement that the shift is not merely from taxing income to taxing spending. It was a remarkable effort in combining hefty increases in tax and spending with hefty increases in taxing income.

There is no doubt that taking £10 billion out of total public spending over the next three years will have a disastrous effect on many areas of our quality of life. The opening remarks of the Secretary of State, in which he placed great emphasis on targeting welfare benefits, were interesting. He mentioned that hon. Members such as himself would be concerned with

"those for whom the welfare state was designed"

I am not as young as the hon. Member for Erewash, but I have always believed that the welfare state was designed for every one of us who may want to use the library or who may want to send our children to state school, who may want to use the state health service, or who is concerned about the cleanliness of the environment.

As soon as the welfare state becomes something that is available to that mythical "those", who are not all of us, it will decline in quality and will not operate in the best interests of all the British people. That is a central element of the irresponsibility with which the Government approach the whole issue of public finance for the future welfare of us all.

The Budget did nothing for jobs and manufacturing in my constituency, and it points to the worrying way in which the Government intends to serve the British people, in whose interests they were supposed to design the Budget.

7.53 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I feel sorry that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) does not feel that the Budget will do anything to improve manufacturing in her constituency. I may follow up those comments later.

The hon. Lady also mentioned family values. Anybody who starts to talk about family values should be heard because we need more of a consensus in the House about what family values should be and how we should sustain them. But it is a little churlish to lead family values against VAT on fuel after the announcement of such an incredibly generous package of measures that is certain to protect poor families, not only because of the special measures that

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will be announced, but because all possible commodity price rises are already reflected in the retail prices index. That index affects the annual uprating of all social benefits.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the impact on higher education of reducing student grants and converting them to loans. There is no evidence whatever that since the Government have introduced loans, people have been discouraged from entering higher education. On the contrary, we are ahead of the Government's target of getting more people into higher education. We hope to get one in three into higher education by the end of the century and we shall easily beat that target.

Speaking as an hon. Member who represents a university constituency, I realise that our system requires more generous provision for student maintenance, whether through parents, state grants or loans. It is more expensive for the average British student to attend university because the average student lives away from home. That is not the norm in most other European countries and often not the norm in the United States, but the introduction of loans has not discouraged people from taking on the liability of higher education because they know that it will improve their earning power in the long term.

I declare an interest in the debate as an adviser to the Legal and General Group plc and congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the presentation of the Budget. I choose to call it the hush puppy Budget—not that the hush puppies and the softness of their step should deceive us of the weight and stature of the man that fills the shoes, or conceal the heaviness of the task that he has borne or the toughness of the decisions that he has had to make. I wish to comment on two general areas: the steps that the Government appear to be taking towards a comprehensive reform of our welfare system and the lessons that we can draw from the extraordinarily successful anti-inflation policy pursued by the Government that has created excellent prospects for the United Kingdom economy.

There are several aspects of the Budget that I have always considered most important for Britain's economic health. I am delighted with my right hon. and learned Friend's plans to eliminate the PSBR by the end of the decade. That is the dividing line between the Conservative party and the Opposition parties. There has been absolutely no evidence in any of the debates from either the Opposition Front Benches or Back Benches that there is any strategy whatever to deal with the deficit.

It is no good merely throwing around false charges about election pledges. I am perfectly happy to stand by any pledges that I made about the Conservative party being a party of low taxation. Compared with any of the Opposition parties, that is certain. It is rich of those on the Opposition Front Bench to pretend that somehow they will not raise taxes as high as the Conservative party.

Even better in the short term is the Government's plan to end borrowing for current spending, which is wholly unproductive and merely robbing tomorrow to pay for today.

Contrary to the out-dated fears of the few remaining monetarist commentators, those steps will provide a powerful boost to the economy that will increase employment and create wealth. From the rises in the gilt market and the stock market we have already seen that the financial markets have every confidence in that statement. The Government have successfully demonstrated their determination to manage their finances prudently and live within their means.

We should pay tribute to the tough decisions made in the March Budget because they laid the foundations for yesterday's announcements and my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) should not be forgotten or dismissed for his role. However, the March Budget left a question mark over the determination to deal with the deficit—one with which I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames would have dealt.

The figures were serious. I refer briefly to a written answer given by the former Chancellor to a question tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) in which the projected out turn of the national debt as a proportion of gross domestic product was described. The answer said:

"This ratio fell from 49½ per cent. at the end of 1978-79"—

when we were first elected—

"to 27¼ per cent. at end 1990-91, but has since risen to an estimated 33½ per cent. at end 1992-93. The PSBR projections in table 1 of 'The Budget in Brief' imply a ratio of 49¾ per cent. at end 1997-98."—[*Official Report*, 29 March 1993; Vol. 222, c. 17.]

That was an indebtedness in excess of what we had inherited from the last Labour Government. It was clearly unacceptable. That Budget was clearly an interim arrangement, pending strengthening economic performance, before my right hon. and learned Friend the new Chancellor had a chance to put his stamp on the proceedings.

We now have a much improved scenario. The consequence of mounting up less debt is much less debt interest. It is a virtuous circle. The less debt, the less debt interest and the lower the public sector borrowing that ensues the following year. So we have reduced debt interest by a billion and more in all the forward years.

Conservative Governments are nothing if they cannot live within their means. Amid all the manifesto pledges that we made at the last general election, one of the most pre-eminent surely was and remains that we should see the budget return towards balance as the economy recovererd. I am extremely pleased to see that the manifesto pledge will be fulfilled. No matter how many manifestos the Labour party signs up to, it is business that creates wealth while Governments' efforts to redistribute wealth tend to undermine the wealth-creating process.

I welcome the tight cap kept on public spending. My right hon. and learned Friend is to modest when he talks of "a real terms freeze in the new control total over the next two years".—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 924.]

By insisting that next year's reserve should not be sprinkled around the various Departments, the Government have ensured that the control total for 1994-95 represents a real terms reduction against the expected outturn for the current year. Over the summer, while Parliament was in recess, a few of us put ourselves into the line of fire by insisting that that would be possible. We gained much criticism from the "Today" programme and the Labour party and all the other people who said that it would not be possible. I am extremely pleased that it has been possible without inflicting great pain on our public services.

Simply because we are in a less inflationary environment, it is easier to manage the public finances, and

it is right that the Government should seek to take advantage of lower than expected inflation by lessening the burden of public expenditure. The control totals in the March Budget were already tight, but the futher reductions are entirely reasonable, given that inflation and public sector wage costs have turned out lower than expected.

The Government still take too great a share of national income. Those countries in which public spending is a lower proportion of national income are best placed for economic recovery. We ought to take more active steps to reduce our public spending. The public sector pay freeze is a good start. I welcome the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary today about the administrative cash limits that have been put on Government Departments.

There are plenty of instances in the folklore of Whitehall and Westminster of vast waste and extraordinary Byzantine practices around the corridors of power. One special adviser—a little while ago, I have to say—working in the Department that one would imagine would be the most cost-conscious of all Departments, the Treasury, told me that, if he was preparing a document, it first had to be sent down to the typing pool. If it was sent back, he could make up to seven corrections on his computer on his desk. If it needed more than seven corrections, he was required by civil service rules to send it back to the typing pool to have the corrections made.

I know a similar story from the Department of the Environment. A trainee was sent off to do some jobs which included some photocopying. She asked where the photocopier was. The reply came, "Oh no, you don't do the photocopying. That goes down to the fourth floor. Len does the photocopying." She asked when she would get her work back. She was told that Len was on holiday and would not be back for two days. I can give chapter and verse on a personal basis, but perhaps I should do so off the record. I am sure that the competitive testing programme is designed to take heed of such practices.

Perhaps some of the best news in the Budget is what did not happen. Income tax rates did not rise. While we see the benefits to the Conservative party of a 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax—increased incentives to work hard and encouragement for those with the lowest earnings—we are right to increase national insurance contributions to fund the deficiency grant of the national insurance fund.

Another move that was clearly needed was the first step towards abolishing the remnants of mortgage interest tax relief. That will remove a distortion in the economy, which was ably described by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), and help prevent another property-based boom like the one in the late 1980s. People will be less encouraged to invest in non-wealth-creating residential property and more encouraged to invest in productive assets.

Furthermore, by effectively raising the cost of money to domestic borrowers, we make it easier for reductions in the base rate to take place, which benefits industry as a whole. We must still encourage home ownership and make it easier for young couples to buy their first home by means of first-time reliefs. But we do not need to subsidise the rest of the economy. With interest rates at a 16-year low, the typical mortgage payer is some £170 better off already. Now is clearly the time to start the long-needed abolition.

As secretary of the Conservative Back-Bench smaller businesses committee, I welcome the measures to help small businesses. Along with the forthcoming deregulation, simplifying the paperwork that the Government require is a great step forward. Not only will taxation forms be simplified, but some 45,000 businesses will be freed from VAT. Many more will no longer be subject to audits. All those measures will allow small and medium-sized businesses to get on with making money rather than enriching accountants.

I particularly welcome the ideas to tackle late payment of small company debts. We look forward to the development of those ideas. Also welcome are the measures to encourage investment in small businesses. The new enterprise investment scheme and venture capital trusts will bring in capital. Allowing angels to take paid directorships will bring in valuable expertise.

While the changes to capital gains tax are welcome, I believe that the Government are missing a trick here. We successfully raise far more revenue from top-rate taxpayers by abolishing special reliefs and cutting the rate from the previously punitive levels. Yet we have set CGT at a relatively punitive level. We find ourselves compelled to introduce an ever-evolving set of special reliefs to ameliorate its damaging effects. There is a better way.

If the Laffer curve, as it has become known, applies to income tax rates, why does it not apply to capital gains tax rates? Two interesting papers have been produced on capital gains tax, which I recommend to interested Members. One is by the Centre for Policy Studies and the other by the Adam Smith Institute. I shall precis the latter document.

The United Kingdom rate of capital gains tax is 40 per cent., although it is adjusted for indexation. It is among the highest in the world. It is far beyond the point of maximum revenue yield. Several academic studies in the United States provide empirical support for the argument that the present 28 per cent. rate of capital gains tax is above the maximum revenue rate. Estimates of the latter vary from 9 to 21 per cent., with 15 per cent. the mid-point of the range.

There is no reason to believe that the revenue maximising rate of capital gains tax is higher in the United Kingdom than in the United States. There is good reason to believe that it may even be lower. The revenue maximising rate of capital gains tax is not necessarily the optimum rate, in that the maximum revenue-raising rate would be damaging to the infrastructure of the economy.

The taxpayer loses from the current system of capital gains tax. The available evidence suggests that the revenue maximising rate of CGT in the United Kingdom is possibly about 15 per cent. Further benefits could be realised if the tax rate were reduced below 10 per cent., and ultimately to zero, as in many other countries, such as Hong Kong.

In the current period of fiscal stringency, I do not recommend abolition, but a substantial cut in the current 40 per cent. rate would release assets, currently imprisoned by the 40 per cent. rate, for more productive uses, there would be a substantial increase in capital gains tax revenue for the Treasury to go towards reducing the PSBR further, and it would substantially improve general business incentives without resorting to the expensive profession-subsidising mechanisms that have been announced in the Budget, welcome as they are.

I particularly welcome the measures to protect those on low incomes from the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel. The Conservative party has made clear its commitment to preserve a functioning welfare state and to helping those in

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need, which the package does. It will benefit 15 million people—one fourth of the population—and we are starting the relief measures before the taxes kick in.

One measure of particular merit is the pensioners income bond, which will provide a guaranteed monthly income, alowing those on fixed incomes to plan their budgets more easily—those reliant on their savings.

I shall now deal with social security. As well as the comprehensive VAT compensation package, there are other items such as the reform of invalidity benefit—the introduction of incapacity benefit, changes to statutory sickness pay, the reform of unemployment benefit, the introduction of the job seeker's allowance and equalisation of the state pension age.

All those measures are part of a clear programme that the Government are developing to improve work incentives and reduce reliance on the state. I shall talk in detail about the job seeker's allowance, which is intended to be, and will be, a single, simple and comprehensive benefit for unemployed people. It will require that the recipient completes a job seeker's agreement, which will set about the conditions to be fulfilled to receive benefits. People who do not look for work will be penalised. That is better than workfare, because it encourages people to find a productive job rather than be stucck in a non-productive job.

There is a strong case for change. At the moment, there are two benefits: unemployment benefit and income support. They do not fit will together and there are inconsistencies between them. The two benefits have different rules, offices and systems. It is too easy for people who are not genuinely looking for work to claim for an indefinite period.

Under the current system, there is no effective penalty for people on unemployment benefit who fail to participate in training schemes. Under the job seeker's allowance, income support will remain unchanged for pensioners, carers and their families. Benefit will be paid weekly with two possible routes of entry: the contributory route or the means-tested route. The new benefit simplifies procedure and will reduce fraud by targeting the help on those who are genuinely seeking a job. The vast majority of my constituents will be delighted that there will be less shirking under the arrangement.

I mentioned that that is part of an ongoing plan for reform. I would point out that two of the proposals that appeared yesterday in the Budget: equalisation of the state pension aged at 65 and the reform of unemployment benefit, are broadly explored in a pamphlet that a group of us published over the summer.

I do not take any personal credit for the proposals that were introduced. If the Labour party is honest, it knows that its so-called social justice commission is forced very much to the same conclusions and to explore the same arguments. It is difficult. Anybody studying the problems that we face on the ever-growing burden of social security, is forced to the same conclusions that we have been forced to draw.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): My hon. Friend does not do himself justice when he refers to the publication that he has before him. Out of the measures that are advocated in it, four were introduced: the equalisation of the retirement age; reforms to the earnings related element of invalidity benefit; the fact that the new benefit that will be introduced in respect of invalidity benefit; and also the new job seeker's scheme, which will be available for six months.

My hon. Friend should also note the support that the Prime Minister gave to another——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is, I believe, seeking to catch my eye, but he seems to be making a speech rather than a short intervention.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, as he makes a valuable point about the influence that we may have had, but I do not claim to have been that influence. Those are natural conclusions to be drawn from the arguments once one explores them.

Another point that I wish to emphasise to the Opposition is one made by Beveridge in his original report. We quote it in our document. He said:

"The danger of providing benefits, which are both adequate in amount and indefinite in duration . . . [is] . . . that men as creatures who adapt to circumstances may settle down to them."

That is something to which the welfare state that we have inherited today does not pay sufficient heed. No doubt Labour's Social Justice Commission will have to grapple with that as well.

I shall now move to the second area that I wish to cover to say a few words about our economic prospects with particular regard to the Government's outstanding inflation record. The anti-inflation policies have been remarkably successful in view of the shocks and dislocation to public policy just a short time ago, particularly after the devaluation of sterling, which many commentators—the Treasury, the CBI and the Bank of England—said would lead to higher inflation than has been produced. Last March the Red Book showed a reduction in the forecast that was previously forecast. This week's Red Book shows a further reduction.

Since the pound left the exchange rate mechanism, we have proved; first, that we can have lower interest rates than the Germans—we are not necessarily inexorably tied to them; secondly, that a substantial depreciation in the rate of sterling does not necessarily lead to uncontrollable inflationary pressures; thirdly, that the exchange rate is far more useful as an indicator than as a target. I am pleased to say that the Red Book uses the exchange rate as an indicator and not as a target.

The success of our policy since we left the ERM and the prospects outlined in the Red Book—startlingly high growth prospects rising to a steady 3 per cent. annual growth in GDP—represent the coming of a new golden era, perhaps a second "golden age" for the Conservatives. I shall draw attention to one or two ratios and indicators, which are woefully ignored by hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench.

Central Government fixed investment is far higher now and will remain far higher than ever it was in the 1970s. Let us look at unit labour costs and manufacturing. Unit labour costs have fallen recently, making us more competitive. All the indications on cost competitiveness show that we are gaining competitiveness at the current time, which leads me finally to a brief comment about monetary policy.

We have succeeded in re-establishing a more orthodox monetarist policy that enables such success to take place. Some commentators have been consistently monetarist and I shall draw the attention of the House to one in particular. Tim Congdon wrote on 26 September 1985:

"It would be particularly foolish to reject the PSBR and sterling M3 because the figures have generated problems of interpretation. Sterling M3 cannot be 'meaningless'. It consists of bank deposits and notes and coin, and no one in his right mind can believe that their holdings of these assets do not affect the behaviour of individuals, companies and financial institutions."

On 17 October 1985, he wrote in *The Times* an article that described how sterling M3 growth accelerated rapidly in the preceding six months. In *The Times* of 22 November 1985, he was warning that the EMS was no easy option. By 27 June 1987, he was writing in *The Spectator*:

"Much has gone wrong with the management of the British economy in the last two years. The growth of credit and money is too high, the economy is expanding too quickly and interest rates are too low to prevent the return of inflationary pressures."

If only the Conservatives then had heeded those warnings, we might not have had such a serious recession to contend with, and certainly not such serious inflation.

What is perhaps more interesting is what Professor Congdon is saying now. He was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* on Friday 26 November as saying:

"We'll be clearly into a proper recovery next year, and we can then look forward to several years of above-trend growth without inflation. There is a real possibility that the underlying growth rate has improved."

In his November review, he recommended:

"There is no doubt that public sector borrowing is unsustainably high and that measures must be taken to reduce it . . . large and early tax increases to reduce the PSBR, accompanied by an offsetting relaxation in monetary policy"

That was his prescription. That is what the Government duly delivered. What did he say about yesterday's Budget? I shall quote from *The Daily Telegraph* today, in which he said:

"The two budgets of 1993 may well be seen by future economic historians as paving the way for the better phase of Mr. Major's government in much the same way that the 1981 Budget laid the foundations for the good years of the Thatcher administration."

We may see a second golden era.

I shall end with a question. If we can achieve the Maastricht convergence criteria as set out in the Maastricht treaty—the Red Book shows that we shall probably achieve them—one wonders why we need to think about re-entering the exchange rate mechanism. What do we need a fixed exchange rate for if we can manage all that with a floating exchange rate? If we can achieve the economic convergence criteria—they are laudable criteria intrinsically, although there is no target for overall public expenditure, and include low inflation, low interest rates and high levels of investment—with a floating currency, why do we need a single currency? I shall leave that one hanging in the air.

8.22 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): As I have listened to the speeches of the past couple of days I have attempted to work out what the Budget is aimed at doing for the Conservative party. Much has been said about reducing public sector debt and something has been said, although not something explicit, about preventing the recovery from faltering, as it seems to be doing in many parts of the economy. I have concluded that the overriding aim behind the Budget is to keep Tory Back Benchers happy, and in that the Chancellor seems to have succeeded.

I should have liked to see a Budget that got people back to work, that boosted investment in industry and that built up Britain's manufacturing base, which has been sadly depleted over the past 14 years of Conservative rule. I should have liked to see a Budget that produced a fairer society. I sometimes wonder what sort of society will emerge in the long term if Conservative policies continue. I have a little news for the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). He seems to think that the Conservative party is a tax-cutting party but, under the Conservative Government, taxes will have increased from 34·75 per cent. of GDP in 1979 to 35·25 per cent. in 1994. The Government have also increased the percentage of the average family budget taken by taxes.

More serious than that, over the past 14 years society has become sharply divided. Today, the bottom one tenth is 14 per cent. worse off in real terms and the top one tenth is 62 per cent. better off in real terms. We can see the effects of that throughout our society. People are homeless and unemployed and pensioners and students live in poverty. There are great inequalities. The bottom one tenth of the population is paying 43 per cent. of its income in taxes while the top one tenth is paying 32 per cent. of its income in taxes.

The March Budget will make that division in society worse. The micro simulation unit of Cambridge university has estimated that the March Budget will hit the poorest one tenth by a further 3 per cent. while taking only 1·5 per cent. from the richest one tenth. More people at the top end will do extremely well for themselves and benefit from the Chancellor's largesse, while at the bottom end more and more people live in dire poverty. I do not want to live in such a divided society.

Yesterday, the Chancellor announced a package of help towards paying for VAT on fuel—a package obviously intended to keep Tory Back Benchers quiet—that will cost £1·25 billion, while the imposition of VAT on fuel will raise only £2·3 billion. Does the Chancellor really think that it is worth it, in view of the political backlash? I am glad that pensioners will have some protection, although I do not believe that the package will fully compensate the worse-off for the imposition of VAT on fuel. We have heard today that young families on income support will get 45p a week to cover an average £1·20 of extra cost. That will result in great hardship.

One group of people on extremely low incomes will get no help on the imposition of VAT on fuel. Students will not benefit one iota from the package of help.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I have been listening with great interest to the hon. Lady. Does she not think that the 18 per cent. fall in the cost of fuel, primarily as a result of privatisation—that figure goes back to 1983, and the midlands has seen a cut of 5 per cent. in a year—will benefit students as well as older people?

Mrs. Campbell: I am sorry to say that it will not benefit students. Over the past 14 years, the spending power of students' grants has been reduced by 120 per cent. of today's spending power. We have to balance any fall in costs against increases in other living expenses and the general reduction in grants. Students often live in private sector rented accommodation that is badly insulated, with draughty windows and insufficient heating systems. Often, they are in no position to do anything about that. The coins in the meter by which they keep warm will be consumed at an unsustainable rate, throwing more students into debt and poverty.

Students are already badly hit by the fall in the value of the student grant, and an increasing reliance on loans means that students are leaving university many thousands

[Mrs. Campbell]

of pounds in debt. That will increase sharply over the next three years. I know that it will be viewed with alarm by those students starting their courses this year, and I declare an interest in that I have a son who has started a degree at Imperial college, here in London. Because London living costs are higher than costs in the rest of the country, students in London on a full grant will receive £2,845.

That is due to fall to £2,067 by 1996-97. That is a reduction of £778 during the next three years, and the Government are expecting students to borrow £778 to make up the shortfall. I hope that the Government have appreciated that that is not a one-for-one exchange. Those students whose parents will be able to make a full contribution—they include my son—will be able to borrow £778, as will those students who receive their grant from the state.

As many more students will take out the full loan than students who will draw a full grant, expenditure will increase. I will benefit from that, if I choose to reduce my son's grant to the same extent that the Government are reducing the grant to students who depend on grants. That is not a fair way of financing students and, although I shall benefit from it, I shall vote against the measure if I get the opportunity to do so in Committee.

Students will also suffer under the Budget from the increase in the council tax. Government Members will say that students do not pay the council tax, but that is not exactly true. I have received a letter from a constituent of mine, Mark Goodrich, who is the welfare officer of the Cambridge university students union. He points out that, in a household consisting of five students, no council tax is payable; similarly, in a house where five people are unemployed, no council tax has to be paid.

However, let us consider a household in which there are four students and one unemployed person. That household becomes eligible for the single adult rebate, so that 75 per cent. of the council tax is payable. The unemployed person, it is true, can claim back 20 per cent. of his share of the bill. That is one fifth of 75 per cent. which, I can tell Government Members, is 15 per cent. of the full council tax bill. That still leaves 60 per cent. of the bill to be paid by the four students.

It seems desperately unfair that households consisting of either all students or all unemployed people pay nothing, while those live in mixed households pay a high proportion of the bill. I am sure that the Government did not expect that to happen, and although it does not affect many people, it hits some people hard. Some of my constituents who are mature students and who live with non-students —their partners—are badly hit by that anomaly.

I have mentioned that matter twice before in the House, and both times I received the brush-off from Ministers. I hope that, on this occasion, I will get a more sensible answer, because this issue makes a great difference to the students who are affected by it. One way in which Ministers could remove the anomaly would be to make students eligible for council tax benefits. The issue affects very few students, but that measure would wipe out the serious problem cases.

I wish to talk briefly about women. The equalisation of the state pension age will lead to a deterioration in benefits for women aged under 44. Those women have been led to expect that they would receive those benefits from the state. All hon. Members are aware that the equalisation at 65 has happened because of the £5 billion savings which it will create in the national insurance fund. It is a further reduction in benefits for women, in addition to those which have been already announced.

I remind the House that the pension was based originally on 25 per cent. of a person's earnings over the 20 best years of a career. It has been now reduced to 20 per cent. of earnings based on average earnings over an entire career. Periods of low pay are taken into account along with periods of high pay, and that will drag down the value of the pension. That will affect women primarily since, because of family commitments, they spend significant periods in low-paid, part-time employment. Women who have been penalised already by changes in the rules are to be further penalised by having to work until the age of 65 before they draw their pension.

All hon. Members will welcome the £28 a week which has been made available as a concession for child care expenses. I should like to draw the attention of hon. Members to the case of one of my constituents, who wrote to the Prime Minister. As is normally the case, the Prime Minister sent the letter on to me for a reply.

My constituent explained that she was a single mother, although she was not alone by choice. Her boy friend became violent and threw her out. She had a good job as a researcher and statistician, but she could not afford child care on her own. She was in a difficult position. She dared not sue her boyfriend for maintenance because she was afraid of his violence, so she gave up her job and claimed income support. That single mother costs the state more than £600 a month. However, she wants to work and does not want to stay at home and depend on state benefits.

My constituent explained that, when she was working, she took home £800 a month after tax, national insurance contributions, and so on. The largest expense by far was child care, for which she paid £450 a month, which reduced her income to £350 a month. She got no tax relief on her child care expenses. She explained that she would now need an extra £200 a month to bring her back to the low standard of living which she experiences at present while living on state benefits.

I am afraid that the £28 a week—welcome though it is —will not be sufficient to help my constituent and many women who are in her position.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: I have given way once, and I will not do so again because my time is fairly limited.

The concession is too little, too late, and will not help many women who have professional skills and who could make a contribution to the national economy, let alone those women who are able to earn smaller amounts of earnings. Another problem with the Budget is that 300,000 women have been brought into the income tax net, and women can also be affected by cuts in public expenditure.

There are 1,000 small businesses in my constituency which employ 15,000 people, so they are an important part of the local economy. Many of those small businesses are high-tech and are involved in leading edge technology, but I am concerned that they are not growing as fast as they should. There are various reasons for that, one of which is the lack of available finance.

I welcome the enterprise investment scheme to encourage direct equity investment. We must watch

carefully to see how that scheme works. The business expansion scheme started well and helped small businesses a great deal in its early stages. However, during the past few years the BES has been hijacked by property developers. Although the scheme has demonstrated that there is a lot of money around for investment, it has not had the effect that was intended when it was introduced.

Another measure relates to statutory interest payments for late debt, and the consultation paper that the Government are introducing on that subject. If a measure is produced to introduce statutory interest payments, it is important that it should be payable for several years after it becomes due.

Businesses often blackmail their customers by threatening not to provide further orders if their customers press for payment of debts that are due. It is important that we should avoid that situation.

The Budget has not extended the capital allowances that were introduced temporarily in the March Budget. I know that that would have been a popular measure with my small businesses. There are no further tax allowances for research and development and no proper schemes to improve training and education. Many small businesses in my area will see that as a sustained attack on people who are trying to run small businesses and compete directly with companies abroad.

Several measures in the Budget disturb me and I shall vote against some of those that I have talked about tonight.

8.40 pm

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South-West): Lord Wilson said that a week was a long time in politics. Less than a week ago, in the debate on the Loyal Address, I spoke about the economy. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me again this evening.

When I spoke last week, I urged a reduction in the control totals, action on the Budget deficit and a more confident stance by the Government on economic policy. Yesterday, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer presented his Budget we made significant progress in all those areas. The control totals for next year were reduced by some £3 billion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) said, many Conservative Members had argued for that throughout the summer months right up to the Budget. The reduction is sensible in that it takes into account the lower inflation which has been achieved and brings greater discipline to the Government's finances. That is particularly important, but the Government have made only a beginning.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has struggled long and hard to reduce the contingency reserve and to ensure that it is not consumed in the main estimates of departmental spending. With a sensible budgetary framework in place for the coming 12 months, it is up to Ministers to ensure that those targets are achieved.

The overall increase in the control total allows for an increase in cash spending of 2·7 per cent. That is a not insignificant sum when inflation is at such a low level. However, it will require a cultural change for Ministers and civil servants. *The Times* today published photographs of Ministers who had supposedly won and those who had supposedly lost in the spending round. As usual, the press regarded those who had contained their budget and achieved savings as losers. There needs to be a fresh philosophy in the Government so that those who play a part in achieving more cost-effective public services are recognised and rewarded.

There also needs to be a change in attitude among civil servants. Tight budgetary targets have been set. Now they must be achieved. This afternoon, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary referred to Lord Howe's Budget of 1981 and drew comparisons between it and my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget yesterday. It should be remembered that the 1981 Budget provided for public spending to fall by 4 per cent. in real terms over the subsequent three years. Today, my right hon. Friend presented public spending projections for real increases of 0·25 per cent. per annum. Despite Lord Howe's good intentions, he could not achieve the 4 per cent. reductions over the following three years and public spending increased in real terms by some 5·7 per cent.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Unemployment rose by 2 million.

Mr. Legg: That was coming out of recession and into a period of sustained growth.

With a firm Budget set for next year, Ministers will have to work extremely hard to ensure that those spending plans are adhered to. Comments about efficiency and lower overheads must be made into realities.

The other welcome changes in the spending figures for next year are reflected in reductions in debt charges and in cyclical spending. That shows the merits of our overall policies. By getting down the overall level of borrowing we are driving down debt charges, and by coming out of recession we are getting a reduction in cyclical spending.

The Budget is being well received in the markets. Today, both the equity market—*[Interruption.]*—and the gilt-edged market responded positively to my right hon. and learned Friend's measures. Opposition Members may not care about the equity market or the gilt market, but I am afraid that they are living in the 1930s. The gilt market is important to the Government and to every business.

Today, long-term interest rates fell and the gilt market rose. That is good news for Government finances and for every business. Whether in the service sector or in the manufacturing sector. The long-term interest rates set by the markets determine the price at which businesses can borrow and plan for the medium and long term. That lies at the heart of our policies and is an aspect of economic policy that the Opposition choose to ignore completely.

The strategy of balancing the books in the medium term has now been established by my right hon. and learned Friend. When I spoke in the Queen's Speech debate, I said that the concept of reducing the public sector borrowing requirement towards balance over the medium term was too vague a policy objective. Yesterday, that changed. My right hon. and learned Friend introduced plans in the Red Book to balance the books. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may not like that, but if they open the Red Book and look at the figures, they will see plans to reduce the PSBR to zero. That will be good for the country, for the Government's finances and for business throughout the country.

Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend did not spend much time talking about monetary policy. Previous Chancellors have tinkered with monetary indicators, such as M0 and M4. My right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Legg]

Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) widened the bands for both those indicators to such an extent that they had little meaning as instruments for determining monetary policy. Yesterday's statement about underfunding the deficit next year by £7 billion was, however, significant and a welcome development in terms of monetary policy. It will help the liquidity of many businesses, which is vital to their expansion.

My right hon. and learned Friend rightly made disparaging remarks about forecasts. Many of our forecasting institutions and economists run forecasts based on models that do not reflect the matters that drive the British economy in the 1990s.

The adjustment of £7 billion to monetary policy—that is, 1·25 per cent. of gross domestic product—will be an important stimulus to the economy, which counters any suggestion from hon. Members that this is a contractionary Budget.

Spending plans have been reduced, but they do not result in an overall cut in expenditure—spending has been brought into better balance.

Confidence will flow from the Budget. I mentioned the reaction of the markets today, which the Labour party seemed to pooh-pooh. Unemployment will continue to fall and my right hon. and learned Friend's estimates for GDP growth in the Red Book have been modestly set. The output gap in the United Kingdom economy is probably at a significant level. Unused facilities, resources and people exist to take up the slack in the economy. I believe that we shall see above-trend growth over the next few years.

The overall success of the measures will not depend purely on monetary policy or on the Government being able to manage their machine more efficiently. Success will also depend on having a coherent long-term strategy for reducing the state's role, in step with people's aspirations. I was pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend yesterday reinforced our commitment, as a Government and a party, to reducing public spending as a proportion of GDP. That is one of our main priorities over the remaining period of the Parliament and in the run up to the end of the century.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North drew attention to the fact that many of the most successful economies in the world today have much smaller lower public sectors than the United Kingdom. I believe that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary also drew some parallels in his opening speech. Japan has a much smaller public sector as a proportion of national wealth—32 per cent. of annual GDP. The United States' public sector is about 35 per cent. of its GDP.

Opposition Members will be interested to learn that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) seems to be a convert to the concept. In his speech on the Gracious Address last Thursday—it appears in *Hansard* at column 602—the hon. Gentleman gave Taiwan as an example to be followed by Britain. He said that a larger proportion of young people went into higher education in Taiwan than in the United Kingdom. He seemed to suggest that we should follow the example of Taiwan. His suggestion probably reflects his usual intellectual laziness. Taiwan has a much smaller public sector, which has something to do with its economic vitality.

What is more, if the hon. Gentleman had bothered to do any homework, he would have found that all further education in Taiwan is financed by private loans—there is no state help for higher education students in Taiwan. I look forward to seeing the hon. Gentleman in the Lobby when we vote on issues relating to student grants. It is important to have a long-term strategy to reduce the size of the public sector as a proportion of national wealth if we want to have a successful economy.

I welcome the changes announced in the Budget on social security payments. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor presented a generous and significant package to help with VAT compensation. The package was much more generous than any of the estimates that I saw in the press or from the Labour party. The total package is worth £1·25 billion, which is a success for grey power.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced changes in the level of retirement pensions over and above the inflation rate. He gave the House an assurance that that was a one-off measure and could not be repeated in later years, which was a wise and sensible assurance for him to give the House. Politicians must take fully into account the changing demography of British society. Demography has certainly changed enormously since Beveridge established the welfare state in 1945. At that time, those over 65 represented one in every seven of the population of working age. As we heard this afternoon from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, there is now one person over the age of 65 for every three people in the working population. Therefore, the demography has changed.

The economics are also changing fundamentally—Opposition Members would do well to recognise that. Many elderly people retire on substantial occupational pensions which have grown significantly during the 14 years of Conservative rule. Those pensioners will have been pleased to see the developments in the markets today. They have become more wealthy and will have an opportunity to receive higher occupational pensions in future. In considering policies for the elderly and the social security budget overall, we must take into account demographic and economic changes that have occurred over the past 50 years.

I welcome the introduction of the job seeker's allowance and the new incapacity benefits. The aim of seeking to concentrate help on those most in need is the appropriate policy for any responsible Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North said, spreading universal benefits widely across the whole population weakens the amount of resources available to direct to those most in need. A high priority for Conservatives is to ensure that those in need receive proper allowances.

I support the proposals to equalise retirement ages announced yesterday, which was a common-sense solution to the European Court rulings. Hon. Members may be interested to know that the private sector has already taken the step of equalising retirement ages, and more than 90 per cent. of occupational pension schemes have equalised retirement ages at 65. The social security budget still shows substantial increases over the coming years. Opposition Members who suggest that Ministers are undermining the welfare state should turn to the Red Book and look at the spending figures on social security, education and health—all of which are increasing in real terms.

The renewed commitment that we have heard from my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor to reduce public spending overall as a proportion of GDP is vital. A sound financial foundation and a sound financial example set by the Government will heighten the prospects for enterprise and initiative within the economy as a whole in coming years and produce substantial economic benefits for Britain and its people.

8.58 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): The Chancellor's Budget judgment is that the economy needs a huge deflationary increase in taxation and an unprecedented cut in public expenditure just as we are coming out of recession. I assume that that is known as the new economics, but it is not an economic formula known to me in other circumstances.

The tax increases that will hit the ordinary taxpayer in the spring can only be called a tax bombshell, which will fall not only when the economy is slowly recovering when it should be gathering pace, but just before the local and European elections, which will bring just retribution to the Conservative party.

A family on average earnings will lose no less than £30 a month as a result of the action of a Government who are pledged to reduce the tax burden. By 1995-96, a married person earning £25,000 a year will lose £74 a month—£900 a year. That is also a formula for delaying recovery. But the full weight of the new tax-benefit regime will fall on invalidity beneficiaries, the unemployed and the nearly poor, who will, for example, have to pay VAT on domestic fuel without compensation.

I welcome the £28-a-week child care allowance, although it will not go very far. It is a useful antidote to the hysterical speech on the social cleansing of single mothers and scroungers that the Secretary of State for Social Security made at the Conservative part conference. Some 200,000 low-paid workers will be pulled into taxation for the first time as a result of freezing allowances, so that the weakest will again get it in the neck.

The increase of £1·6 billion in health spending is quite inadequate to cope with growing waiting lists and increased demand. The Secretary of State for Health said that she expects 2·25 per cent. in efficiency savings. I hope that she will tell us where those efficiency savings will come from. She really means that savings are coming from the standard of living of health workers.

Costs in the health service are driven by new technology and drugs, which far outstrip a 1·6 per cent. funding increase. Our health service is phenomenally efficient by international standards, and it cannnot be squeezed any more. Frozen pay in the health service and other public services simply means redundancies.

In my constituency advice surgeries, the biggest and most intractable problem is housing. In what was once an exceptionally well-housed city, there is now real housing stress and hardship. We can look forward to a substantial worsening of the situation. The cut of £300 million to the Housing Corporation, followed by another reduction of the same amount in the following year, will lead to a fall in the number of completions of some 13,000 dwellings and the loss of 30,000 improvements. It will lead to increases in housing associaton rents and a fall in work for the building industry.

The effect on local authority housing will be worse. Local authorities will take a £860 million cut next year, and that will mean more redundancies and substantial cuts in services that have a direct impact on the less well-off. New starts by housing authorities and housing associations in the last year of a Labour Government were more than 100,000. Today, new starts are 36,000. Public investment in housing has fallen by more than 20 per cent. in real terms since the end of the 1980s, and it is now lower than for the past 30 years.

I have never understood why the funds received from council house sales could not be used to build more rented housing. That would create jobs and provide homes. There has been a huge growth in poverty, noticeably in my formerly prosperous constituency where unemployment is now some 15 per cent., while 140,000 taxpayers on incomes of more than £80,000 a year have had an unbelievable bonanza of income tax cuts. We are heading for an American-type society, in which there is a vast gap between rich and poor. The differentials between the well-off and the poor are greater now than at any time since records were started in 1886.

There has been a steady weakening of our productive capacity. Investment is a smaller share of national income than at any time for nearly 40 years. Britain is 23rd out of the 24 OECD countries in terms of the share of national income devoted to investment. We are not investing for the future of our industry. Investment for each manufacturing worker is half that of Germany and Japan, and a third of that in America. With private and public investment still falling, that is a recipe for continuing depression in our economy.

All the policies embodied in the unified Budget depend for success on the eventuality of a recovery from recession over the next three years which is capable of offsetting rises in taxation and cuts in public services and infrastructure.

I am one of the few people who take an interest in the form of national accounts. The Budget is much less unified than one might think. It is really a standard Budget with less detail than usual, and simply a presentation of public spending heads. It will be followed by departmental spending reports which set out costs but never set out the outputs or objectives of spending, and estimates which are more or less meaningless for management purposes.

I am pleased about the shift to an accrusals basis of public spending. I remember proposing it to a Procedure Committee in 1969, but the Treasury then opposed it as impractical.

Much more work has to be done on our national accounts, given that, as Robin Butler said in an answer to a question by me in the Treasury Committee a week or so ago; we are moving from a central Government of 30 main Departments to a Government of 30 ministerial headquarters, 150 agencies, more than 1,000 quangos, trusts and boards and countless thousands of contracts that are all managed by companies that are out to make a profit.

Those changes make nonesense of Government accounts and wreck the accountability of Departments to, for example, the House and its Select Committees. That is worth mentioning. Public expenditure planning is simply becoming impossible as a result of those changes in the machinery of government. Unfortunately, the machinery of government has changed much faster than the machinery of scrutiny that Select Committees can bring to bear.

[Mr. John Garrett]

To return to the Budget judgment, as I started, it seems to me to be an exceptional gamble on recovery. It is a Budget that hits the poorest hardest. It depends on massive cuts in public expenditure, which were hidden in the Budget statement and will become apparent only when the settlement with local authorities is made. It imposes taxation on the greater part of our fellow citizens, and I very much doubt that that gamble will come off.

9.5 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett). I agree with every word that he said.

May I say, for the record, that I was absent from the debate earlier because I was attending a meeting of the Procedure Committee and I returned immediately after the meeting finished. One of the papers that we considered there was about the impact of a unified Budget. Although the Committee is naturally very supportive of a unified Budget, as we all are, we need to monitor the date carefully and to observe its impact, because there have been some complaints, especially by retailers, that in the run-up to Christmas it is not especially good for business to have to try to second-guess a Chancellor of the Exchequer, and consumers have the same problem. We ought to consider that carefully and perhaps think about another date if we feel that there has been some adverse impact on commerce and consumer patterns.

In recent weeks and months we have got used to hearing the phrase about getting "back to basics". The Prime Minister is very fond of using it. Two points occurred to me about that phrase. First, the Conservatives have been in power since 1979, which is 14 years. If we are to get back to basics, therefore, we need to ask who took us away from basics in the first place. Secondly, what on earth does the phrase mean? What are basics? When did basics begin, when did they end, and when was the golden age of basics?

I must admit that it is a very evocative phrase but, rather like its author, the Prime Minister, it defies objective definition. It can mean totally different things to different people. That is precisely the trick. Everyone can agree with it without contemplating the problem of ever having to agree with anyone else, because no one really knows what it means. It is a phrase that says it all but, at the same time, says nothing. It is vintage John Major.

I decided to try to get into the mind of the Prime Minister, a task that some people may say does not require the abilities of a Harry Houdini, but I am a little more charitable about the Prime Minister because, in my opinion, if the Prime Minister has in mind a golden age it must mean Brixton and getting back to the basics of the 1950s.

I can connect easily with that sort of image because I was also brought up in Brixton in the 1950s. We lived in a London county council home. The Majors, of course, lived in a privately rented mansion flat, as I understand, and we always used to envy them greatly. They were well-known nobs in the area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can tell you. It was, however, a time of great security, I am sure, for both of us although, mercifully, we were blissfully unaware of each other's existence.

There was little or no street crime in Brixton at the time. As kids we were able to play in the streets—I am sure that the Majors did not, because that was a working-class practice only. If anyone was unfortunate enough to be knocked over when we were playing in the streets, you could bet your bottom dollar that he would be knocked over by a car that was designed and built in Britain. It would be an Austin or a Morris Oxford; or, if he was very lucky, or perhaps unlucky, he could be knocked over by a Jowett Javelin. How I longed to be run over by a Jowett Javelin.

There were no beggars in the streets of Brixton in the 1950s, there was no one pushing drugs. Truancy was almost inconceivable and anyone who did it found that the school inspectors or the educational welfare officers would soon come round to talk with his parents.

To own a television in Brixton in the 1950s was a big deal. Anyone owning a black and white television was thought of as either being on the fiddle or a bit of a flash git, as my granny used to say. There was no real violence portrayed on the screen, nor were the minds of the young polluted by the obscenity of the violent sick videos and computer games that we have today.

To complete the idyllic picture of the Prime Minister's golden age of basics, this is the clincher. During the 1950s Surrey won the cricket county championship every year for six successive years; and Chelsea recorded its only league championship in 1954-55. It must have been the golden age of basics for the Prime Minister. I was lucky; I saw every match that Chelsea played in the great year of 1954-55.

However, when the Prime Minister recalls those times, he always manages to forget two things. First, unemployment in 1953 was 356,000 nationally—1·7 per cent. of the working population. London now has more unemployment—about 500,000—than we had nationally in the 1950s. There are now 2·8 million unemployed people in Britain—and that is the fiddled figure. If we take the 29 changes or fiddles into account, probably about 4 million people are unemployed.

There was no homelessness in Brixton in the 1950s. Local authorities at that time were building 239,000 homes. In 1992, local authorities built just 4,600 homes. It does not take a PhD in housing administration to work out why Britain has a housing problem.

In Brixton in the 1950s, in the Prime Minister's golden age of basics, security was based on employment. People had security, and jobs and a stake in society. When people have employment, they have something worth keeping. They have something that gives them a stake in our society. It is not surprising that street crime, truancy, single-parent families—all the things that are pointed out as problems in our society—did not exist in the same measure because people had the security of jobs.

The Chancellor's Budget speech contained little or nothing that really addressed the problem of unemployment. The only job that the Budget addressed was the job of the Prime Minister, which the Chancellor clearly covets. There he stood, all beer belly and hush puppy shoes, playing to the one electorate that really matters, the only one he needs for the future—the electorate behind him of Tory Members of Parliament who will be voting for a new leader of the Conservative party probably some time next year, and he obviously wants to be in the frame when that happens.

The Chancellor could have done a great deal for jobs in Britain and for London in particular. He could have done it by expanding the budget of the Department of Transport instead of reducing it by one fifth between now and 1996-97.

Last week in London we suffered one of the worst breakdowns in the Underground system that any city in the world has experienced. It was the worst one I can ever recall in London. It led to headlines such as "Enough is enough" in the *Evening Standard.* On Wednesday 24 November, about 20,000 people were trapped in the tunnels in trains and people were stuck in lifts. Millions of people failed to get to work or arrived at work late.

The Secretary of State for the Environment said that Londoners should stop whingeing. Instead of whingeing, they should storm No. 10 Downing street to do something about the calamitous state of London transport. How dare the Secretary of State tell Londoners that they should stop whingeing when we have such a crappy, clapped-out Underground system as we have today? He is lucky. If he thinks that we are whingeing, if he comes anywhere near my part of town in the east end of London, where we were without the Central line until Monday this week, Londoners are more likely to string him up than to start listening to his admonitions about whingeing.

It is all right for Ministers in their chauffeur-driven cars, with their red boxes and their civil servants brushing dandruff off their shoulders, moving around in the luxury that surrounds them while millions of Londoners struggle every day to make sense of an Underground system or a public transport system that is palpably breaking down. It ill behoves Ministers such as the Secretary of State for the Environment to say that Londoners should stop whingeing.

The Monopolies and Mergers Commission said that £700 million to £750 million a year is needed to produce an acceptable modern metro system. The previous Secretary of State for Transport promised £700 million a year for London Underground by 1993-94. However, one year later, that funding was cut by about 30 per cent. in the Budget. We are talking about cutting a budget that was estimated only to be able to keep things going and then make some improvements. To cut the budget by 30 per cent. means that so much work cannot be done now.

That is why London Underground broke down so badly. It turned out that the electrical fault lay in cabling that was 70 years old in some cases. We should not have a system that has 70-year-old cabling. We have rolling stock which badly needs replacing——

Mr. Jenkin *rose——*

Mr. Banks: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman because he spoke for ages and bored hon. Members rigid, especially me. I know the hon. Gentleman's father well. To show family values, the old man goes to the House of Lords and the son comes to the House of Commons. The Tories know all about family values. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should sit there and take it because I can tell him about this place. There is no more unreceptive an audience than when it is made up of people who are simply waiting for the hon. Gentleman to shut up and sit down so that they can get up and speak. I have three minutes and I shall relish them, and the hon. Gentleman will sit there and listen.

The Chancellor could have said something about the Northern line. It is called the misery line *[Interruption.]* If the Chief Secretary, with the bouffant hair, travelled on the Northern line instead of in his swish car, he might push forward the proposals to modernise the Northern line. Crossrail is now uncertain in London, and the Jubilee line extension is not the highest priority.

It is nothing to do with the transportation needs of Londoners—it is all to do with saving the bacon of Canary wharf and the developments of the London Docklands development corporation. It is developer-led; it is not consumer-led in terms of the transport needs of London. When will we get the channel tunnel rail link? The Chancellor could have talked about that. That has been pushed back.

Transport investment means jobs in the construction industry and in rolling stock manufacturing outside London. It saves billions of pounds in terms of congestion. If we had a modern metro system, people would use it instead of private cars. The Confederation of British Industry estimates that congestion costs London £10 billion a year.

A good public transport system brings environmental improvements. No economy can prosper without an efficient transportation system. Investing in London and national transport systems makes a great deal of economic, social and business sense. Anyone in the House who travels on London transport knows that its infrastructure is a disgrace.

The Government had a wonderful opportunity to say something positive in the Budget about investment in London transport's infrastructure and they failed. They have betrayed Londoners, and Londoners will get an opportunity to show what they think about the Conservative party and the Government when we get round to smashing the Conservative party in the local elections in May.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I had a fleeting hope that the elusive Secretary of State for Health would turn up this evening to give us the benefit of her wisdom.

Mr. McCartney: She is out partying.

Mr. Blunkett: No, she is not out partying. She will be out doing a bit of late-night Christmas shopping, taking advantage of especially late opening hours in the build-up to Christmas. Instead, we have the Paymaster General and my old sparring partner, the bouffant boy, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. I am delighted that the Chief Secretary is here tonight because his hand is on the tiller in terms of the ideology that is being followed.

Mr. McCartney: The "Portiller".

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, his hand is on the tiller as the "Portiller" and potentate of what is likely to happen to this country. A clear ideological thrust is hidden by how the "beer-swilling Chancellor" manages to freeze duty on beer and spirits, but places the duty on others to meet the Budget deficit.

Those who are unemployed through no fault of their own now find that their benefits and the time in which they can expect to receive back their own money are reduced. Six months is a poor return for people who have paid for years, through national insurance contributions, for the benefit to which they are entitled.

[Mr. Blunkett]

Conservative Members have undermined the Beveridge principle that people who pay in should have a right to benefits—not a benevolence, something handed down by others or something passed across because they happen to be in distress. They have undermined the key principle of full employment and the ability of those who have a job to contribute back into the Exchequer as well as look after themselves and their families. They have undermined individuals' responsibility for themselves and their families to earn a living through hard, rewarding work in order to contribute to themselves and their loved ones, but also to put back into the community, through contributing to tax and national insurance, money that can then sustain decent public services.

The crunch of the ideological difference between us is that Conservative Members, led by the Chief Secretary, believe that public expenditure is bad and undermines the fabric and backbone of society. They believe that a free-for-all, free-market economy in which people "do it yourself" in terms of gaining benefits and buying insurance is the direction in which this country should go. That mirrors in part the United States' experience, with insecure work, insecure prospects and a lack of stake in a community that values itself—a society in which people are threatened and their stability is undermined to ensure that they are willing to take lower and lower wages to manage to survive on the breadline.

If that is the sort of society we want, we shall continue with the policies that were enunciated yesterday. But if we want to build a society that believes in itself and can use its intelligence, rational thinking and experience of history to build up public services, the community and a sense of belonging so that people value those around them and understand their interdependence with others, we shall turn instead to the policies enunciated by the leader of the Labour party and the shadow Chancellor today.

The Budget deficit is entirely of the Government's making. It is their policy that has deliberately thrown away the receipts from North sea oil, the gains that were made through the hard work of the people in the pits, the steelworks and the engineering industry. The engineering industry is clinging on by its fingertips in the city part of which I have the proud pleasure to represent.

When reporters from the BBC ask people for their opinion on the Budget, do they ask the engineering industrialists of the north and Scotland; or the people who produce wealth by manufacturing products that can be sold overseas; or the people whose livelihoods depend on key public expenditure on essential services; or the people who produce equipment and materials—not rubber ducks, plastic gnomes or somebody else's champagne corks, but real things that people want to buy and can be sold abroad? Of course they do not. They ask what the City of London thinks about it, what happened to the index and whether people are confident. They do not ask the people who produce the real wealth of the country. We have lost touch with the reality of what is taking place on the ground.

The Government's claim yesterday that the health service had received a boost from the Budget was fraudulent. The Government knew perfectly well that what they were expecting from those working in the service, and those receiving its services, was a sacrifice to keep it going. If we take out the inflation figure, using the GDP deflator, the actual increase is 0·9 per cent. If we take from that the amount that is being asked for in savings, £450 million —the same amount that was asked for in the current financial year, and mirrored savings of a similar amount that were requested in the previous financial year—we get a totally different picture.

Mr. Portillo: Savings produce more.

Mr. Blunkett: The Chief Secretary says that savings produce more. In other words, it is necessary to cut the service to reinvest in it. The Government produce saving targets, which the service can have back if it makes the savings.

The savings are not on senior managers' salaries, which have gone up by 211 per cent., or on those who have awarded themselves an average pay increase of 9 per cent. this year—ranging up to 137 per cent. in the case of one very favoured Conservative friend, who was the chief executive of Guy's hospital until it was merged.

It is not the people at the top who are being asked to save, but the people who will have their pay frozen in the coming year. It is the people who will be asked to save to fund the service. If the Chief Secretary strongly believes in what his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is doing, perhaps he will do us the honour of telling us so tonight.

What will be the increased charges and tax on the sick, through increased charges for prescriptions and dental treatment, and the withdrawal of exemption for certain groups in those categories? Perhaps the Chief Secretary or the Paymaster General will stand up and tell us when the announcement about the increased charges to those using the health service will be made, and how much the increase will be.

Mr. Portillo: We are not standing. We are listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech; we will be talking about Labour's policy later.

Mr. Blunkett: The Chief Secretary wants to talk about Labour party policies. He wants to talk about anything except Conservative party policies. He does not want to talk about the fact that there will be a reduction of £175 million in real spending on the health service in the coming year. By the Government's own statistical records, 1·5 per cent. of the health budget will be taken up by demographic change and changes in medical technology.

We are talking about a £175 million cut in the amount available for spending on the health service. That is not counting the £290 million for every 1 per cent. saved by freezing pay for the average nurse or doctor, and not counting the fact that the Government are virtually doing away with the pay review bodies. Evidence given to the Department of Health suggests that national pay bargaining should be replaced by local productivity agreements based not on what we understand to be fair remuneration for the average decent day's work by a nurse or doctor, but on what the evidence now describes as performance-related pay.

Mr. Portillo: I am driven to intervene in the hon. Gentleman's speech by the old relationship between us. I know that he wishes to conclude this part of his speech and to deal with Labour party policy. Before he does so, however, let me tell him that the amounts that we have added to the health service budget for the coming year will enable the service to treat 4 per cent. more patients. That

is in addition to a 60 per cent. increase in the number of acute patients receiving treatment since 1979, when the Conservatives came to power. Those are the facts. The hon. Gentleman should be concerned with the treatment of patients—with output rather than input.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree that it is a scandal that the Conservatives have lengthened the waiting list by 100,000 since the general election alone; that it has exceeded the 1 million mark in England alone for the first time; that waiting times went up by 25 per cent. in the first six months of the current financial year; and that the number of complaints rose by 37 per cent. last year.

The Secretary of State for Wales would take issue with the Chief Secretary on whether the Government could judge whether there would be a 4 per cent. increase in the number of patients treated. He rightly pointed out that the Government do not refer to patients as patients nowadays; they call them "episodes of care". They do not count patients. An "episode of care" may mean someone changing from one ward to another, or returning from theatre to a different bed in the same ward. The Government do not know whether there will be a 4 per cent. increase in the number of patients treated, because there are no indicators to provide the information.

The Government speak of "episodes of care", and of "provider units" rather than hospitals. They speak of "job seekers" rather than the unemployed. We are given everything except the truth. As the Secretary of State for Wales rightly pointed out in Monday's *Times*, we hear of "down-sizing" rather than mass redundancy. The Government engage in doublespeak; they speak with forked tongue; they say one thing and mean another.

The Government are cutting public spending, having promised that they would increase it. They have increased taxes, having promised that they would cut them. They are fraudulent, they mislead, and they have bamboozled the electorate; but they will do so no more. The electorate are wised up: they understand what is happening. A £1,000 million cut in housing provision will take its toll. That 8 per cent. cut will have an impact not only on those who are poorly housed or have no homes, but on all who want others to be decently treated—who believe in a health service which, as well as merely treating patients, prevents ill health from occurring in the first place.

We are against the Government's Budget because it imposes spending reductions on those least able to bear them. That is why we have continued to oppose the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel bills. The low-paid families—mothers at home with their children, for instance—will be hit by it, and there is no compensation for those who are just above the benefit level. They are earning and struggling: they get up at 6 am to go and do a lousy job that they would rather not be doing.

Those are the people to whom we shall be appealing. They are our natural constituents now. They are the people whom the Government have targeted with a tax on insuring their homes and their futures, and with a tax demanding that they should not expect—through national insurance—the comfort and security of the surrounding community when things go wrong. They should not expect support when the Government's policies make them unemployed; instead, they should take out private insurance. They should have to look after number one, if they can. That is the united state vision of the future from a Chief Secretary to the Treasury who is obsessed with cutting public spending.

The Chief Secretary said that he would ring me on election day and he did. He was confident while he sat in an Italian restaurant. Next time, I shall ring him and I shall have a different message—that £16 a week of the budget of every family in the country will have spelt doom for the Conservative party's election chances. The cuts in education at school level—not what was announced yesterday, but what will be in the revenue support grant—the reductions in real spending, in real people's lives, in libraries, in schools, in care of the elderly, in social services and, as I have already mentioned, in housing will have spelt doom. The cuts will have to fall in local government. The cuts will fall in the day-to-day budget of every man and woman who know that the increase in taxes will bear on them.

The Labour party was honest and said that it would take from the national insurance contributions that the very rich avoid once their incomes exceed £22,000. The Government said that they would not raise national insurance contributions and instead levied them on those below the £22,000 level and thereby protected those above. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government have done it on every occasion——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I ought to tell the hon. Gentleman that it is now Madam Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

Mr. Blunkett: I only wish that I could tell the difference, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I wish that I could tell the difference between the Chief Secretary and the Secretary of State for Health, but I do not get close enough to either of them to be able to do so. In fact, it is now almost a year since the Secretary of State for Health had the temerity to debate with me over the Dispatch Box. Considering the catalogue of disaster that is hitting the health service, it is no wonder that she has been afraid to come to the Chamber since 26 January.

Take the announcement yesterday of a private sector investment in the Fazakerley hospital in Liverpool by SAS, the Scandinavian airline. It was fixed up by the previous regional chairman, who told the local trust to get ready for a £15 million investment through the health service, and, at the last minute, pulled the plug. He then came along with, guess what, a scheme, not a tender or a contract or an open bid for a 100-bed hospital, but a private deal—just like the appointment of the chairman of the Scarborough trust.

Nepotism, corruption, fiddling and fixing are rife—from the west midlands, where £10 million was squandered on a golden handshake and a "thank you" letter to the chairman of the region, to the squandering of £63 million in Wessex, to the £600,000 squandered by St. Thomas's hospital, whose director of finance and business manager flew to America to investigate the First Response company run by Richard Saig—since arrested—and failed to discover that the company was simply an answerphone. It is funny that he managed to travel first class to Grand Rapids, but never managed to discover that the company was an answerphone only. No action was taken. Nor was action taken when the estates division of the South West Thames region was sold off and one man made a £900,000 killing.

[Mr. Blunkett]

It is not the patients, the citizens, the low-paid or those who struggle to pay taxes who are the benefactors of yesterday's announcements in the Budget; it is the fixers, the friends of the Conservative party, the better-off, the people who do not need the health or education services or public housing or decent public transport, because they can buy their way out of the public squalor with the temporary and narrow private affluence that some people have gained from the past few years of Conservative government.

We have a different vision of the future, which is fairness in tax, fairness in the distribution of wealth and investment in public services. It is restoring confidence in people's right to a job and to decent treatment at work. It is ensuring that those who are unemployed do not have national insurance snatched away from them and that they do not have their rights taken away by a Budget that targets those who can ill afford to pay and protects those who can best afford to pay.

9.39 pm

The Paymaster General (Sir John Cope): It hardly seems fair to intervene in the dialogue between my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside, (Mr. Blunkett), but that is what I am supposed to do. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not been able to secure an Opposition day for so long to raise the matters that he wanted to discuss with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I shall come back to what he said later in my remarks.

I want first to respond to some of the comments made earlier in the debate yesterday and today, especially about the matters for which I have responsibility under my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who spoke yesterday, was disappointed that there was not a cut in beer duty to compensate for the cross-border effects. I noticed that the hon. Member for Brightside had the opposite opinion and believed that beer duty should be increased, but never mind.

Others also said that the effect of excise duties on the cross-border price of alcohol and tobacco in the single market was something that we ought to take into account. It is, indeed, something that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor took into account in the Budget for the first time in a major way. He will have to give consideration to it in every future Budget.

There is a considerable difference in duty between the United Kingdom and some of our neighbours on the continent. The issue tends to be seen only in terms of our continental neighbours across the channel. Yet we also have quite a long land border with the Irish Republic. Land borders are, by their nature, much more susceptible to cross-border shopping than sea borders. Irish excise duties are basically higher than ours and the problem there is one for the Irish Republic rather than us. It is part of the whole picture of alcohol and tobacco duties, and our traders in Northern Ireland benefit from the present position.

The main attention has been on the opportunities for buying alcohol and tobacco across the channel. As the House will have realised, that is and will be a feature of Budgets, as my right hon. and learned Friend said in his Budget speech. There have been well-publicised stories in the press about firms just across the channel selling drink and tobacco to British visitors. Of course we understand the attraction of that, but it is important to keep the whole thing in perspective.

In many cases, the goods can be purchased at considerably lower commercial prices, irrespective of the duty across the channel. That has been reognised and has been acted on by some firms in Britain to improve their position. That trade was to be expected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) said in 1992 that the Exchequer might lose a total of about £250 million a year in revenue as a result of the single market. There have been claims that the volume of cross-border shopping has been dramatically greater than that which is implied by that estimated revenue loss. However, I have monitored the receipts of duty extremely carefully month by month, as the House would expect me to do. The fact remains that, if anything, those estimates look as if they were on the high side rather than the low side.

Various surveys suggest different increases in the legitimate trade but there is nothing to suggest that the loss is anything like as drmatic as some of the newspapers have suggested. It is nothing like enough to justify people saying, as they occasionally do in the newspapers, that we need to reduce the rate of duty in order to preserve the revenue. Even if the revenue loss from increased cross-border shopping were more than £250 million, if one considers that we get £5 billion on alcohol and £7 billion on tobacco from those duties, the House will realise that it is not something that enters into the calculations much.

There have also been references during the debate to the proposed air passenger duty that the Chancellor introduced in his Budget. That fits the Government's strategy of shifting at least some of the burden from direct taxation by broadening the indirect tax base, and it makes a contribution to tackling the budget deficit, which has been discussed so much in the past two days.

The tax addresses a sector where expenditure is currently subject to very little indirect taxation because of the VAT zero-rating and the use of duty free fuel by international aircraft and most domestic services. If that is compared with some of the areas of expenditure that we tax already, it can be seen that my right hon. and learned Friend was correct to say that that sector is lightly taxed.

Such a tax has therefore been suggested to us from time to time. People do not always understand why some other countries have had such a tax for so long while we have not. The fact that others have similar taxes means that we can organise the duty in such a way that there will not be a major compliance burdens on the businesses involved.

The new tax will be raised through the ticketing system and we attach particular importance to designing the mechanism that will account for the duty to fit in with the airlines' existing systems as closely as possible. It is proposed that the tax will apply to passengers departing from United Kingdom airports from 1 October onwards. It includes domestic flights and flights to the European Community, on which the duty will be £5. That covers rather than more than 60 per cent. of all passengers who fly from United Kingdom airports.

To protect the position of the United Kingdom's international hub airports, there will be an exemption for transfer and transit passengers. There is also a provision that those coming from, for example, Edinburgh through

Heathrow to another destination will pay only a single charge, which will depend on the final destination to which they are heading.

Mr. Blunkett: The Chancellor of the Exchequer told us all that yesterday afternoon. I remember him specifically talking about internal flights. Will the Paymaster General tell us instead why the Government have clearly broken their promise not to increase taxes?

Sir John Cope: I shall come to Labour's policies, our own policies and the election in a few moments. I was asked about details of the tax, and I think that it is important to put them on the record.

The other new tax that was proposed—insurance premium tax—goes on a sector that has been lightly taxed because of the exemption from VAT that it enjoys. My right hon. and learned Friend also spelt out some of the particulars of that yesterday, but the impact on households and industry of the insurance premium tax is important.

My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned some of the ways in which it would affect people. It would be about £35 a week for the average household. I can give more particulars to the House. The average tax on contents insurance, which about three quarters of households have, will come to about 6p a week, although obviously it depends on how large is the house and how elaborate are the contents.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Did I hear the Minister correctly? Did he say that the cost per household of the tax on insurance was to be £35 a week?

Sir John Cope: No, it will be 35p a week. I hope that that is what I said. It is what I intended to say and it is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor told us yesterday. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. People might hear better if there were not private conversations going on.

Sir John Cope: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The tax will be due on all payments made on or after 1 October 1994. For policies that span that date, the tax will not be due if the premium has been fully paid before 1 October but will be due on any payments made after that date. The Finance Bill will also include specific measures to combat forestalling. It will not be possible to avoid the tax by making payments in advance of 1 October 1994 if insurance commences on or after that date. We also attach considerable importance to ensuring that the implementation of the tax is done in a way that gives rise to the minimum compliance costs either for the industry or for the Government.

Mr. McCartney: Will the principle that the right hon. Gentleman has just enunciated, that advance payments will still be subject to VAT, also be true about advance payments for gas and electricity? In other words, will advance payments for fuel made before the date of the introduction of VAT on fuel be exempt from VAT? If that is the position, people who can afford to pay a year in advance will get a tax rebate at the expense of others who have to pay quarterly bills in the normal way.

Sir John Cope: It is not on precisely the same lines as the insurance premium tax, but nevertheless the hon. Gentleman is right in principle. The normal VAT rules apply. The tax point is when somebody pays, if they pay in advance, and that applies to VAT on fuel as well as to other matters in the VAT——

Mr. McCartney: That is the opposite.

Sir John Cope: On the contrary, it is similar to what I have just outlined with regard to the insurance premium tax. The tax point is when one pays but one cannot pay in advance for insurance that does not commence until after 1 October.

Mr. McCartney: Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the matter precisely? Is it right that one cannot pay in advance to avoid VAT, whether on fuel or on anything else?

Sir John Cope: Yes, if one pays in advance for VAT for any purpose, and that includes for fuel, the rate of VAT that applies is the rate that applies at the time that one pays, as opposed to when the service is delivered. That is the normal VAT rule and it applies equally to fuel as to other matters eligible for VAT.

We are anxious to ensure that the compliance arrangements for the insurance premium tax are of the minimum possible cost and are designed with the fullest co-operation of the industry, to ensure that the burden is as small as possible. That is part of another of the themes of the Budget and of the Government—to ensure, through deregulation, that all taxation provisions are as user-friendly as we can make them. That includes VAT, and we have several proposals on that.

Mrs. Wise: Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that to impose a tax on people insuring their homes and the contents of them is oppressive? He said that three quarters of the population have insurance policies. Should not the Government, especially this Government who are always talking about people standing on their own feet, do something to encourage those who have not been able to insure their homes and the contents of them rather than penalising those who have?

Sir John Cope: The hon. Lady must make her own judgment about whether it is right that a large amount of expenditure for all people should be left out of the tax system in the way that insurance is. She knows that our philosophy has been to extend, and to some degree accelerate, taxation on indirect tax rather than taxation on income. The hon. Lady knows that, and the proposal is in line with that. I understand all that she says, and I understand also those who say that we should never extend taxes of any sort. At the same time, it is the duty of the Chancellor to look across the board and to see areas where taxation can be best raised. He must make his judgment on that, and whether that judgment is the same as the hon. Lady's is a matter for her also.

I was talking about deregulation, and the House knows that we have increased the registation threshold of VAT. We are also making proposals in connection with those businesses which are struggling to survive, and which have difficulties in paying their VAT. At the moment, those businesses which are in administrative receivership or are heading for being wound up have not been able to set off any of the VAT refund which they were due to receive against their VAT bills. We propose in future that they should be able to do so, as is the case under an ordinary voluntary arrangement under bankruptcy or liquidation.

[Sir John Cope]

Businesses which trade in that way but which are in difficulty have been able to offset the VAT under the extra statutory concession. We propose to write that into law to extend it as I have described. We are also proposing to complete the package of VAT reforms in the March Budget which deal with repayment supplement. I announced the other day some further improvements which will make it easier for businesses to qualify for the cash accounting scheme.

In the excise field, we have made a series of proposals. The first of those concerns gaming machine licence duty, a matter of considerable interest to some hon. Members. As those hon. Members will know, we are proposing to improve the administration of the tax and we published a consultation document about that earlier in the year.

There were some reservations about the proposals to abolish seasonal licences and the facility to surrender licences and to obtain a refund. Seasonal licences were introduced in the early 1980s. In fact, we have taken note of the reservations and we propose to continue both seasonal licences and the surrender provisions.

We propose also to reform excise law to make tax enforcement more effective. At the same time, some safeguards will be introduced in the form of the decriminalisation of minor breaches of the excise rules. The trader will be given the right of an appeal to a tribunal in the case of both excise and customs law. We are extending the power of the VAT tribunals to allow them to take on appeals from those areas as well. That is part of the modernisation of the customs procedure to bring it more in line with modern business methods.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett) had to say about resource accounting and accruals. Speaking as a chartered accountant—although one who has not practised in a long time—I believe that that is a most important sea change in Government finances, and that it has profound long-term significance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) seemed to touch on a similar point in his speech when he drew attention to the references to human capital in the Red Book. We propose to publish a document about resource accounting next year. In the meantime, studies have been set in hand on the matter under the new chief accountancy adviser. One important aspect of that—to which the House will have to pay great attention in due course—is the interaction with voting and the way in which accounts are presented to Parliament. We are drawing both the Public Accounts Committee and the Treasury Select Committee into the discussion on that subject.

Much else has been said, but I should return to the main theme of today's debate and, indeed, of the days of debate on the Budget. Yesterday was devoted to spelling out the Government's view of what should be done and the plans for doing it. The day following the Budget is usually the opportunity for Opposition parties to set out their alternatives. Neither the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) who spoke for the Liberal Democratic party nor the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) who spoke for the Labour party took that opportunity. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newbury said that the Liberal Democrats would abolish mortgage interest tax relief. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have spoken before about seated interventions. I expect the Front Bench at least to set some sort of example.

Sir John Cope: The Labour party——

It being Ten o'clock the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITION

Child Support Agency

10 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg leave to present a petition

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the residents of Halifax sheweth that they regard the Child Support Act 1991 as a failure, and believe that its effect upon single mothers on income support and on second families is injurious, that many women on income support have been left worse off through loss of passported benefits and that single mothers have been intimidated to authorise the Child Support

Agency to pursue fathers of second families. This is grossly unfair and a serious poverty trap and the petition therefore calls on this House to abolish the Child Support Act and the agency.

Wherefore your petitioners pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Young Offenders

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity of raising an issue which is of great importance nationally as well as in west midlands constituencies. A debate on the subject of young offenders could range over many days. I intend to specialise in particular in cases in the west midlands which show that public concern is legitimate.

There has been a massive increase in the number of persistent young offenders in particular. That has led to the public outcry, which is fully justified, and to the courts and the police maintaining that they are powerless. They have joined the public in calling on the Government to take action soon and speedily.

Too many young offenders are going into court and leaving court laughing, not just at the judiciary but at society. They think that we are fools to let them get away with what they do. They appear persistently, time after time. I shall cite at length one case in Birmingham a few months ago.

In September, a 13-year-old appeared in court charged with 225 offences, mainly of breaking into cars, stealing cars or burglary of a comparatively minor nature, although the cost of the items that he stole totalled £23,000. The frightening thing is that, of the 225 offences, 175 were committed while he was awaiting trial at a so-called social services secure accommodation abode. He managed to leave the accommodation and commit many offences. Indeed, on one occasion he was re-arrested only three hours after being sent back there by the court.

The chief superintendent, John Jasper, who is in charge of the city of Birmingham centre area, said:

"If I could lock up my hard core of six, I could reduce city centre crime by 18 per cent. and car crime by 30 or even 40 per cent."

He also commented that the magistrates were unable to help him to deal with the problem.

When the youngster eventually got to court, he was given 12 months' probation. Shortly afterwards, he was due to appear on a television programme that I was appearing on for Central Television. I arrived at the studio to be informed that, unfortunately, the youngster could not make it—he had been detained yet again by the police. I should think that the police were sick of spending their time chasing someone who was committing that number of offences.

I am not critical of the Government. The Home Secretary has responded to the problem. Following discussions, his speech to the Conservative party conference contained 27 points covering many of the issues that I had raised, including cautioning.

In my district of Dudley, the chief superintendent, contrary to what the chief constable had thought could be done, suspended cautioning. The chief superintendent said that the small print stated that cautioning could be suspended in cases of extreme need. The number of house burglaries, car burglaries and joy-riding in his area led the chief superintendent to believe that he had the right to suspend cautioning. The results were interesting: in

[Mr. Warren Hawksley]

Dudley, joy-riding fell in the first four months from 248 cases a month to 97—a success for the suspension of cautioning.

The Government are right to look at bail-breaking. Too many offences are committed by those on bail. When my hon. Friend the Minister replies tonight, I hope that he will be able to give a guideline not just on whether serious offenders who are likely to reoffend will be denied bail. I hope that he will also consider more persistent and perhaps minor offenders, because they waste a lot of police time and cause a lot of inconvenience and concern to society.

I also hope that the Minister will be able to give us some idea of when he hopes the secure accommodation for such youngsters will be available. It is important that society knows that it will not have to wait much longer for those people to be denied the way of life that they are pursuing.

It is also important that the age of criminal responsibility is considered again, because I believe that many eight-year-olds know the difference between right and wrong. At that age, if they are persistent offenders, they should be treated as young criminals, and they should be prosecuted for offences that they commit.

One issue involves social services more than the Home Office. It is the most important aspect of the issue of young offenders. I served in the early 1970s as a member of Shropshire county council's social services committee when it first became responsible for dealing with young offenders. We took over the running of homes that had formerly been Home Office-approved schools. In the past 20 years or so that social services have been responsible for the way that young offenders and young children are looked after, they have failed. The time has come for the Home Office to be given responsibility for the treatment of those youngsters.

From my files, I have taken out some newspaper headlines from around the September period. They read:

"Ram-raid boy on safari",

"Yobbo sent on sailing jaunt",

"Bailed youth sent to Jamaica"——

he was on five counts of arson at the time——

"Car thief was sent on £20,000 holiday",

"Yobs taken on £34,000 hols by care workers",

"11-week camping trip to Portugal"

and

"2 months rambling through France".

Are those punishments? the law-abiding youngsters in my constituency wonder why they stay law-abiding.

I coined a phrase which seems to apply today—nick a car, grab a social worker and go on holiday at our, the taxpayers', expense. That must stop. It is essential that the sort of holidays given to those youngsters are seen as undesirable. The director of social services for Shropshire told me that money was being saved by sending youngsters on such trips.

I asked how much was being spent. The answer that I was given was that £1,600 per child per week was being spent. When I asked whether that was saving money, he said yes. I confirmed with Dudley social services that to keep a child in care costs about £2,200 a week. That is unacceptable, when we consider that a person can be kept in prison for about £260 to £270 a week. I cannot understand why it is necessary to spend so much on these children.

I am concerned that social services are using these private homes. The Bryn Melyn home at Bala has been involved in many of the cases that I have quoted. People have been sent to Portugal, and a girl was sent swimming with dolphins. I am not sure whether that was in Ireland or Israel: it may have been both. They have sent people to France and Eire. I asked, "Do these trips succeed?"

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): My hon. Friend may be interested to know that the mother of a youngster who was sent to Portugal said that it was a total waste of time and money. Who should know better about the effect of that so-called punishment on the young person than the mother?

Mr. Hawksley: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful comment. The mother was right, and, yet again, social services were wrong.

The youngster has returned. When he was there he was, I was told, doing a computer studies programme. I am advised that, unfortunately, they sent the wrong programme, so he spent most of his time scuba diving and, apparently, getting badly sunburned. I was worried that Shropshire county council might be sued because of the sunburn that he suffered.

After his return the *Express and Star* reported:

"A Midland teenager car thief has admitted going on a crime spree only weeks after returning from a £20,000 trip to Portugal designed to reform his behaviour."

He was back in Telford court with a list of charges against him. As well as that, he managed to escape from the court, and had to be arrested yet again. Surely such people should be locked up for some time.

I hope that social services will look at the way establishments in which such as Bryn Melyn are run. Are qualified social workers sent on these trips, and if so, what interest do they take in what happens? The director of Shropshire social services department said, "Well, it is up to Gwynedd. It has approval for running the establishment."

The Home Office should take over the responsibility of running these establishments and for the care of young offenders. The madness of holidays and the rampaging of persistent offenders must stop quickly. Over the 20 years that social services have had responsibility, they have failed badly. Let us treat these persistent offenders as young criminals and stop their holidays. Lock them up quickly, so that the property of our constituents is safer.

10.12 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) for giving me the opportunity to hear the views of hon. Members on juvenile offenders and for giving me the chance to state plainly Government policy in this area. I am also grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Stevenage (Mr. Wood), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) for being present throughout the debate, and for similarly pressing me on these matters. Their constituents have exactly the same concerns as those of my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge.

The Government's first duty is to protect the public: that must always come before anything else. From that perspective, there is no doubt that there are currently gaps in courts' powers for dealing with juvenile offenders, particularly those who are under 15. My right hon. and

learned Friend the Home Secretary recently announced that the Government intend to give the courts the powers they need to deal properly with alleged and convicted offenders of all ages, and that includes juveniles. If that means custodial sentences, so be it.

Critics of these options often talk of secure institutions as colleges of crime. But at present, persistent juvenile offenders are at large committing crimes openly on our streets in front of other children, giving them hands-on experience.

In my view, street corners must be more efficient universities of crime than any prison, because the prisons contain only those criminals who are unsuccessful enough to have been caught. The best teachers are still at large.

Let it be made clear: on those street corners children are not learning to steal Smarties or to scrump a farmer's apples. Those children are embarking on serious crimes, often with serious implications for their victims, who are often other children. Stealing a car, driving it dangerously, putting the lives of other people at risk, is a serious crime. Burgling a home, often one that is lived in by a defenceless older person, is a serious crime. What should we do with the juvenile who commits such a crime not once, not twice, but over and over again?

We could relate stories of such offenders; the 15-year-old in Sunderland who already has 55 convictions and who the police believe is responsible for almost 50 per cent. of crime in the city centre; or the 15-year-old in Bexleyheath who has already been convicted of 18 burglaries, two thefts, three criminal damage charges, an assault and riding in a stolen car. Tonight we heard another frightening example from my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge, of a juvenile offender, a youngster, with an horrendous record of criminality at that young age.

We do not need to be guided, however, by those individual stories, because the same message is coming out loud and clear from throughout the country. There is a hard core of offenders—not thousands, but only hundreds—with whom the system is quite unable to cope, but that small number of offenders just do not respond to what is currently available.

For those young people who continue to offend in spite of high-quality community schemes, there needs to be a custodial option. For 12 to 14-year-olds, the secure training order will be that option. For 15 to 17-year-olds, detention in a young offender institution is already the custodial option, thanks to changes that were made to the criteria for custodial sentences by this Government in the Criminal Justice Act 1993. So the courts will get real powers to deal with those juveniles whose offending has got completely out of control.

I remind my hon. Friends that we intend to introduce proposals for a secure training order. That will be a new sentence for 12 to 14-year-olds who have persistently offended and failed to comply with supervision in the community, and whose offending is so serious that only custody will do.

It is intended to be a determinate sentence for between six months and two years, one half of which will be served in a secure training centre and the final half under supervision in the community. We want the new sentence to provide good-quality regimes that are designed to educate the young people, to tackle their criminal behaviour and to equip them to lead a law-abiding life in the community.

For the older age group, the 15 to 17-year-olds, the sentence of detention is already available, but the maximum length of that sentence, detention in a young offender institution, is currently limited to 12 months. We believe that that places an unnecessary restriction on the courts, and the Government believe that they should have greater powers to pass longer sentences where necessary. We therefore intend to double the maximum sentence from 12 months to two years.

I intend to put firmly on the record the fact that, for many juvenile offenders, custodial responses will not be necessary. The figures demonstrate that plainly. One hundred and forty-two thousand 10 to 16-year-olds were known to have committed offences in 1992, of which 80 per cent. were cautioned, 8 per cent. were given a community sentence, 3 per cent. were fined and 1 per cent. only were detained in young offender institutions.

The same picture, I might add, is true in relation to adult offenders. Of all the adults who were convicted last year, 73 per cent. were fined, 10 per cent. were cautioned, 4 per cent. were given a community sentence and 3 per cent. only were sent to prison. It is therefore nonsense for the Government's critics to claim that "Lock them up" is our only policy either for adult offenders or for juvenile offenders.

Protecting the public, of course, requires consideration of the long term as well as the immediate future. Many youngsters commit crime, and most grow out of it. That is why the Government have developed over the past 10 years measures which deal with juvenile offenders without automatic recourse to the courts or to custodial penalties.

The response to the first offence is often a caution. That is fair, and it works for a large number of offenders. Cautioning has been successful in most cases. Recent evidence shows that 87 per cent. of those cautioned are not reconvicted within two years. A caution gives a clear warning to the youngster that his behaviour is not acceptable. It gives him a chance to stop that behaviour.

However, there has been far too much repeat cautioning and cautioning for serious offences, and that is not acceptable either. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has issued new draft guidelines on cautioning.

Many offences are committed while the youngster is already on bail for previous alleged offences. In the next criminal justice Bill, we intend to introduce measures to reverse the presumption of those who are charged with an offence while out on bail for a previous offence.

To be effective in stopping offending, the punishment needs to follow the crime as quickly as possible. Delays in the justice system must be minimised. Inter-agency arrangements to reduce delays are already in place. The pre-trial issues steering group comprises representatives from the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Justices' Clerks Society and the Association of Chief Police Officers, and it has set time limits for the various stages of criminal proceedings.

The targets for juvenile offenders are more demanding that for adult offenders, and there are already areas in the system where delays for all cases are being reduced. For example, in 1992, the period from first listing in magistrates courts to completion was 67 days. By June 1993, it had fallen to 53 days. It is important that we get juveniles to court as soon as possible to be tried for the offences they have committed.

[Mr. David Maclean]

We have also enhanced the range and efficiency of community penalties by extending attendance centres, introducing a wide range of requirements to supervision orders, and developing tough national standards for the supervision of offenders in the community.

We continue to support effective supervision in the community. Only last week, I opened a centre in Wandsworth which provides supervision and support in the community for alleged juvenile offenders on bail and convicted juvenile offenders subject to community sentences.

Many community approaches have been developed in recent years, and many of them work well with juvenile offenders. However, community-based schemes have sometimes sought to keep young people out of custodial establishments as if it were an end in itself rather than a means to the more important end of reducing crime.

Successful community schemes must provide an individualised and intensive programme for the offender. The programme must get to the heart of the individual's offending by addressing particular difficulties, whether it is drinking too much, lack of self-control, trouble managing money or whatever.

Community penalties must be just that—penalties. They will not have the confidence of the public or of my hon. Friends or myself unless they make the necessary impact on the offender. They must not be perceived as a soft option, or even as a holiday. Supervision in the community must not send out the wrong signals. Children must not be allowed to think that, if they embark on a life of crime, all they will get is tea, sympathy or holidays abroad.

Although a cushy foreign holiday is clearly an unacceptable and wrong response to offending, in some cases physically demanding activities can be a most effective way of instilling much-needed discipline into the lives of young offenders. I can see some merit in the kind of outdoor pursuits which could provide some young offenders with character-building opportunities, and I should be interested to hear from organisation with ideas on appropriately tough and demanding schemes. Links with private enterprise would be vital for the offenders concerned, to take the gains of their outdoor experiences into the world of work.

Community schemes must reflect the disciplines of working life. They must place responsibilities on the offender to attend and participate, with failure to do so leading to a speedy return to the courts.

The Government have already started the work of improving community penalties by setting national standards. These standards are now being reviewed, so that offenders ordered to serve community sentences receive proper punishment. Those improvements are crucial to the success of community penalties. Without them, the support of the police, clerks, magistrates, judges and, above all, the public will not be sustained. All those people must have faith in the penalties.

There is now more than ever a need for community penalties to be based on creative partnerships between statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. Local authorities, the probation service and the voluntary sector must pool their skills, traditions and resources to ensure that projects comprising community penalties are of the highest possible quality.

I am keen that the business world should be involved in skill training and other work with offenders to forge the links with employers which will be crucial in determining the success of an ex-offender's return to the job market.

I must tell my hon. Friends who did not manage to participate in the debate that the Government are not relying on those measures alone to deal with juvenile offenders. Action must be taken at all stages of the cycle of offending juvenile behaviour.

The most important responsibility for ensuring that children grow up to respect the law rests with their parents. Some families need help in achieving that, and the Government have already acted in the Children Act 1989 to require local authorities to provide facilities for children and their families to receive guidance.

In that context, the Government have helped the voluntary sector to develop family support services such as home-start, the family services unit and the family centre network, and we are now encouraging local authorities to use those services.

Those parents who do not take their responsibilities seriously must be required to face the consequences of their children's behaviour. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 increased parental responsibility in a number of ways. First, it strengthened the power of the courts to make parents attend court in cases involving offenders up to 17 years of age; secondly, it made parents pay fines and compensation arising from the young person's offending. We consider making reparation and compensation to the victim of great importance.

Thirdly, the Act contained greater power for the courts to bind over parents to control their children if that will stop further offences. Fourthly, it allowed bind-over orders to be imposed for up to three years or to the offender's 18th birthday. Fifthly, it provided fines of up to £1,000 for parents who refuse to be bound over without good reason. But more may be able to be done. Therefore, the review of community-based sentences, which my right hon. and learned Friend announced in his speech on 6 October 1993, will include an assessment of how to strengthen parental involvement in such sentences passed on their children.

Offending often begins while children are truanting from school. The Department for Education has taken steps to ensure that schools get to grips with truancy, keeping proper, published records of the problem. Poor behaviour in schools can often be a sign of offending to come. Schools will be inspected on their standards of discipline and behaviour. Those children who are excluded from school will not then be allowed to slip through the education net. Education authorities will be required to develop comprehensive plans to educate pupils who are not attending school.

As my hon. Friend told us, some offending occurs while the juveniles concerned are absconding from children's homes. In April this year, the Department of Health issued guidance on permissible forms of control of young people in children's homes. This makes it clear that staff in all children's homes are expected to control the children in their care; to take positive action to prevent children who are detained by order of the courts from running away; and to take appropriate action, which may involve the use of physical restraint, to prevent the child injuring itself or others, or damaging property.

Of course, offending can also begin when a young person finds nothing constructive to do. Crime prevention is of prime importance. Crime concern, which was set up by the Government five years ago with annual Government funding, has created and developed a number of schemes to divert young people from crime.

They include projects to give children on high-crime estates some supervised activity outside school hours, and schemes to keep young people out of trouble during the long summer holidays. In Bristol, a programme of summer activities for young people led to a drop in crime of 29 per cent. on a particular estate and savings of £9,000 to the local authority housing department on petty damage. Crime concern is now beginning to work with young people in their schools to address crime issues.

The Government also set up the safer cities programme. Since it began, the programme has supported more than 3,000 local crime prevention schemes, with funding in excess of £20 million. For example, a motor education project in Bradford led to a reduction of 60 per cent. in the number of new juvenile car crime offenders coming to the notice of the police.

The Salford safer cities project gave grant aid of about £1 million to 200 local crime prevention and community safety initiatives, to the benefit of all sections of the community: 47 of those schemes involved assistance in providing constructive activities for young people at risk of involvement in crime.

I appreciate the attention of my hon. Friends who are present for this debate, and I hope that they agree that the Government's action to deal with juvenile offenders, which I have briefly outlined, represents a sensible and balanced response to the problem. We welcome new approaches where they can be shown to be effective, but we do not shrink from using custodial powers where they have, sadly, proved to be necessary with young offenders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge can warn the hooligans he mentioned that their days of thumbing their noses at the courts are coming to an end, their days of rampaging through the streets are numbered, and the days of more peace and quiet for his constituents——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 2 December 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH WATERWAYS BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the British Waterways Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That, if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read for the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House has having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)" were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Economy

1. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to discuss the economy.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Robert Atkins): I met a delegation from the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions to discuss the economy in May. Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have received requests for a further meeting.

Mr. Parry: When the Minister next meets the ICTU, will he congratulate the trade union movement in Northern Ireland on organising huge and safe demonstrations for peace in the Province? Will he also state when the Government will publish their proposals on policy appraisment and the fair treatment paths?

Mr. Atkins: I join the hon. Gentleman in his congratulations. As a former president of the Conservative Trade Unionists, I, too, have an interest. I offer deep support for the trade unionists in their activities in Northern Ireland, not least for the event to which he referred, which was a solid and impressive demonstration by a wide variety of working people expressing their desire for peace to be achieved and for the problems to be resolved. I hope to be able to say something about the hon. Gentleman's special point in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. William Ross: Does the Minister agree that not only members of trade unions but many other people in Northern Ireland are concerned about the training and retraining of people of all ages in the Province? When he next meets the trade unions, will he explain why money seems to be diverted from community workshops, which are badly run down in many parts of the Province, to private training agencies that apparently do little other than redirect people to colleges of further education?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is being untypically unfair about some of the great work that has been done by a number of the organisations to which he refers. It is fair to say that, pleasingly, an increasing number of young people wish to stay on at school to get qualifications of one sort or another, but the numbers using some of the training facilities have declined. We have made it clear that we will honour the commitment to provide every youngster with a training place and I am determined to ensure that that occurs.

Mr. Stott: Will the Minister, during his discussions with Terry Carlin of the Northern Ireland trade union movement, explain how the Budget will help the economy in Northern Ireland, given that a typical family will pay £10 a week more in tax next year, which will rise to £16 a week more by April 1995? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that those tax increases, coupled with the new taxes on house and car insurance and on holiday travel, not to mention VAT on fuel and the freezing of personal

allowances, will drastically reduce people's purchasing power? Is not it self-evident that those measures will have a detrimental effect on the economy in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Atkins: I should have thought that if I were to discuss matters with Mr. Carlin along those lines, I might find perhaps not his agreement, but his acceptance of the fact that, had the Labour party been elected, his members would have been worse off than they are now as a result of one of the most difficult recessions in recent years, which the United Kingdom is pulling out of faster than anyone else, leading the rest of Europe. I suspect that as Mr. Carlin is a fair and reasonable man, he would understand that point.

Employment

2. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effect of the MacBride principles on employment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The comprehensive Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 provides a vigorous and effective framework for achieving fair employment. The MacBride principles are unnecessary and inadequate as they do not advocate investment, without which the achievements of fair employment would be more difficult. It is impossible to quantify the negative effect of the MacBride campaign.

Mr. Trimble: I agree with all the criticisms that the Minister made of the MacBride principles, but it would be helpful if he got in touch with all the public authorities in the United States that foolishly adopt those principles and pointed out that in Northern Ireland more than 60 per cent. of employees are Protestant, yet according to aggregate employment in American firms to which the MacBride principles apply, only 55 per cent. of employees are Protestants, showing a significant imbalance.

Will the Minister also point out that the firm with the worst employment record is the American firm, United Technologies, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), where out of 737 employees, fewer than 10 are Protestant. Will the Minister point out to the public authorities in the United States that if they are to take action to achieve fair employment, they could begin on those terms?

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his tacit support. I suspect that the proverb of mote and beam has a part to play here. My task and that of all Northern Irish Members is to ensure that any state or city of the United States that has companies that we wish to encourage to invest in Northern Ireland is persuaded by us, by the House and by our ambassador and his staff in the United States that the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act is one of the most rigorous of its type anywhere in the world. All that MacBride has done is to make life difficult for American companies that wish to invest in Northern Ireland, knowing as they do that it is such a fine place with such a fine work force.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Will my hon. Friend make the strongest representations to the Clinton Administration to remove the outdated MacBride principles? Will he assure them that the best way to help the Province is to strengthen its economy by investment and by increasing employment?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend puts her finger on the matter succinctly. It is true that President Clinton, as a candidate and as President soon after his election, made it clear that he supported MacBride. However, I know that the good work being done by our ambasssador and visits such as those carried out by Northern Ireland Members have made the position on MacBride and our Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act much clearer to representatives of the United States Administration. Their support in these matters is to be welcomed.

Dr. Hendron: Will the Minister accept that it is the rhetoric of MacBride rather than the principles which could lead to disinvestment in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Atkins: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman, who played such a significant part, along with his colleague in this context—the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr.Walker) —on their recent trip, again puts his finger on the problem. It is the campaign and the people asssociated with it rather than the substance which is causing the problem. Anything that any hon. Member can do when visiting the United States will be much appreciated by everyone in Northern Ireland.

Schools

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children of primary and secondary school age are in what number of schools; what is the average class size in primary and secondary schools: and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): At October 1992, there were 185,626 pupils in 983 primary schools and 145,512 pupils in 234 secondary schools. The average class size in primary schools was 24·9 pupils. Information on class sizes is not collected for secondary schools.

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the quality of education in Northern Ireland is, rightly, highly renowned throughout the United Kingdom? Is he further aware that although excellence in education does not necessarily depend on class size, the class sizes in primary schools which he has mentioned are a matter for congratulation?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, with his professional and lifelong experience of education, for what he says and for his tribute to the quality of education in Northern Ireland. It has the best rates for A-levels for those leaving school, so my hon. Friend's tributes are well deserved. Class size is a helpful indicator, but, as he rightly says, it is the quality of teaching rather than the size of schools which is the primary determinant of results.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Secretary of State agree that children who have had the benefit of a good nursery education are more likely to realise their full potential as they proceed through primary and secondary schools? Will he undertake to review the current low level of provision of nursery education places in Northern Ireland? Will he seek to make funding available to the boards so that they can increase nursery school places? Will he also take account of the importance of the early diagnosis and

recognition of children with special educational needs, and will he seek to encourage earlier identification and additional remedial assistance for those children?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman on what he says about the importance of nursery education. It is easy for a child from a deprived home or with particular difficulties to join the losers' club if he or she gets to school, finds that he or she cannot keep up and resorts therefore to the truculence and disagreeable behaviour with which we are all familiar.

The overall proportion of three and four-year-olds in nursery education in Northern Ireland—46 per cent.—is broadly in line with that in England and Wales. That is something which we wish to improve. I should like to write to the hon. Gentleman about the latter part of his question.

RUC (Personal Security)

4. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to improve the personal security of part-time members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Royal Irish Regiment.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): Measures to safeguard the personal security of police officers and soldiers in Northern Ireland are in place and kept under constant review. It is not in the public interest to discuss specific items or cases.

Mr. Brazier: Yes, indeed; but on this day, when another soldier has been killed in Ulster, I put it to my right hon. Friend that part-time soldiers, policemen and their families suffer the greatest risks of all. The attrition that they have suffered is the main cause for the sharp and continuing decline in their numbers.

Is not the best way to improve their security and that of everyone in Ulster to get the terrorists behind bars? To that end—as with the criminal justice legislation—there must be ways of ensuring, through disclosure and other measures, that a higher proportion of terrorist prosecutions in Ulster results in such men going behind bars at the end of trial.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He referred to the tragic killing today of a young soldier in Northern Ireland. I know that the whole House will wish to extend its sympathy to the family of that young man. My hon. Friend is right to say that the care of those who volunteer to serve in the Royal Ulster Constabulary reserve and the Royal Irish Regiment as part-time soldiers is very important. We owe them a great debt.

The fact that so many people in the part-time Royal Irish Regiment are able to make themselves available for duty every third day is a great credit to them and their families. I can assure my hon. Friend that every care is taken of them. I visited the Royal Irish Regiment yesterday and saw the arrangements for the care of those part-time soldiers and their families. I am pleased to tell the House that it is of the highest order. The point that my hon. Friend makes about reviewing the law is a matter that the Government have under constant review.

Rev. William McCrea: Although I join the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) in offering sympathy to the family of the young soldier, it is important that the safety and security of my constituents along the border should also be of the highest order. Has the Minister received any communication about the fact that, at 4 o'clock last Saturday, on the Kilcleen border in United Kingdom territory, a constituent of mine, who is a member of the security forces, was stopped and questioned by the Garda Siochana and asked for details concerning his comings and goings?

My constituent told the officer that he was not answerable to the Garda when in the United Kingdom. When my constituent told him that it is not a united Ireland yet, the officer said, "It is near enough." That situation is despicable in the United Kingdom. It is totally unacceptable and is putting fear in my constituents. Unfortunately, although the House condemned the soldier's death today, there will be someone from the Government speaking to the murderers tomorrow.

Sir John Wheeler: I have no knowledge of the incident to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I take note of what he says and, if he gives me further details, I will have the matter investigated. I can tell the House that co-operation between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana has never been greater.

Rathlin Ferry Service

5. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Rathlin ferry service.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are committed to a safe and comfortable Rathlin ferry service. We have grant-aided Moyle council for safety works at Ballycastle and Rathlin harbours and have provided subsidies to the ferry operators. Major harbour works are required for a modern ferry service, but resources for those works will be considered along with other requirements against necessarily limited resources.

Mr. Bottomley: I ask this question about north Antrim with the agreement, and blessing, of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), in his absence. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is wrong that, year after year, the necessary moneys to provide safe harbours at each end of the ferry service are cancelled from the estimates? Is it not about time that there was a firm commitment so that both the residents of, and the visitors to, this historic island can get on and off their boats in safety?

Mr. Atkins: I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in Rathlin island and is still famed on the island for his involvement there when he served in the Province. I share with him and the islanders the concern about the lack of resources, but he will know that we have undergone a difficult public expenditure round and finances are tight. It is in my mind to do something about that as soon as we can, not least because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland also has an interest in a route that might exist from Campbeltown to Rathlin and Ballycastle. However, resources are simply not available at this stage.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: As the Minister responsible for another form of ferry service, will the hon. Gentleman tell us when he hopes to publish the taxi review, which has been with his office for some time?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is ingenious, but he makes a fair point. It is one which my right hon. and learned Friend and I have been looking at in some detail.

I am conscious of the urgency of the matter and of the concern that the hon. Gentleman has represented to me and others, and we are doing our level best to produce something soon.

Ms Hoey: The Minister will be aware that there has been great delay in advertising for a teacher for the home tuition unit on Rathlin island. When will that post be advertised? Does he agree that if it is the Department's aim to increase the number of integrated schools, Rathlin island would be a wonderful place to set an example? It is the only place in Northern Ireland where people of all faiths are buried together. Should we not be trying to get an integrated school there?

Mr. Atkins: Not only are people buried together, but they live together, and in this context that is perhaps more important. The hon. Lady raises a fair point. As she will know, I am not responsible for education, but I have taken the liberty, thanks to her, of making some inquiries. There has been no request from the island for an integrated school and that is the most fundamental factor, but my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), the Under-Secretary of State who looks after education matters, and I in general terms will look at the matter closely to see what can be done to follow through the point which she raises.

Health and Social Services Boards

6. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many managers and administrators there were in the four health and social services boards on 1 January 1990, and in the designated trusts and boards on the most recent date available.

Sir John Wheeler: On 1 January 1990, there were 5,789 managers and administrators employed in the four health and social services boards. On 30 September 1993, there were 7,190 managers and administrators employed in the four boards in the HSS trusts.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome that answer, but it conflicts with an answer given in *Hansard* on 25 November. Will the Minister accept that there is some discrepancy in the provision of care in Northern Ireland when, as is shown in that answer, between 1990 and 1993, there was an increase of 11·3 per cent. in the number of administrators and of 91 per cent. in the number of managers and a decrease of 11·3 per cent. in the number of nurses and midwives? Does he agree that managers and administrators are not able to give hands-on care?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As he says, there has been an increase, but that is linked to the growth in finance, personnel and information technology staff. The part played by the administrators and managers in the care of patients has resulted in the number of patients waiting for two years or more for in-patient treatment being reduced from 5,277 to 1,332, a reduction of 75 per cent. Those administrators play an important part in the health care programme for Northern Ireland and relieve the medical and paramedical people of a responsibility for bureaucracy and administration.

Tourism

7. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest figures for tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The latest figures available are for 1992, when 1·25 million visitors came to Northern Ireland, representing an increase of 6 per cent. over the previous year. This was the fourth successive annual increase in visitor numbers, which is highly encouraging set against the background of a difficult year for the tourist trade worldwide.

Mr. Bruce: Will my hon. Friend send our congratulations to all those involved in the tourism industry in the Province for maintaining their traditional welcome? Will he tell the House what more can be done to promote this excellent industry and to increase the benefits gained from tourism in the Province?

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I join him in congratulating the chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board, Hugh O'Neil, together with all members of his board. They have done a tremendous amount of work to ensure that tourism—the fastest growing industry in the western world—goes from strength to strength in Northern Ireland. There is more that we can do in terms of resources and commitments, and we are trying so to do. Above all, we need to get across—as we are doing —the positive message about Northern Ireland being "the place you will never know unless you go." The more that we promote Northern Ireland in the House, the more visitors will come and the more profit will be gained for those in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: The Minister will be aware that good travel facilities are necessary for tourists in Northern Ireland. Will he tell the House what steps he will take, or has taken, to sort out the infighting which is apparently taking place between not only the airports in Northern Ireland but the airlines there? It will lead to a lack of confidence about the travel facilities in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Gentleman speaks with great authority on airport matters because he has an airport in his constituency. I take slight issue with him on his last sentence—that this will harm the tourist industry. It is clear that competition among airlines and airports can only be good for the traveller because, we hope, it will reduce costs and make things more attractive over a period. The point that the hon. Gentleman raises about differences of opinion interests me. They are not directly a matter for me, except in so far as it affects my custodianship of Aldergrove airport, albeit temporarily.

Mr. Viggers: I take pleasure in the fact that 1992 was the fourth year of growth in the Northern Ireland tourist business. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland co-operate on tourism, particularly as it is supported by the International Fund for Ireland and European Community funds?

Mr. Atkins: It would be fair to record that my hon. Friend probably started the increase in tourism when he was a Northern Ireland Minister and, to that extent, its roots lie with him. I agree with what he said. We must attempt to get the message across to those who wish to

come to the island of Ireland that they can travel north and south and enjoy excellent facilities. Discussions that the tourist board is having with Bord Failte from the south are aimed at doing that. For example, the Erne-Shannon waterway crosses the border and is of mutual interest. It is something which people are keen to see when they come to Northern Ireland.

Mr. McGrady: I certainly accept that the Minister is deeply committed to the development of tourism in Northern Ireland. Does he agree that one important aspect is to provide the necessary infrastructure so that we can leap forward, as it were, when peace breaks out? Is the Minister aware that a quango appointed by the Government, the Northern Ireland Museum Council, has made direct representations to Brussels? That has frustrated applications made for funding there for several flagship developments for tourism. Is the Minister aware of that and does he agree with it—and if not, what action does he propose to take to indicate to the Brussels Commission that that is not the attitude or feeling of the people of Northern Ireland or of his Department?

Mr. Atkins: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Northern Ireland has some fine museums, not least the one in his constituency with which I have been privileged to be associated. I am not aware of the detail to which he referred. I must investigate the matter and I promise that I will write to him. If he has further information that I ought to have, I should be grateful if he would talk to me later.

Mr. William O'Brien: I agree with the Minister and with other hon. Members that tourism is most important to Northern Ireland. It mainly comprises small businesses, which compete for a share of the market. I agree with the Minister that the Northern Ireland tourist board brings together both the private and the public sector to develop tourism. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that what is required now is for the national heritage section of his Department to work with the Northern Ireland tourist board and the local authorities—which, with their limited resources, promote tourism—to make available through the Northern Ireland Office details about arts, culture, historic buildings, music, museums and so on, as that would help to give tourism in Northern Ireland a boost? Will the hon. Gentleman take that suggestion on board and act so that we can further stimulate tourism in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Atkins: There are many documents which pull together the concerns to which the hon. Gentleman draws attention. As I would expect of him, he has come up with a very good idea. I shall certainly consider it and draw it to the attention of the bodies that can best implement it.

Inter-party Talks

8. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress towards the resumption of the inter-party talks, and on talks that he has had with the Irish Government.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), is engaged in private discussions to explore the basis on which the parties can come together for further dialogue. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has recently met the four main constitutional party leaders. Additionally, we are in discussion with the Irish Government on matters of mutual interest, including constitutional issues. It remains our objective to return to multilateral talks involving the two Governments and the four main constitutional parties at the appropriate point.

Mr. Burden: Given article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, will the Secretary of State tell the House plainly whether he accepts that the Irish people have a right to national self-determination, based on consent freely given—north and south?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I think that the Anglo-Irish Agreement speaks for itself. What is of most immediate importance to those concerned for stability, in Northern Ireland in particular, is that it should be thoroughly understood, as the Prime Minister has made it abundantly clear, that the British Government—the Government—stand firmly behind the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland as regards the constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

Sir James Kilfedder: Does the Secretary of State accept that it would be a great mistake for the media or anyone else to interpret the present yearning for peace as a movement for appeasement at any price? Does he not agree that the majority of Ulster people want peace, political progress and the best of relations with the Irish Republic, but not at the cost of weakening their position within the United Kingdom?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That is absolutely right. As my hon. Friend said, we went into the matter with some care on Monday. There is an overwhelming demand, as well as a yearning, for peace—but not, as I endeavoured to say on Monday, at any price. Peace properly attained is what people require and that is what the Government and all people of good will are striving to help the people of Northern Ireland to attain.

Mr. Molyneaux: In response to any inquiries from foreign parts, will the Secretary of State explain clearly that those conversations and informal discussions being so ably pursued by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), have the aim and object of restoring accountable democracy to all the people of Northern Ireland and that that is a necessary first step to restoring stability and subsequently peace?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his well-deserved tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes. My hon. Friend has made good progress with those with whom he is talking in the bilateral discussions. There is a good measure of agreement on the need for new political institutions in Northern Ireland. Those institutions are essential if democratic accountability is to be restored, and everyone recognises that that would be a good thing.

I am not sure that I would agree with the right hon. Gentleman in saying that that is the first requirement. I believe, as I have just said, that the first requirement for the restoration of stability in Northern Ireland is for everyone to accept beyond question that the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland will determine their future status.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Will the Secretary of State tell the House why, at a press conference in Northern Ireland on Sunday, he said that he had only recently learnt of some

unapproved contacts on a face-to-face basis between British Government officials and the IRA, when the documents that he supplied to the Library indicate that he knew back on 10 May? Why did the Secretary of State tell the press conference that they did not form part of the process that the Government were having with the IRA when they formed part of at least three of the messages? The right hon. and learned Gentleman persists in saying that they were unapproved contacts. Why did he never at any stage after he was made aware of them indicate to the IRA that it was talking to loose cannons? Is it not about time that the Secretary of State came clean? Has he not stretched credulity beyond breaking point?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I said at the press conference that I gave on Sunday in Northern Ireland that it had recently come to our notice that there had been an unauthorised meeting between somebody of official status and a member of Sinn Fein. The reason I said that was because it was true. It had come to our notice—that there had been an unauthorised meeting—something like 10 days or perhaps a couple of weeks previously.

We also learned that some three years ago there had been—or probably had been—a meeting with somebody of similar status in the circumstances which were probably described by Martin McGuinness recently. That happens to be the case. I want to make it clear that there is no question of there being anybody who is authorised to conduct talks or negotiations with Sinn Fein or the IRA, or with any other organisation that either perpetrates or justifies the use of violence.

Mr. Alton: Will the Secretary of State repeat the Prime Minister's recent comment that this still remains the best opportunity for peace? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the participants in the middle east process—which is so often cited—were not subjected to the full glare of media speculation or to leaked documents, and were helped by the presence of an independent arbiter? Can not we learn from that process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: It is only a partially apt analogy, because the middle east process was one of negotiations. No negotiations have taken place of the character that I described on Monday by use of the chain of communication. That chain is a secret and valuable one.

The hon. Gentleman is right to point to the value of a secret means of communication with groups such as Sinn Fein. It should not be assumed that there is a direct analogy with the Israeli-Arafat process because no negotiations have been conducted by means of that chain.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in welcoming the remarks by the Archbishop of Armagh yesterday here at Westminster when he called on Sinn Fein and the IRA to cease violence and, more than that, called for them to accept unambiguously the democratic process?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I have heard many tributes paid to the speech made by Cardinal Daly yesterday which, unfortunately, I was not able to hear. The Archbishop was a fine record of resistance to and denunciation of violence which is pursued for political purposes or for any other purpose. His speech will repay a careful examination.

Mr. McNamara: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge the value of the goal of a united Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: One needs to be careful when speaking in language that attributes value to a particular notion. The British Government cannot join the ranks of the persuaders. Here we differ from the Opposition who wish to persuade the people of Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom and join a united Ireland. We believe that it should be for the people of Northern Ireland to determine for themselves, without persuasion from us, whether they wish to remain in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman asks a rather naively loaded question when he asks whether we will sign up to the value of a united Ireland. What we sign up to is the value of maintaining a democracy and the rights of all democrats within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Butcher: I welcome the hint that my right hon. and learned Friend gave earlier that he may be considering restoring some of the functions of local government within the Province of Northern Ireland, but will he reassure me on whether a stage has been reached in which a foreign Government have a say in the internal constitutional affairs of the United Kingdom, or do the conversations that are going on with the Government of southern Ireland exclude that possibility?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No, the Government stand by the agreement reached between all the four main constitutional parties and the Irish Government and ourselves back in 1991 that there should be discussions—political talks—with a view to achieving an overall settlement of all the political relationships within Northern Ireland, between north and south and between Dublin and London. The parties agreed that there should be a place in that process at a particular point for the Irish Government and that point was reached. When sufficient progress on strand 1 had been attained, the Irish Government came in. We hold to that agreement to which all the four main constitutional political parties adhered and we are not at the moment in the course of conducting any discussions that are incompatible with that agreement.

Mr. Hume: Following what the Secretary of State has just said, he will reaffirm that the talks process to which both Governments and all parties agreed involved facing up to all the relationships that go to the heart of the problem, and those relationships include relationships with this Parliament. Have the Government already agreed a relationship with any party in this Parliament behind the backs of other parties?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer very well. He had better come out openly and ask whether a deal has been done between the Government and the Ulster Unionist party. If he asks that—*[Interruption.]* I would rather the hon. Gentleman did not shout while I am trying to answer his question, because I assume, in his favour, that he is interested in an answer. If that is what the hon. Gentleman means, I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) have said. If, on the other hand, the hon. Gentleman is referring to the report issued by the Procedure Committee last night, the Government have not reached a conclusion on that. The Government will study what has been said and will take account of the views of parties in the House in the ordinary way. Much has been said here about the need to reduce the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland and affecting

Northern Ireland, and it might be said that there is some value in having a Select Committee to look at the affairs of Northern Ireland rather than six separate Select Committees taking part of Northern Ireland's affairs into their ambits as they discuss the matters of individual Departments in Westminster. I simply offer that as an answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Police Authority

9. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Northern Ireland Police Authority.

Sir John Wheeler: The current membership of the Police Authority's term of office expries in June 1994 and the normal process for appointment of new members of the authority will commence shortly. I encourage all those approached for nominations to the authority to respond positively.

Mr. Taylor: It was the last Government at Stormont who brought into existence the Northern Ireland Police Authority so that there would be cross-community involvement in supervising the provision of an efficient police service in Northern Ireland and to distance the police from political and Government control. Can the Minister assure the House that there is no intention to return the RUC to political or governmental control next year?

Sir John Wheeler: I can certainly give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. Consideration is being given to arrangements for policing structures in Northern Ireland, taking into account the White Paper and the Sheehy inquiry. Any changes would reflect the concerns of the people of Northern Ireland about policing, the need to hold the Chief Constable accountable to the community in Northern Ireland and the need to ensure the acceptability of the police to all sections of society in Northern Ireland.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Jones: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the vital importance of the north Wales railway line to the economy of north-west Wales, an importance recognised by the European Community? Yesterday's announcement about improvements to the west coast main line omitted to include any reference to the section to Holyhead. The Chancellor in his Budget statement did not even mention north Wales.

May I impress on the Prime Minister the need to include the north Wales section in that programme, which should also include new rolling stock as well as track improvements?

The Prime Minister I am afraid that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman any immediate commitment to that section of rail. Of course, in due course that will be a decision for Railtrack in conjunction with operators on the line. They will have to determine whether a commercial case exists for upgrading, electrifying or whatever appears to be appropriate for the north Wales line.

Our commitment to the west coast main line is now clearly stated. The introduction of private finance can play a very substantial part both in the improvement of the line and in the renewal of much of the infrastructure.

Q2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to condemn the merciless way in which Opposition spokesmen tried to frighten pensioners——

Madam Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister is not responsible for Opposition policy or activities.

Mr. Bruce: Indeed, Madam Speaker.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government have fulfilled their commitments to pensioners? Will not the tough fiscal stance that we are continuing to take ensure that low interest rates and low inflation, which are the cornerstone of our recovery, continue to benefit both industry and the public?

The Prime Minister: I certainly condemn scares, from wherever they may come. The Budget is delivering our policies to pensioners. We are delivering low inflation to protect their savings, we have uprated the pension to meet the cost of VAT on fuel, and we have introduced an income bond to give them a guaranteed income month after month. At the same time, we have been able to give a boost to business and to deliver sound public finance. The Budget is well on track to deliver, in due course, rising prosperity to all our citizens. I am glad to note that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) agrees with the Government that the proposed assistance to pensioners for fuel bills is adequate.

Mr. John Smith: At a time of high unemployment, what is the moral justification for cutting entitlement to unemployment benefit from 12 to six months?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, we have made substantial contributions towards both training and getting the unemployed back to work, which is the priority. Through unemployment benefit and subsequently, where necessary, through income support, we are ensuring that there is assistance for those who remain unemployed.

Now, thankfully, we are seeing unemployment beginning to fall in every part of the country, and that is beginning to affect the long-term unemployed. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know also that the majority of people who become unemployed are back in work within the six-month period for which they will still be entitled to unemployment benefit.

Mr. Smith: Does the Prime Minister not begin to understand that it is a fraud on the public to raise national insurance contributions by a full 1 per cent. at the same

time as cutting a benefit to which people have contributed all their working lives? Why do the Government not attack unemployment instead of attacking the unemployed?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman had his own, rather more dramatic, plans for increasing national insurance contributions. At the same time, he has his own plans for unemployment—plans which would put it up. A new training tax on employers would put it up. A minimum wage would put it up. Businesses with new taxes levelled up to the higher rates in other European countries would put it up. Forcing employers to introduce a 35-hour week would put it up. That is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's prescription for the economy. It would make more people unemployed, and for longer.

Mr. Smith: Does the Prime Minister not understand that in the real world in which, unfortunately, unemployed people have to live, if their partners work more than 24 hours per week they move from unemployment benefit to nothing—*[Interruption.]*—No, it is 24 hours per week. It was changed by the Government, as the Secretary of State for Employment should understand. Does the Prime Minister not understand that, however low the income that the working partner earns, the unemployed partner will receive no benefit? Is that not disgraceful in a country with so many unemployed?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman grows indignant in his usual fashion. Will he drop the policies that would make people unemployed, which he parades month after month? If not, what does he have to say to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who said of a national minimum wage:

"I knew the consequences were that there would be a shake-out in unemployment. Any silly fool knew that"?

Not quite any silly fool, it seems.

Q3. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread support for measures announced in the Budget to help small businesses? In particular, is he aware of the support for the announcement that the statutory audit for very small firms is to be abolished?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I am aware of the support from many small business men and every small business organisation for the measures in the Budget. They do in a substantial way take the burdens off small businesses, abolish the audit requirement, and make matters simpler for more than 500,000 companies in this country. We are also raising the value added tax threshold to take 75,000 traders out of VAT. Ours is the only party committed to taking such measures to help small businesses.

Mr. Ashdown: As the country waits to back the Prime Minister if he will take further risks for peace in Northern Ireland, will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to reaffirm that he has no difficulty with the principle of separate and parallel self-determination for the people of the island of Ireland—north and south?

The Prime Minister: For us, there is one fundamental point. It is that Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the freely expressed consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Gillan: Has my right hon. Friend had time to reflect today on the overwhelming vote of support that the other place gave the Government last night?—*[Laughter.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is a waste of time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Order. The House is using up precious time.

Mrs. Gillan: Is not that great success and the overwhelming support for the Budget on Tuesday further proof that the Labour party is totally out of touch with the British people, both in the other place and in this House?

The Prime Minister: I do not know that my hon. Friend's last comment about the Labour party being as out of touch in the other place as here can possibly be true. The reality is that it is rather odd to table a motion of no confidence in the Government in the other place the day after failing to vote against the Queen's Speech. I rather suspect that the outcome of the vote in the House of Lords, where fewer than 100 Labour Peers were prepared to support the Opposition, shows a great lack of confidence in the Labour party in this House and nationally as well as in the leadership in the House of Lords. That may be because it used to be a serious party, but it is no longer that because it has no policies.

Q4. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: Will the Prime Minister admit to any embarrassment or even mild contrition at presiding over the biggest tax rises in British post-war history? Is it not a grotesque betrayal of the people who voted for his party 18 months ago that he should now be introducing these colossal tax rises?

The Prime Minister: I did not notice a great deal of complaint from the hon. Gentleman over the expenditure to protect people who were vulnerable during the recession. I did not hear a great deal from the hon. Gentleman about that. Broadly, had the Labour party won the election and were its members sitting on the Government Benches having implemented their programme, the increase to the average taxpayer now would have been about £24 a week.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend feel that on Northern Ireland we can do without the shifting and swinging influence and suggestions of the Liberal Democrats, in view of the utterances of that party's leader at the weekend? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government's policy is clear and well balanced and provides the only way forward to a lasting and durable solution? I wish my right hon. Friend well for the meeting with the Taoiseach tomorrow.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members who have indicated their support for the meeting tomorrow. I hope that we shall be able to make some further progress. There is an overwhelming feeling in Northern Ireland and elsewhere

that we should seek to produce peace in Northern Ireland if we can, but there are parameters to those discussions and that must be understood. The first parameter is that to which I referred in answer to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, a moment ago.

Q5. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Prime Minister aware of my constituent, Michael Gibson, who died in August this year 16 months after being violently assaulted in Darlington town centre? Is he also aware that Michael's killer is now free to roam the streets again because the current law stipulates that a charge of murder can be brought only if a victim dies within 366 days of an offence taking place? Will the Prime Minister join me and the Gibson family in urging the Home Secretary to review a law which not only takes no account of advances in medical technology, but which simply fails to deliver justice?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the particularly tragic case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I should like to send my sympathy to the family. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is looking at precisely that matter now.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that all of us who entirely endorse his total and complete commitment to peace in Northern Ireland believe that one way of solving that desperate problem is to integrate Northern Ireland completely and entirely in the United Kingdom? Will he give the matter some consideration because many Members on both sides believe that that could bring the problems of Northern Ireland to a speedy conclusion?

The Prime Minister: Among the principles agreed last year was an agreement, accepted across the House, that we were looking for an agreement that would stretch right across Northern Ireland and all the individuals who live in Northern Ireland. It is for that reason that we are pursuing, as we are at present, the objectives that I set out earlier.

Q6. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michael: Will the Prime Minister face up to the implications of his Government's Budget? Does he accept that not only the car worker, for whom he cried crocodile tears before the last election, but the average experienced police officer will pay well in excess of £500 extra in tax on their basic pay? Is the right hon. Gentleman proud of presiding over the biggest tax bill ever for the British public?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might bear in mind that probably the car worker whom he is talking about is now exporting and making more cars than ever before and therefore has a more secure future, not least because of the policies that we have followed to get down inflation and interest rates.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Will the Leader of the House be good enough to give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 6 DECEMBER—Continuation of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 7 DECEMBER—Conclusion of the debate on the Budget statement.

WEDNESDAY 8 DECEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Sunday Trading Bill (first day).

Motion on the Broadcasting (Restrictions on the Holding of Licences) (Amendment) Order.

THURSDAY 9 DECEMBER—There will be a debate on the European Community white papers, European Community budget and subjects to be discussed at the forthcoming European Council, on a Government motion.

FRIDAY 10 DECEMBER—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 13 DECEMBER—Proceedings on the Social Security (Contributions) Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 8 December to consider European Community document No. 8441/93 on the protection of animals during transport.

[Wednesday 8 December:
European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Community document: 8441/93, transport of animals; Relevant European Legislation Committee reports: HC 79-xxxviii (1992-93), HC 48-i (1992-93).]

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the Leader of the House for that statement. I remind him that Labour Members expressed great concern last year about the fact that many people were losing their right to vote because of the defective state of electoral registers, especially in the Tory-controlled London borough of Brent. As this year's initial figures show that the electoral register in Brent is down yet again by 13,000, and as the council is refusing at present to do anything about it, will he ask the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House about the activities that the Government are undertaking to ensure that people have the right to vote?

In particular, will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Home Secretary to take account of parliamentary answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) on 26 November, which show that, although in Scotland and Northern Ireland the relevant Secretaries of State intend to mount a publicity campaign to remind people who are disabled or sick or who have a right to proxy and postal votes of their entitlement to vote in the local and Euro-elections, no such campaign is planned in England and Wales? We should like the Home Secretary to address that issue.

Will the Leader of the House ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement to the House, perhaps next week, on the defeat that the Government have suffered in the High Court at the hands of the fishing industry on the compulsory tie-up policy, which as yet has not been reported to the House?

We all very much hope that, once the process of debates on the Budget is complete, there will be early and full discussions on the way in which business is now being handled. It cannot be satisfactory to the House to have substantial statements at the outset of business on each day of the Budget debate, thus squeezing the start of the debate itself well into the early hours of the evening? Because the Budget is combined with public expenditure, we all understand the need somehow to handle those statements, but there could and should have been full discussions about how we should deal with this before the unified Budget process was introduced. Since that has not happened, will the Lord President assure us that it will happen before next year, and may we have an Opposition day soon?

Mr. Newton: That was a rather longer list of questions than the right hon. Lady usually has. I will do my best to deal with them all.

First, as to the electoral register, I think that the right course is for me to bring the right hon. Lady's observations to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I hope also that, in the light of what the right hon. Lady said, the people who are responsible for those matters in Brent might also give them some consideration. The right hon. Lady might care to transmit that message as well. *[Interruption.]*

As to the days-at-sea point, as the right hon. Lady said, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation's case against the Government has been referred to the European Court, which, I understand, is unlikely to rule on it in less than 18 months, so final judgment in the United Kingdom will be correspondingly delayed.

I assure the right hon. Lady that the Government are urgently studying the position and will make an announcement when they are in a position to do so. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is on the Front Bench, will have noted the request as to the way in which that announcement should be made.

As to the Budget debate and the right hon. Lady's observations, I think that I made it clear several times, not least to my right hon. Friend the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, that we do think that it will be right to review any lessons that need to be drawn from the unified Budget procedure in the light of experience this year. Of course we would expect to have regard to representations that the right hon. Lady might make through the usual channels or in other ways.

I would, however, make the point that, until the date of the social security uprating statement, for example, was changed the Government—in the mid-1980s as I recall, probably when I was Minister of State—for many years it was the norm for the social security statement to follow in the immediate wake of the Budget, as it has done this year. If the right hon. Lady wishes to make representations to the effect that she would prefer those matters to be dealt with only after a long delay—which, as they are involved in the Budget, would seem a bit odd—or by written answer, rather than oral statement, I would happily consider those possibilities.

Lastly, on the subject of Supply days, I always seek to satisfy the right hon. lady's ambitions, but I cannot make any great promises for the period between now and Christmas at this stage.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early, urgent debate on the policies that are being followed by local education authorities controlled by Labour and Liberal Democrat coalitions, not least in the county of Kent, where up to £100,000 of council tax payers' money is being set aside to encourage schools vigorously not to embark upon a policy of securing grant-maintained status?

Hon. Members: Abuse.

Mr. Newton: This is, I think, the second Thursday running when significant questions relating to the way in which Kent is dealing with those matters have been asked in the House. I will ensure that the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is drawn to them.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House confirm that next Thursday's business about EC documents and the motion that he intends to place before the House is not confined to the budget of the EC for the next year, but also relates to an adjustment of its own financial structure for the next few years? If that is the case, can the Leader of the House confirm that the forthcoming meeting of the European Council to which the motion will no doubt relate will take decisions on that matter, and that any Bill that may come before the House subsequently will be only to effect those decisions and not to give leave to anyone to agree to them?

Mr. Newton: The list of documents that are to be taken into account in the debate next Thursday is extensive, and it would not be sensible for me to attempt to run through them all at this stage. Nor, indeed, can I give undertakings —it is literally not within my power—as to precisely what will emerge from the meeting of the European Council. I note, however, the points that the hon. Gentleman makes.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): Is my right hon Friend aware of the inquiry that is currently being undertaken by the Arts Council into the future funding of the four London orchestras? Can he arrange for a debate to be held before Christmas, because this is a matter of urgency, so as to ensure that the House has an opportunity to express its views about a process which could lead to the destruction of two of those four orchestras, with consequent effects on the artistic and cultural life of the capital city and elsewhere, and on Britain's balance of payments?

Mr. Newton: I believe that the Government's commitment to the arts has been clearly demonstrated over a long period. Indeed, despite the continuing need to keep strict control of public expenditure, we have managed even now to find more money than was planned for the arts. I put that fact on the table before my hon. Friend, but I cannot promise what I would call a dedicated debate. However, he may find that there will be opportunities for him to raise the matter, if he wishes, before the House rises for the recess.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Leader of the House comes to these occasions well briefed, but is he aware of my representations to Ministers earlier today about the 3,000-plus Ferranti workers now heading for the back of the longest queue in Britain—the dole queue? Will the right hon. Gentleman ask every Minister who can help to do so urgently, and may we have an oral statement next week on the Government's response to this tragedy?

Mr. Newton: I will draw the latter request to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, but I can readily assure the right hon. Member that of course Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Employment and any other relevant Department will wish to do everything they can to assist with problems that will follow what has occurred at Ferranti.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate or statement before Christmas on safety standards and maintenance on London Underground, including investment in that organisation, so that my constituents, many of whom have to commute into London, can be reassured that they will not again have to face the awful ordeal that they suffered a few days ago, which caused many of them considerable difficulty?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that the investment programme in London Transport continues at a high level—significantly higher than in the days of the old Greater London council, for example. But I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Now that we have reached the time of year when we celebrate both the Hindu festival of light and Advent, which is a preparation for our celebration at Christmas, may we have some enlightenment and some news worthy of celebration from the Leader of the House? May we hear details, set out in a logical way, of when the Government expect to introduce the legislation mentioned in the Queen's Speech, for which they obtained the assent of the House, so that we have some idea of the timetable for the year, especially in relation to the Sunday trading option votes—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is on Wednesday."] No, that is only the first day. May we also have some news about ordering the sittings of the House sensibly—news often promised but never yet delivered?

Mr. Newton: In my concluding speech in the debate on the Loyal Address, I made some comments on the continuing efforts to achieve progress in securing the necessary agreement on that matter, and I cannot now add to what I said then.

On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I presume that he had noticed that I announced the debate on the Sunday trading options, which we hope will be dealt with next Wednesday. Thereafter, I expect the Bill to go to Standing Committee and at some later stage, perhaps while the Bill is still in Committee, we shall have on the Floor of the House the day that has been committed for the employment protection provisions.

Beyond that, I cannot yet give the hon. Gentleman a detailed catalogue of the dates on which Government Bills will appear. Some have already appeared; some will have their Second Readings in the House of Lords in the next week or two; others I hope to bring forward shortly after Christmas.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): As there is no time in next week's business schedule for a debate, will my right hon. Friend draw to the attention of the President of the Board of Trade the appreciation of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale) and myself of this morning's announcement by the Department of Trade and Industry that Chelmsford

[Mr. Simon Burns]

in Essex has received the full bid for KONVER funding to help defence-related industries that have suffered so many redundancies, and to provide a future, so that we can rebuild part of the manufacturing base in our constituencies?

Mr. Newton: As my hon. Friend knows, I shall have the greatest possible pleasure in communicating his message to the President of the Board of Trade, because it would be easy for me to couple my name with that of my hon. Friends and to express my congratulations to the people from Essex county council and elsewhere who have put so much work into developing the project, not least because it is probable that as many of my constituents as my hon. Friends' will be helped.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 155?

[That this House condemns the Portuguese Government and authorities for its failure to investigate the tragic death of Paul Kenney, whilst on holiday in Portugal in July; is outraged that the Portuguese authorities failed to take any steps to trace Paul's family, who were in Portugal at the time and were only informed of his death after his parents traced him to a local hospital, where the body had lain for four weeks after being found on a beach in Portimao, although on several visits to the hospital his parents were told that no person of his description had been admitted; expresses its dismay that even though Paul had telephone numbers on his person that would have helped identify him, neither the police nor the hospital made any effort to trace his next of kin; condemns the extraordinary discourtesy of the Portuguese Ambassador and his staff towards the honourable Member for Leicester, West, when he sought to progress this matter on behalf of his constituents, the Kenney family; and demands that the Portuguese Government now take immediate action to investigate Paul Kenney's death, to inform the bereaved family of its causes and circumstances, and to apologise to the family for the disgraceful way in which it has treated them and their awful tragedy.]

It concerns the awful tragedy of the death of a young constituent of mine, Paul Kenney, while on holiday in Portugal and the outrageous behaviour of the Portuguese authorities. Could the Foreign Secretary make an early statement on why that British citizen's family were not informed about the death for four weeks, why they found out only by chance and why, even now, the Portuguese authorities have refused or failed to provide any information on how the death occurred, despite my efforts to find out through the Portuguese embassy—efforts that were most discourteously treated?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that that subject has been selected for an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Newton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was going to tell the hon. and learned Gentleman that. The Government share the concern shown in the motion about the circumstances of Mr. Kenney's death and the lack of notification to his family. We hope that the Portuguese authorities will respond positively to our consul's formal and informal requests for an explanation, and we shall continue to press for that.

As you, Madam Speaker, helpfully and informally reminded me, and as I was about to remind the hon. and learned Gentleman, if he did not already know, he has the Adjournment debate on that matter on Friday 10 December, when he will have a greater opportunity to ventilate his concerns.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House when he expects that we will be able to have a full day's debate on agriculture? I understand that it was initially intended to have a day before Christmas. He will know from the statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor that there is to be a further reduction in the support given to hill farmers. It is likely that the first chance that the House will have to debate agriculture is when some specific, related motion comes before the House late at night. Would it not be much better to take a thorough, on-going look at agriculture to see how hill farmers are bearing up in the general context of farming?

Mr. Newton: There are three observations to be made on that issue. First, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be here on Thursday to answer questions. Secondly, on the same day, there will be extensive debating of European matters, into which he may probably squeeze a reference. Thirdly, I hope that he will acknowledge that, despite the reductions to the allowances to which he referred in 1993, the net farm income of the relevant farms rose by 33 per cent. in real terms between 1991-92 and 1992-93, and is set to rise by a further 28 per cent. this year.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate next week on early-day motion 157?

[That this House welcomes the information provided by the Channel 4 programme Dispatches, broadcast on 1st December, which demonstrated conclusively that Aims of Industry is a front for the Conservative Party; notes with surprise that a number of companies who made donations to Aims of Industry have not included these in their annual report in breach of the Companies Act 1985; notes with concern the suggestion that before the 1992 general election Aims of Industry funded a campaign on behalf of the Conservative Party in Wallasey, apparently in breach of the Representation of the People Act 1983; and calls on the Prime Minister to instruct the President of the Board of Trade and the Home Secretary to authorise immediate investigations with a view to prosecuting those responsible.]

It concerns Aims of Industry and the Conservative party. In addition to a discussion about how Aims of Industry has illegally raised funds on behalf of and with the knowledge of the Conservative party—generally and in the constituency of Wallasey—we can discuss the dinners that the Prime Minister is again beginning to promote, with a tax-free subsidy that helps those dinners, and discuss the relationship between those who attend and donations from the tobacco companies, for example, to the Conservative election campaign in 1992 and the consequent refusal of the Government to introduce a ban on tobacco advertising.

Mr. Newton: I find the extent to which the hon. Gentleman appears to claim that the entire world rests on a permanent, running conspiracy of some kind quite

extraordinary, and sometimes almost laughable. The Government's view is absolutely clear: that all companies should comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 1985, which was introduced by the Government. I hope that, in the light of what the hon. Gentleman has said, he will find it possible also to condemn the millions of pounds spent on what was, in effect, political advertising by the National and Local Government Officers Association during the general election.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Will my right hon. Friend find a way to promote the superintendent of police in the Commons for his exemplary work in creating the maximum number of obstructions which prevent hon. Members from getting to the Commons and to the Chamber? Outside St. Stephen's entrance in particular there are more and more barriers which now resemble something out of Hampton Court maze.

During Divisions, we cannot get round Parliament square by car or by taxi because there is no police cover at the traffic lights to enable us to get through. When one finally arrives in New Palace yard, one finds that only officials and not Members of Parliament can park there. We have to park five or six floors down in the underground car park. Is it not time that we ensured that the House of Commons is run by and for Members of Parliament and not by officials for officials?

Mr. Newton: I shall convey my hon. Friend's initial recommendation to those responsible for these matters, although they may find that the gloss that he subsequently put on it conveys a rather different flavour. I say straightforwardly, not least because of your involvement in and knowledge of these matters, Madam Speaker, that there are present in the Chamber significant numbers of people concerned with security arrangments in and around the House who, I am sure, have noted what my hon. Friend has said and what has been said by a number of hon. Members earlier this Session.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As the Minister responsible for such matters, will the Leader of the House give us an assurance that no motion will be put on the Order Paper for the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland? Would it not be wrong, at this time of all times, to do anything that would further divide the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland? There was no direct recommendation from the Select Committee on Procedure. The Committee was split, with Labour Members making it clear that we were opposed to such a Committee. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman bears in mind the sensitive position over Northern Ireland at present.

Mr. Newton: I have, of course, looked at the report that the Procedure Committee agreed last night, and I have noted the voting pattern to which the hon. Gentleman accurately refers. He well knows that the Government have consistently acknowledged that, although such a Select Committee may, in principle, be desirable, a number of issues need to be considered before coming to a decision, let alone before putting proposals to the House. Obviously, any such proposals need to be the subject of discussion.

Mr. Ian Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend give his attention to the announcement of a debate next Thursday on the European Community White Paper and budget? We find that all the relevant papers are not available at this stage. I have in my hand what is a available so far. Do we have enough time to review the documents, given the short notice?

Mr. Newton: I shall take first the main thrust of my hon. Friend's question. He is right to think that the documents that will be referred to in the motion are already in the Vote Office, as he has physically demonstrated, or will be there as soon as possible. Some of my documents are being prepared for the European Council, and final versions may not be available until early next week. It is obviously right that debate should take place before the European Council. The House would expect that to happen and would complain if it did not; that inevitably involves some late documentation, I am afraid.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When shall we have a Government statement about the role of the judges in meting out so-called "justice" in the courts? Does it not stink in the nostrils that Roger Levitt, who was involved in a £34 million swindle, was recently allowed to escape on the most important charges by the Government's Crown Prosecution Service, and that he finished up with 180 hours community service? He has friends in the Tory party, including Tory Members.

Terry Ramsden, a member of the race horse fraternity who was involved in a swindle of more than £50 million, got only an 18-month suspended sentence. Yet a Labour councillor in Derbyshire, in a case involving £13,000, was sent down the line for 18 months. Poll tax payers who refuse to pay the poll tax on principle are sent to gaol for as long as six months. There are double standards operating in British law, which is what one would expect from this tin-pot Government.

Mr. Newton: That is another question of what might now be regarded as a traditional variety from hon. Members who sit just below the Gangway. I simply observe, as calmly as I can, that I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks about judges to the attention to my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and his observations about the Crown Prosecution Service to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at his timetabling, and give time to a matter that is of great importance to all the parents in my constituency and to every parent in the United Kingdom: the fitting of seat belts in coaches? There have recently been two tragic crashes. One of them was on the M40, near my constituency, when many young lives were lost. Sadly, last week there was another crash, on the A3. Although the children who were wearing seat belts were hurt, they were not killed.

I should be grateful if time could be put aside to debate the matter, as it is of great concern to all parents throughout the United Kingdom whose children travel every day on coaches and minibuses.

Mr. Newton: I well understand why my hon. Friend raised that question. Although I cannot promise time for a dedicated debate—as I called it earlier—she may find opportunities to raise that matter if she wishes between now and the recess. I will draw her remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

[Mr. Newton]

The Government are currently reviewing the technical and cost implications of her proposal, but feel that it would be unwise to rush into new legislation until the full reports of those accidents have been thoroughly considered.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can we have a statement on the future of the days-at-sea legislation before the European debate next Thursday? Would it not be foolhardy to proceed with such controversial legislation while the matter lies before the European Court?

On the same time scale, can we have a statement on the crisis in the Scottish salmon industry, which impacts on thousands of jobs across rural Scotland? Why are the Irish Government defending the interests of their producers in Europe more vigorously than the British Government are defending our producers? Those of us who hope to see better Irish-British co-operation on a number of important issues would like to see some practical co-operation to protect the interests of that vital industry.

Mr. Newton: On the latter point, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know of the active interest that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has been taking in those problems. He will know also that the Commission introduced emergency safeguard measures in the form of minimum import prices to provide a temporary floor in the market while the longer-term problems that face the industry are addressed.

As to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I cannot give a date for any announcement by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about the matter that I touched on earlier, but I take note of his request about the timing.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Can the Leader of the House give an assurance that, in Wednesday's debate on Sunday trading, there will be a completely free vote in the House of Commons and that there will be no so-called payroll votes on that issue?

Mr. Newton: I am reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), who is a member of the Whips Office, that that is not a matter for the Leader of the House. I presume that he is protecting some other empire. I do not speak for the Opposition Whips and therefore cannot say what they will do. Nobody has told me what to do.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Might it not be necessary to extend the debate on the Budget beyond Tuesday, given that so far we have had so few policies from the Opposition and that there is not much prospect in the next few days that we shall hear any more policy objectives from them?

Mr. Newton: That is a good question. Although I am much tempted, even if I were to extend the debate for a further year, the Opposition would still not have a policy.

Local Government Finance

3.56 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. I take points of order at the end of statements.

Mr. Clelland: But this point of order is about the statement to be made by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry; I can take points of order only——

Mr. Clelland: My point of order relates to what the Secretary of State is about to say. Hon. Members do not have the statement. I understand from the Vote Office that the Secretary of State has decided that hon. Members will not be entitled to see the statement until after he has sat down.

Madam Speaker: As I have explained on numerous occasions, it is at the discretion of the Minister whether to issue a copy of the statement before he makes it, when he rises or after he has finished. It is entirely a matter for him.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It is normal for the documents relating to a statement to be made available by the Minister at the beginning of his statement, not at the end. Will the Secretary of State or the Leader of the House authorise the Vote Office to issue the documents? There is no question about it—they should be made available.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I would not want to be curmudgeonly. I merely did what I understood had been done before, and if the House would like the statement now, I am happy for that to happen.

Madam Speaker: Do I understand that the Secretary of State is releasing the documents in the Vote Office?

Mr. Gummer: I am.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

4 pm

Mr. Gummer: With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the local authority finance settlement for England for 1994-95—the document that is now in the Vote Office.

In forming my proposals, I have listened carefully to what local authorities and their associations have said to me, and I have considered fully the demands that will be placed on local authorities in the coming year. I have also weighed very carefully the interests of the economy as a whole. We must reduce the public sector deficit. Local government accounts for around a quarter of general Government expenditure and cannot be immune from our rigorous examination of all spending programmes.

I have had regard to levels of price inflation, with the RPI increase to October at 1·4 per cent. and the underlying rate currently the lowest for decades. I have also had in mind the statement of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that any increase in public

sector pay in 1994-95 must be paid for by greater efficiency and economy. I have considered the scope that many authorities still have to increase their efficiency.

Those are the considerations underpinning the aggregate figures I published on 30 November. The Government's view is that the appropriate level of revenue spending for local authorities in England in 1994-95 will be £42·664 billion. Central Government funding in support of that expenditure will be £34·3129 billion.

Those figures reflect a number of specific changes in local authorities' functions next year. The most significant is the further increase in community care clients needing assessment and support. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 29 October, the Government propose to make available in 1994-95 a special grant of £736 million for that purpose. That amount is included in the figures I have just quoted.

I remind the House that that comparison must be like with like. Therefore, excluding such function changes, my proposal provides for a 2·3 per cent. increase in local authority spending year on year. That reflects our responsible approach, and I believe is a fair outcome in the current circumstances. Provided that local authorities themselves take the same responsible approach to pay and efficiency, and in assessing their spending priorities, front-line local services can be maintained.

I announced on 30 November that the distributable amount of non-domestic rates in 1994-95 should be £10·685 billion, and I am today publishing details of the full calculation. I proposed that the main revenue support grant in 1994-95 should be almost £18·5 billion. In addition, some £5·1 billion of specific and special grants would be available.

That is the total, and we must now see how it is to be divided up. The means of distributing the revenue support grant has at its heart the standard spending assessment for each authority. This year, because of the many cross-party requests, we have undertaken a thorough review of how SSAs are calculated, in consultation with the local authority associations.

The review had two essential purposes: first, to bring the system up to date by incorporating detailed information on social characteristics now available from the 1991 census; and, secondly, to review the elements that make up the SSA calculation by reappraising the factors that determine necessary local authority expenditure.

There is not an hon. Member who will not have heard from his local authority that this or that factor might be done in a different way. We have sought to listen to those requests very carefully, in association with the local authority organisations. We are very grateful for the co-operation and participation of the local authority associations in the process of the review. In addition, 200 individual local authorities made detailed representations. All these points were carefully considered before I formulated my proposals.

The package of proposals is detailed, but I will describe briefly some of the main points as they are of the utmost importance to many hon. Members. Having considered the evidence, I propose to reduce the present weight assigned to the allowance for additional needs within the education element. This is in the light of an updated statistical analysis of the proportion of local education authority spending that is attributable to additional needs. Even after the reduction, the additional needs allowance will still represent more than 20 per cent. of the education component of the SSA.

In the personal social services element, I propose a number of changes to the underlying indicators. In particular, for the assessments associated with elderly persons in need of domiciliary and residential care, I propose to introduce an indicator of long-term illness. That has been pressed upon me widely. For residential care, I also propose to adjust the calculation to reflect authorities' responsibilities under the community care arrangements.

One of the most controversial features of the method of calculating SSAs since they were introduced in 1990-91 has been the measurement of social conditions by means of the all-ages social index. That index aims to provide a broad measure of social conditions that are likely to affect the cost to local authorities of providing services. A large number of authorities have suggested that a wider range of social and economic indicators should be incorporated in SSAs. I have looked carefully at the evidence and I propose to introduce a revised social index and an economic index, which will include indicators of unemployment, ill health and homeless.

I also propose to make allowance for the numbers of day visitors within the assessment of services for districts. Previously, we did not have reliable data on a consistent basis for all authorities, but as a result of research commissioned for the purpose we now have the necessary estimates of numbers of day visitors by authority.

I have thought most carefully about the issue of the adjustment to take account of additional employment costs in London and the south-east. That is an issue on which opinions are sharply divided, and those divisions are almost entirely geographical. Those who fall within the area covered tend to be very enthusiastic about it; those who fall outside the area naturally find reasons why it is not correct. My predecessor acknowledged in the debate on the 1993-94 settlement in February that we would need to consider carefully the evidence for the present cost adjustment, and that is what we have done. I have concluded that there is firm evidence to support the present level of allowance for employment costs, and that there is justification for a further small addition for the costs of business rates. That is what I propose.

My proposals for 1994-95 are firmly based on the available statistical evidence, and I am confident that they will stand up to scrutiny. The system is fair, rational, up to date and comprehensive. Each of the proposed changes has been subject to the most rigorous analysis and has been incorporated only if it was resilient to that analysis.

At individual authority level, the effect of my proposals will vary. Changing a means of distribution to make it fairer produces losers as well as gainers. I recognise that authorities facing a reduction in SSA will need time to adjust their spending. I therefore propose to set aside some £280 million for a special grant to authorities whose SSAs are reduced by more than 2 per cent. as a result of the incorporation of the more detailed information from the 1991 census and of the review. The grant will be paid in support of expenditure by those authorities, cushioning the impact on council tax payers. I will review the situation next year before deciding whether to extend that transitional measure.

Last year my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, looked ahead to the first year of the council tax. He predicted that the tax would place

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local government finance on a sure footing and would find general support. I am pleased to report that my right hon. and learned Friend's optimism was well placed, and that the council tax has been successfully established as the means whereby local residents contribute to the cost of local services. In doing so, I gladly echo my right hon. and learned Friend's commendation of the constructive role of local authorities and their associations in preparing for its introduction.

Council taxes can vary widely, depending on the spending decisions of each local authority and its performance in collecting the tax, on the circumstances of each household and on individual entitlement to exemptions or benefits. There is therefore practically no meaning in talking about average taxes. For the sake of grant distribution, however, we have to identify notional taxes for each valuation band, for a standard level of spending—the so-called council tax for standard spending or CTSS. My proposals incorporate a CTSS for band C of £468. I emphasise again, however, that that is merely an element in the grant formula. It is neither a prediction of individual council tax bills nor a national average, and those who have sought to use it as such in the past have found how very far out their calculations are.

One reason why the bills of individual households will vary is the effect of council tax transitional relief, which has reduced the bills of those who faced the largest increases from the move from one taxation system to another. Some 3·7 million households are benefiting from transitional relief this year. In line with our commitment to continue transitional relief for two years at least, I propose to make available, in addition to the central support that I have already announced, some £130 million to provide continued relief in 1994-95. In general, taxpayers will receive last year's relief less an amount ranging from £67 a year for band A to £137 a year for band H.

In the current economic circumstances, we are as determined as ever that local authorities should play their full part in making reasonable spending plans that their local taxpayers and the country can afford. I am today announcing my provisional capping criteria for 1994-95. I am also issuing proposals for the calculation of notional amounts for certain authorities whose boundaries will change from 1 April 1994. They are the base from which I will measure increases in budgets in determining whether those increases are excessive. In addition, my provisional capping criteria themselves make allowance for the expenditure on care in the community that is being met this year by the special transitional grant. That allows a fair year-on-year comparison.

As in previous years, my provisional capping criteria allow larger increases for authorities with budgets close to their SSAs than for those whose budgets are relatively higher. Where budgets are very substantially above SSA, I intend again to seek budget reductions. The effect of my intended criteria is that: any increase of more than 1·75 per cent. over 1993-94 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement above the authority's SSA; any increase of more than 1·25 per cent. over 1993-94 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement over 5 per cent. above the authority's SSA; and any increase of more than 0·75 per cent. over 1993-94 will be considered an excessive increase if it gives rise to a budget requirement over 10 per cent. above the authority's SSA. In addition, I intend that any budget requirement more than 12·5 per cent. above SSA will be considered excessive—save that an authority will not be designated if it fulfils certain conditions equivalent to those that have applied in previous years. Those criteria are necessarily provisional. I cannot make any decisions on capping until authorities have set their budgets for 1994-95. When I come to take those decisions, I shall of course take into account all appropriate considerations.

One issue affecting a small number of authorities in 1994-95 is the start-up cost of local government reorganisation. Our intention is that, in 1994-95, authorities should be able to borrow for any such costs, and I am today issuing a consultation paper on the detailed arrangements.

In conclusion, my Department today is writing to every local authority in England with details of the system. The package includes a consultation paper which sets out how we propose to distribute central Government support between authorities, including my proposals for SSAs and for damping SSA losses.

The package gives details of the proposed council tax transitional relief schemes, sets out provisional capping criteria and includes proposals of notional amounts. It also includes a consultation paper on how costs arising from local government restructuring should be met. Copies of the package have been placed in the Vote Office and in the Library.

The proposals which I have outlined today represent a balanced and reasonable response to the conflict between the pressure to provide ever more resources for local government and the need to reduce the public spending gap. They provide for a 2·3 per cent. increase in local authority spending. They incorporate major improvements in the way in which the available resources are allocated, while protecting people in those authorities which stand to lose most from the results of the incorporation of the 1991 census data and the SSA review. They would allow council taxes next year to be set at reasonable levels, maintaining a substantial measure of transitional relief, and offering protection from excessive bills. They represent a package which the country can afford.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On Tuesday we had the bizarre spectacle of the Chancellor of the Exchequer boasting of cuts in the House while the Secretary of State for Environment boasted of rises in spending outside the House. Since they cannot both be right, has not the Secretary of State surrendered to the Chancellor? Will the Secretary of State explain to the House how he came to issue a press release on Tuesday with the unqualified headline

"Local Government Spending to Rise by 2·3 per cent."?

Did the Secretary of State know that was plain wrong or did he just not bother to check?

Has the Secretary of State studied the small print of the Red Book? Table 5.4 shows that, during the next two years, the cut which he has accepted and to which he has surrendered is £860 million next year and £1·5 billion the year after that. Is not that cut three times greater than has been conceded by any other Minister? Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that that is the worst record of any service-providing Minister?

Is the right hon. Gentleman proud or ashamed of his surrender, and of the damage which will flow from his failure—larger classes, higher home help charges, less help for vulnerable children, fewer day nursery places and lower spending on crime prevention and on youth work?

The Secretary of State claimed in the press notice, and repeated it today, that a 2·3 per cent. increase represented an increase in total spending. How does that fit with the letter which his predecessor, the present Home Secretary, wrote to the Chief Secretary in May saying that an increase of 5·2 per cent. was needed in total standard spending

"to protect local authority services."?

If the then Secretary of State was right to claim that 5·2 per cent. was needed, how can the present Secretary of State be right today? Will the Secretary of State confirm that compared with what authorities are spending this year by lawful budgets, each of which was approved by his predecessor, the settlement will mean a 1·2 per cent. cash cut?

On top of those cuts, all councils will have cuts in their capital programmes, including a £500 million cut from the Housing budget and the re-freezing of capital receipts. Is not it crazy that local authorities should have over £5,000 million of capital receipts in the bank at a time of desperate housing, social and economic needs? They could and should use those capital receipts for the benefit of their residents for housing and for other much-needed capital projects, but instead they have to be locked up by order of the Chancellor.

Is the Secretary of State aware that, last December, the then Secretary of State told me

"there is no need, as you suggest, for authorities to cut their staff as a result of my proposals for the 1993-94 settlement"?

Will the present Secretary of State repeat such a brazenly incorrect statement today? Does he realise that, contrary to that statement, during the past year thousands of local authority jobs have been lost as a direct result of that settlement? How many more jobs does the right hon. Gentleman estimate will be lost next year as a result of this settlement?

Standard spending assessments have a profound impact on spending and council tax levels, but the Minister will accept that the information which he has presented to the House, and which hon. Members have had just 15 minutes to digest while listening to his captivating statement, include complicated algebraic formulae and factors which run to 16 decimal points, and that in those circumstances councils will need time to comprehend the full impact of what he has announced today?

However, is it not clear, from the information that is already available to hon. Members, that once again the Secretary of State has sought to distort the system so as to stuff grant the way of a few favoured Tory councils? Can it be an accident? Annex A of an unnumbered special grant report shows that, of the 88 councils that are to receive the so-called standard spending assessment reduction grant, it is, surprise, surprise, Conservative-controlled Wandsworth which gets the largest amount—£26·5 million, nearly one tenth of the national total and £3 million more than Birmingham which has more than five times Wandsworth's population. What a surprise from a Government who claim to be fair. That is on top of the £30 million of so-called transitional relief, again one tenth of the total for the country, which his predecessor stuffed to Wandsworth this year.

If, as the Secretary of State claimed in his statement, his decisions today are "fair and rational" and will stand up to "scrutiny", why does he not do what the Audit Commission and the Opposition have proposed and submit his plans to the scrutiny of an independent local government grants commission to make recommendations to Ministers and to the House about the distribution of grant?

Is not it time for hon. Members and Ministers to recognise the futility of all this financial gerrymandering? Last May, despite extra grant to the then Conservative shires, the Tory party suffered its worst ever losses in those shires. On top of those losses, reducing Tory shires to one, in the last six months the Conservative party has lost control to Labour of Hillingdon borough council in outer London, of Gravesham council in Kent and, last Thursday, following an astonishing Labour victory in a safe Conservative ward, of Dover council. Local elections have repeatedly shown that the voters have overwhelming confidence in Labour councils, which provide far better services and have average council tax payments £14 per resident less than in Tory areas.

Despite the Secretary of State's weasel words, will he say by what percentage on this settlement he expects council tax bills to rise on average? Will he confirm that the obscure figure of £468 for council tax total spending levels at band C means a band D tax, which is the central tax, of £526, and that, on the information that the Secretary of State has given to the House, that involves a 6·8 per cent. increase in council tax—four times the level of inflation?

As for capping, when will the Secretary of State recognise that he now presides over the most centralised system of council control in the western world, which denies local choice and which system was specifically disowned by the Prime Minister when he was Chief Secretary in a 1988 White Paper in which he said that councils spending from their own local revenue should form no part of the Government's control total?

Is not it astonishing that, of all Secretaries of State, the right hon. Gentleman, who is so ready sanctimoniously to lecture others about morality, should in today's statement be so alarmingly lacking in those key moral values of courage and candour? He lacks the courage to admit that he failed in the public spending round, and he lacks the candour to admit that his failure will lead to serious reductions in the services that councils provide and in the number of staff they employ.

Mr. Gummer: In a general statement on ministerial answers, Madam Speaker, you asked for answers to be kept short. However, I must tell the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that he does his cause no good by trying to produce false comparisons in the figures and seeking to avoid—*[Interruption.]* I am telling the absolute truth. I compare like with like, not like with totally unlike.

As an example, I shall take the hon. Gentleman's comment about the average council tax. If a council has a large number of low-banded houses, overall it will have a lower council tax than a council with a large number of high-banded houses. If there is to be a proper comparison, the hon. Gentleman must not twist the figures or misunderstand them—he must compare band with band. The truth is that, when comparing band with band, Tory authorities have lower taxes than Labour authorities. Of course, we would not expect otherwise because Tory authorities believe in low tax while Labour authorities

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believe in high tax. The hon. Gentleman knows that and he uses his figures with a lack of candour and a great deal of cowardice. He is not prepared to use the proper figures.

I shall move on to other matters. To compare the Red Book figures with total standard spending is to compare like with unlike. The Red Book figures show an increase in spending for local authorities, as is perfectly proper. The TSS, compared with last year's TSS, has increased by 2.3 per cent. The current Red Book figures, compared with previous figures, suggest a smaller rise. That is not surprising because there is a much lower rate of inflation, many local authorities have learned to make their money go further by taking a more sensible view on contracting out and so on, and interest rates have decreased considerably.

This is the first time that I have heard a rise called a cut, except in the mathematics of the hon. Member for Blackburn. Indeed, his mathematics were pathetic. He referred to job losses, as he did on the previous statement. Indeed, he used the same figure last time as he used this time. He did not use it today in the House, but I heard him use it on the radio. I know the figure that he is using. Last time he said that Birmingham would suffer job losses. We all remember him saying that Birmingham would get rid of almost all its staff, there would not be any jobs and everything would be terrible. In fact, there was a 2.3 per cent. increase in the number of jobs in that council. That does not square with all the doom and gloom that we heard from the hon. Gentleman.

Of course, the hon. Gentleman was right to say that there would be some public sector job losses, because that is the consequence of going out to private tender. When a private firm wins a contract there is an increase in the number of private jobs and a decrease in the number of public jobs. The hon. Gentleman grabs the decrease and fails to mention the increase. He does not want more jobs, only more council jobs. That is what the issue is all about, even though he knows that an increase in private jobs and a decrease in council jobs lowers the cost of services, results in the provision of better services and gives the council more money to spend on other council services, which is what we want.

The hon. Gentleman says, "Do not let the Secretary of State for the Environment do that, or any of the people who used to do it before"—including in a Labour Government —"but let some private quango do it." The scourge of the quango wants a new quango. I think that is a very good idea. It would mean that I could come to the House and say, "I am awfully sorry that your SSA in Blackburn has fallen, or has not increased as much as you would like. But that is nothing to do with me—the independent quango told me what to do."

Happily, I am an elected Member of Parliament. I am responsible to the House for the figures. They are my figures, by which I stand. What is more, they are correct—unlike the false figures of the hon. Member for Blackburn.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend totally disregard the party political tomfoolery we have heard from the Opposition? If I understood the arcane figures correctly, Cambridgeshire county council will receive an SSA more than twice the rate of inflation. Therefore, there is no excuse for inefficiency by the already incompetent Lib-Lab coalition in command there.

My right hon. Friend is to be commended for tackling the vexed question of the area cost adjustment. Is it not possible to correct the absurdities that result in Cambridgeshire receiving nothing and Oxfordshire and Bedfordshire receiving benefit by moving away from the crude and arbitrary regional area system and returning to a county system in interpreting area cost adjustment?

Mr. Gummer: It is perfectly true that my hon. Friend's authority is subject to an increased SSA, in common with a number of other authorities. I happen to have a list of them. Wigan, Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield and Newcastle all do extremely well—although the hon. Member for Blackburn might have thought that they would not—because of the objective measurements. Wandsworth gets the largest amount of damping grant because it has the largest cut. Labour Members are busy trying to make party political propaganda out of an honourable and decent thing—which is to cut where cutting must take place.

I will consider my hon. Friend's suggestion for the next time, but I warn him that everybody feels one way if they benefit and the other if they do not.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Secretary of State agree that it is a peculiar anomaly that capital spending by local authorities from capital receipts is still frozen when the Government insist that the Ministry of Defence's capital receipts are 100 per cent. spent this year in MOD spending on revenue or capital?

Mr. Gummer: The capital receipts that arise from this year—the parallel that the hon. Gentleman would be making—are available for spending in local authorities, so he cannot object to that. That is one thing that we did this year for a particular reason, and I know that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased about it.

Also, capital receipts are not frozen. They are available to pay off debt. Labour Members do not appear to understand that when one borrows money, one has to pay it back—which is why they have always got the economy in such a mess. That is why they talk about freezing when in fact it is available for the spending for which it ought to be available. Labour and Liberal councils have a great deal of debt to pay off before they start lecturing us.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): I wonder whether I have understood the position correctly in respect of Devon. It seems that my right hon. Friend responded to the case that I and a number of west country Members of Parliament put to him and to his predecessor over a number of years—that SSAs do not necessarily reflect the amount to which Devon should be entitled. If that is correct, and if more money could now be spent on, for instance, education, can my right hon. Friend say anything to ensure that the money really does go on education and is not just frittered away by the Liberals who control the county council?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend and his Devon colleagues have an honourable record in pressing the case for Devon with the Government. When the various items that he raised were looked at properly, it resulted in Devon receiving a better share of the cake. That money can be spent by his county council as it thinks fit. It will be up to him to point out how much is ill spent by the

Liberal-controlled local authority. As this is a universal element in Liberal control, he will not have much difficulty in pointing it out.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): In his examination of the all-ages social index, did the Secretary of State give any consideration to the introduction of an economic deprivation factor into the SSA for other services—parks, recreation and environmental services? Is he aware that that would be a fairer system than the all-ages social-index, which has Cambridge and Cheltenham more deprived than Newcastle? Not only would it increase spending in deprived areas by reducing bills, but it would save money for the Treasury—the Chancellor might be interested in this—by reducing benefit levels. Will he look again at the all-ages social index and consider introducing a much fairer system than we have now?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to look at anything that the hon. Gentleman puts before me. I have already looked carefully at that and I think that he will be pleased with the economic index that we have put in which takes particular care to deal with unemployment and long-term illness—two things which the hon. Gentleman and many of his colleagues thought were important. I am happy to say that the changes in the SSA have improved the SSA in Gateshead and Newcastle upon Tyne, in one case by 4·1 per cent. and in the other by 4·8 per cent.

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I welcome as reasonable the 2·4 per cent. increase all over the country, but we are obviously concerned for our own areas. Is my right hon. Friend aware that last year the London Boroughs Association considered that we lost £200 million from London to the rest of the country and we would like it back? Is he also aware that, if we are using the figures from the 1991 census, London will be disadvantaged because so many people disappeared down black holes so that they did not have to pay the poll tax that up to 10,000 were missing from any one constituency, and there is no consideration for that?

Mr. Gummer: I understand my right hon. Friend's concern. He will be happy to know that the damping grant of nearly £19 million ensures that the loss in Brent would not be more than 2 per cent. With the damping grant, London as a whole will receive an addition of £200 million.

That is in stark contrast to the statement by Mr. Toby Harris, the leader of the Association of London Authorities, who said on the radio this morning that London would lose more than £800 million. Mr Harris's figures were £1 billion out. The only comparable error in figures was made this afternoon by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). It seems that innumeracy is a quality shared by most Labour local government spokesmen.

Despite that, there is a particular problem with Brent. *[Interruption.]* Happily, the new authority in Brent has improved things considerably after Labour-controlled Brent produced one of the worst examples of local government in the country, if not in the world. Part of Brent is moved to the neighbouring borough under the reorganisation. That causes a specific difficulty, but I shall be happy to talk to my right hon. Friend about that. He will be pleased with the increase in money coming to London.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): Is not it the case that, as a result of the review of SSAs and the changes in the additional education needs allowance, most inner London boroughs have suffered serious losses? Is not it absurd that areas of inner London which are extremely deprived in all sorts of ways and which show signs of serious social deprivation should be losers rather than gainers in the review of SSAs? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us the net loss for the inner London boroughs as a result of his new settlement?

Mr. Gummer: The right hon. Gentleman gives a curious example, because six inner London boroughs gain and six lose. They do so by an objective system. We have sought to make the system as objective as possible. The result is that, for example, Greenwich has a 7·6 per cent. increase, Southwark a 3·8 per cent. increase, Barking an 11·8 per cent. increase, and Hillingdon, an outer London borough, a 7·8 per cent. increase. The right hon. Gentleman's borough has a 4·3 per cent. increase. I will be happy to send him the detailed figures for inner and outer London.

We have devised objective methods, many of which were introduced because of requests by the Labour party, on the long-term ill and unemployment, which were specifically raised with me when I visited the right hon. Gentleman's borough. As we listened to the requests of the Labour party and made changes from which his borough benefited, it is churlish of the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that there is something wrong with a system that is designed to do the best we can. Perhaps he would like to rethink the way in which he put his question.

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): My right hon. Friend will remember a deputation of Surrey Members visiting him and making a strong case about the unfair way in which the system of calculation has worked against the interests of the residents of Surrey. What has he been able to do to put that right?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend advanced a strong argument in the discussions. It upsets me considerably when the Opposition suggest that we run the system so that certain authorities benefit and others do not. We cannot do that. We apply the same criteria to every authority. The result is as good as it can be—as fair a balance as is possible between the various authorities. It so happens that, when we followed that policy, my right hon. Friend's contention proved to be true. That is why Guildford has an improvement in its SSA of 6 per cent. and Woking of 7·2 per cent. Those who object to our policy are objecting to a system that tries to take into account the objective methods that the Labour party asked for.

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the 2·3 per cent. increase in the education SSA for next year provides a figure that is about £232 million less than the amount being spent in our schools this year? Does he recognise that £232 million is equivalent in cash to 9,096 teaching jobs? How can cuts of £232 million in the school budget, threatening more than 9,000 teachers' jobs, be reconciled with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement on Tuesday that the Budget would increase education opportunities and improve standards?

Mr. Gummer: I understand that the hon. Gentleman has not had much time to look at the figures——

Mr. Straw: He needs more time.

Mr. Gummer: He does need time because he is comparing two different figures. He is comparing the outturn figure at the end of year with the total standard spending figure at the beginning of year. The outturn figure is always higher than the TSS figure. One should take the two figures that are comparable. There is no way around that. It is like comparing the budget of a company with its spending at the end of the year. One should compare budget with budget and outturn with outturn. If one compares the TSS this year with the TSS last year, one finds that there is a 2·3 per cent. increase.

The hon. Gentleman will find that we have spent a good deal of time in ensuring that our priorities, one of which is education, get a disproportionate increase so that we not only safeguard but improve services. The hon. Gentleman should compare like with like. The figures that he gave therefore are not true because he compared two totally different figures when he should have compared the same ones.

Sir Paul Beresford (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that comments such as those made by the Labour leader of the ALA are pitiful, given the incompetence of the authorities that he represents, of which the collection of the council tax perhaps is an example? Many of those authorities are now suffering in their budgets the effects of the sale and lease-back nonsense of the 1980s.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. It is perfectly true that some authorities do a very poor job for their council tax payers. I think, for example, of the London borough of Lambeth, where the council tax is significantly higher than it would have been had it not been for its incompetence in collection and its long history, which is now having to be paid for. However much better it may get year by year, its council tax payers are still bearing the burden.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I thank the Secretary of State for recognising that things are getting better in Lambeth. I recognise that there are swings and roundabouts, but will he confirm that the extraordinarily high SSA reduction grant of £21 million in Hackney, £22 million in Lambeth and, most of all, almost £28 million in Wandsworth underline and show a pretty gigantic shift in resources as a result of changes in the SSA, at least for those three London boroughs? What is the net loss for those three boroughs as a result of the change in the SSA and, since this very high special subsidy is only temporary, at what rate will it be withdrawn, because does not that presage some horrendous problem for Tory and Labour boroughs as a result of the change in the SSA calculation?

Mr. Gummer: I have always tried to encourage wherever possible. That is why I said the nicest things that I could about Lambeth, but it started from an absolutely appalling base and almost anybody could do better. I hope that it will continue to try to do so.

The hon. Gentleman must accept that we have tried to apply precisely the indexes that the Labour party wanted. The result has meant a shift of resources from Lambeth to Greenwich, to Southwark, to Barking and to Hillingdon. That is perfectly understandable and it is disclosed by the figures. It underlines, I fear, the fact that the Lambeth council has been less good than it should have been. Wandsworth, however, has a very low council tax. It has very good services. It is a very good council, and if Lambeth had done as well as Wandsworth the people of Lambeth would be very pleased indeed and would be prepared to accept the change because they would know that their council had properly looked after their resources.

I shall write to the hon. Gentleman with the detailed points that he wants.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I welcome the change in calculating the SSA for day visitors, which should benefit a constituency such as mine that has many visitors, but have my right hon. Friend and the Home Secretary received representations from West Mercia police authority about the level of civilianisation that it has been able to achieve and whether it has been adequately reflected in the way in which the police block of the SSA is calculated?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We have reflected in the police block grant the various changes that have been made in the SSA. I am pleased that Wyre Forest has an improvement in its position of 11·2 per cent., which reflects a real problem that he has so often raised with me and my predecessors.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I have major reservations about the total size of the cake, but may I give some recognition to the fact that the Secretary of State and especially the Minister for Local Government and Planning have gone some way to recognising the representations that have been made by the Webber Craig authorities and Sheffield, in particular on the economic index, including unemployment, ill-health and homelessness?

I draw the Secretary of State's attention to a problem that is facing those authorities, of which I hope he will take account. It arises where an authority has had its SSA relatively increased, reflecting the fact that in the past it has done relatively badly. In those circumstances, the year-on-year expenditure capping rule bites heavily on those authorities and means that they cannot take full advantage of any increase in the SSA that is available. Will the Secretary of State be willing to take account of that problem and reconsider the capping rules?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his balanced comment and I hope that other Opposition Members will take seriously what he says.

Sheffield has a 4·9 per cent. increase in its SSA. That is another example to give the lie to the, I think, outrageous comments of the hon. Gentleman about the way in which that is done. I hope that in a quieter time he will wonder to himself whether it is proper to suggest that a system is run in order to benefit one party or another when it manifestly is not. Of course I have thought about the matter. I have made my provisional statement today; and obviously things are provisional until they are confirmed. I have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said and will think about it.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the thought that he has put into this subject and the skill with which he has presented it would have been easier to appreciate if we could have had the papers earlier? Is there not a case, on this statement above all statements, for Members to have the papers an hour or two before the statement is made in the House? So

that I can tell my people in Staffordshire their fate, will my right hon. Friend say precisely what has happened as a result of the representations that we made?

Mr. Gummer: It is difficult, I know, for everyone to take in the figures all at once, but my hon. Friend might like to look at page 8 from which he will see that South Staffordshire has an increase in its SSA of 21·7 per cent. I imagine that he will be able to put that over pretty clearly without any warning or advance notice.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): As the Secretary of State knows, last year the London borough of Newham, in the east end of London, was short-changed by more than £22 million. That was because of a defective capital SSA and because the borough had to spend more than £11 million on homelessness, for which there was no SSA. Therefore, the council could not spend up to SSA on a range of services, including, for example, education. As a consequence, I went to a school in my constituency this morning where the gym could not be used because of the rain coming through the roof. Has the Secretary of State's statement today rectified the situation or made it worse?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's borough has an SSA per head of £1,143. One ought to remember, when dealing with London, that the per head SSAs are still clearly ahead of those anywhere else in the country. If the hon. Gentleman fears that under-registration of the type that he thinks may have distorted the census will make a difference—he did not say so just now, but I have heard him say it before—I want to ensure that he realises that that has been taken into account by the OPCS and that the figures have been adjusted to take that into account.

The London borough of Newham is one of those which has a reduction in its SSA, and that reduction—which is why, no doubt, the hon. Gentleman mentioned it—will mean that there is a damping grant of £13 million which goes to Newham to ensure that there will not be a reduction of more than 2 per cent.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and especially on the increase of 2·3 per cent,. which well exceeds the prevailing rate of inflation, and also on some sensible amendments, especially regarding the ACA.

I ask my right hon. Friend, either now or perhaps later, to turn to annex 4, page 8, where we have the figures for Gloucestershire, with six councils, of which three, including Stroud, have almost identical populations, but unfortunately Stroud seems to have only £8·5 million SSA compared with considerably more than £10 million for the other two. That seems to be because the external funding for Stroud, with 105,000 people, is only a little more than that for the three smaller and rural councils in that county. I should be most grateful if my right hon. Friend would reconsider that aspect of what is otherwise an excellent statement.

Mr. Gummer: I shall be happy to give my hon. Friend a detailed explanation. His SSA increase is up by 7·6 per cent., so he can tell the people of Stroud that his pressure has at least brought about that result.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): Will the Secretary of State explain to me and to the people of Hammersmith and Fulham what has changed in Hammersmith and Fulham that results in the council—which has met the Government-approved target of £169 million and received the accolades of a number of Ministers on its transport policy, its anti-crime policy, some of its housing policy and so on—still having to confront an enormous cut, in effect, bringing it down to about £145 million or £150 million? How on earth is that to be explained to the people of Hammersmith and Fulham, and will the right hon. Gentleman receive a deputation from the council to argue for some cushioning of that enormous impact?

Mr. Gummer: There is considerable cushioning—£18 million of cushioning—in order to meet the requirements exactly. The reason that Hammersmith and Fulham has had a reduction in its SAA is that, if one applies the specific objective tests which the Labour party was among the most vocal in demanding, Hammersmith and Fulham has a smaller SSA and Greenwich, Southwark, Barking and Hillingdon—all Labour-controlled boroughs —have an increase in their SSA.

I am afraid that if one has objective changes there will be some winners and some losers. I am happy to meet a deputation, however, and will provide them with all the figures.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Does the settlement for Dartford reflect the fact that that council is liable to incur extra costs in the next year in developments for and leading to the east Thames corridor? If there is no reflection in those figures of such expenditure, is my right hon. Friend open to suggestion on that subject?

Mr. Gummer: I shall be happy to meet my hon. Friend on that basis. Dartford has an increase in its SSA of 12·2 per cent., but that would not reflect that item.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Minister tell us whether an authority such as mine that has had an increase in excess of inflation under the recalculation of the SSA for which my authority has been arguing for years will now be allowed to increase its expenditure to that level so that the proven need in the borough can be met? Or shall we be given the money with one hand but be restricted from spending the money to meet that need because of the right hon. Gentleman's calculations on the cap?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is right in that Rotherham has an increase of 5·3 per cent. and I am pleased about that because it underlines the fact that the fears of Rotherham have proved to be ill founded. The difficulty is that Rotherham is already spending significantly more than its SSA and therefore the permitted increase in budget will only be 1·8 per cent. That in itself is a significant change and I am sure that the Rotherham council will make the best use of it.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does my right hon. Friend agree that my constituents in Eastbourne will warmly welcome what I calculate to be nearly a 12 per cent. increase in SSAs over last year? May I take this opportunity to congratulate him and his colleagues on their skill and patience in tackling issues such as the day visitors statistics, which have had such a direct bearing on the calculation of SSAs for resort towns such as my own?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right that the increase is about 11·7 per cent. for Eastbourne and 12·2 per cent. for Wealden. In both cases there is a high proportion of older people and there are necessary alterations because of the number of day visitors to Eastbourne. That is a fairer

[Mr. Gummer]

representation of the needs of Eastbourne. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has acknowledged it and thank him for his remarks.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the Secretary of State realise that his statement will be regarded by the people of Newham as one of the most unjust and harsh statements that he has made? He has just admitted that the SSA for Newham will be reduced by up to 2 per cent. and that that of his hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) will be increased by 10 per cent. Is he aware that the London boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham are three of the most deprived in the country? Can he tell us about homelessness? Does he not realise that £11 million of expenditure has to be taken out of the expenditure for the other services? Yet he has not taken much account of that because he did not deny the charges that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) made a few minutes ago. Does he realise that his 40-minute lecture to us in West Ham town hall about partnership is just empty claptrap when there is that type of deal?

Mr. Gummer: I would have expected better of the hon. Gentleman. I have heard him debate many times and he has always tried to be assiduous in his comparisons. I do not think that he has mentioned that the SSA per head in Newham is £1,143 and that in Eastbourne it is £120. It seems to me that that represents a fundamental recognition that Newham is to get an enormous extra amount of money.

Mr. Spearing: Education.

Mr. Gummer: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that, even if spending on education is taken into account, a considerable amount of extra money goes into Newham, because of its difficulties. But when we compare Newham —*[Interruption.]* The Labour Front-Bench spokesman is right to say that we should compare like with like, and compare Newham not with Eastbourne but with places similar to itself, such as other London boroughs. The fact is that, applying the same criteria, when the deprivation is measured and all the figures are added up, Barking, which is not a million miles from Newham, has an increase of 11·8 per cent., whereas Newham has a decrease. I did not invent that; it happens as a result of applying the same criteria. Opposition Members have wanted us to use those criteria for many years, and it is not acceptable for the boroughs that are adversely affected by those criteria to complain while Labour Members whose boroughs benefit hardly say thank you.

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the increase in the SSA for Langbaurgh, a Labour-controlled authority, is an unparalleled 20 per cent. this year? My constituents will appreciate that, as they have appreciated the courteous and thorough way in which my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have conducted the negotiations over the SSA this year. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the generous settlement will mean that there is no excuse for Langbaurgh council not to get a grip on its finances, and no excuse for any increase whatever next year for the long-suffering council tax payers of Langbaurgh?

Mr. Gummer: Langbaurgh does not have a reputation as a well-run authority, so I hope that my hon. Friend will continue his pressure, and tell the council that we have recognised its particular difficulties, which he has often graphically described to me, and that the formula now takes account of them. The council is therefore now in a position to complete its half of the bargain—that is, to become a more tightly run authority and to use its money more effectively, thus demanding less from the people who pay its council tax.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I was worried by the Secretary of State's response to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers). The right hon. Gentleman appeared to tell the House that it was inappropriate to compare next year's budget with this year's expenditure. I should have thought that there were enough Members on his side of the House who could have advised him on financial matters and accountancy procedures, and told him that no company in the land would prepare a budget for next year without considering this year's expenditure.

Is it not irresponsible for the Government to say that it is not fair to compare next year's budget with real current expenditure? Does not the current level of spending determine the level of police services, fire services, education services and social services? If there are cuts in the budget, those services will suffer. Will the Secretary of State not own up to the fact that the real impact of the financial settlement that he has announced will be cuts in services and jobs, and that he expects local authority employees to bear the full burden of his surrender to the Treasury?

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a comparison with business, I might point out that most businesses will be looking for ways to save on overheads this year; they are not looking forward to the 2·3 per cent. increase that local government is being offered. The hon. Gentleman will probably realise that at such a time as this businesses will deal with the problems that arise when we are coming out of recession by seeking to tighten their belts more than the Government have suggested. The figures are not such as to make local authorities throw their hats in the air, but they expected the settlement to be a good deal tougher. They did not expect an increase of 2·3 per cent. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that every year the outturn figure is higher than the total standard spending.

We need to compare like with like. The first rule for reading any kind of balance sheet is to compare this year's figure with last year's figure, but one must ensure that those figures refer to the same things. To compare this year's figure with last year's figure, when wholly different factors were involved, does not lead to sensible accounting. Perhaps that is why all Labour Governments get themselves into a financial mess. Perhaps that is what the Labour party has been doing all along the line, and it still has not learnt.

BILL PRESENTED

Coal Industry

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Redwood and Mr. Tim Eggar, presented a Bill to provide for the establishment and

functions of a body to be known as the Coal Authority; to provide for the restructuring of the coal industry, for transfers of the property, rights and liabilities of the British Coal Corporation and its wholly-owned subsidiaries to the other persons and for the dissolution of that Corporation; to abolish the Domestic Coal Consumers' Council; to make provision for the licensing of coal-mining operations and provision otherwise in relation to the carrying on of such operations; to amend the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991 and the Opencast Coal Act 1958; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 4.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [30 November].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply, acquisition or importation:

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies, acquisitions and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

5.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. David Hunt): I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's statement. He has emphasised the progress already made towards our central goal—the achievement of sustained non-inflationary growth. We have not wavered from that goal in difficult times, and we shall not depart from it now, especially as recovery is so well under way.

My right hon. and learned Friend is to be congratulated on the skill with which he has constructed his first Budget. I am especially pleased that he has enabled me to announce today the details of our new scheme for apprenticeships and credits, in which I am pleased to say that my Department will invest £1·25 billion over a three-year period, in addition to expenditure of £900 million on youth training over the same period.

Training is not some homogeneous good to be hurled indiscriminately at young people. To be really worth while, it must be based on mutual responsibility and a high level of motivation. In the social market economy, both employers and employees should take clear responsibility for their development. Training is in the best interests of the individuals who receive it, and it is in the best interests of the companies that employ them, which is why industry's investment in training held up so well during the recession.

However, we can always do more to strengthen the incentive to train and to reaffirm the key mutual commitment between the trainee and the employer, so today I want to give details of our plans to introduce a system of new modern apprenticeships.

To remain competitive, our industries need an increasing number of people qualified to the key technician and supervisor levels. They, in turn, need high-quality work-based training, to defined standards; in other words, we want all the good features of traditional apprenticeships leading to a recognised qualification, and modernised to avoid time serving.

[Mr. David Hunt]

I am today inviting training and enterprise councils to prepare to offer a full range of modern apprenticeships to young people in all parts of the country. I am also asking them to prepare to offer youth credits to all young people who leave school at 16 or 17 by 1995, so that credits will be the mechanism to give young people access to modern apprenticeships, as well as to other forms of work-based training.

I am also inviting industry training organisations to work up model schemes of training to national vocational qualification level 3 or above. As the House will know, that is equivalent to A-level standard. Those schemes will describe what young people can expect to achieve and set out clearly the milestones on the way to becoming qualified.

I want apprenticeships to be developed in all sorts of sectors and occupations. Of course, we need modern apprenticeships in engineering. We want electronics and mechanical engineering skills to be brought together, for example. We also want new, modern apprenticeships in areas such as financial services, in hotel and leisure management, in catering, in distribution, in the care sector and in science-based technology industries such as biotechnology. We want apprenticeships in information technology, as it applies across a whole range of sectors and right across the chemical, petrochemical and plastics industries.

I also want to involve small and medium-sized employers as well as big employers. I want to see apprenticeships offered equally to young women as well as to young men. The modern apprenticeship needs to be open to every young person to whom it would be of benefit. I want every apprentice to sign an apprenticeship pledge with an employer. That will clearly set out the training the apprentice can expect to receive, and what, in turn, the employer will expect by way of progress and it will enshrine the commitment of each party to see the training through to successful completion. Ideally, it will set out an intended path to a job once the apprenticeship has been successfully completed.

I want to see apprenticeships on offer to the school leavers of 1995 and I want to be able to run pilot schemes in 1994. That will be a challenge because there is a great deal of work that needs to be done and many people will need to play a part. Today, I have written to invite all the main organisations to come in for consultations, including, of course, the national council of the training and enterprise councils and the Confederation of British Industry. I have written to the Trades Union Congress, the National Council for Education and Training Targets and the National Council for Industry Training Organisations. I look forward to receiving their views and also to seeing the first training models that industry will develop in consultation with my Department as soon as possible.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Is the Secretary of State admitting a failure in Government policy on apprenticeships, because in 1979, according to his Department's figures, there were 367 proper apprentices, as he describes them, and in the past year there were 240, after he had dismantled 26 training boards? Was that a failure of policy and is the right hon. Gentleman attempting to correct it in a "back to basics" approach?

Mr. Hunt: No, I am not. I do not accept that at all. I do not want to engage in a negative discussion. I could describe in graphic terms how the old, male and trade union-dominated apprenticeship system was destroyed, but I shall not look to the past. If the only area of disagreement between myself and the hon. Gentleman is to be the past, then I look forward to the future with him. I noticed that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) spoke in the debate on national education and training targets and I have made it clear that I am prepared to extend the same invitation to him and his colleagues so that we can talk through how best to introduce the new, modern system of apprenticeships. I also extend that invitation to the other parties.

Instead of looking back, we can look forward. Thanks to the labour market flexibility, we can look forward with much more confidence than ever before. I believe that the atmosphere is right for an initiative of that sort and I invite all-party agreement on that point.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend referred to the employers' responsibility in the welcome work-based training opportunity for young people. If an employer runs into financial difficulty and cannot run the training, is there to be a back-up system whereby work-based training can be resumed elsewhere?

Mr. Hunt: I am setting out the framework and funding of the scheme today. I am perfectly prepared to state clearly that the Government will invest £1·25 billion in credits and apprenticeships over the next three years. Obviously, it will now be up to employers to respond with the detailed structures that they believe best suit their industries and companies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) raised one special problem which I will, of course, consider, but I cannot hold out any hope of immediate alleviation of that problem because we want the maximum number of apprenticeships to be agreed with industries and employers. It is up to them to come forward with the way in which they would like to proceed.

It may help my hon. Friend to know that I expect that the new programme will build up to about 150,000 apprentices in training at any one time under the new, modern apprenticeship system. The financial settlement that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has allowed gives a real increase in the funds available. Our average investment in guidance and training for young people will rise in real terms by 25 per cent. over the three years. That is a measure of the importance that we attach to apprenticeships in a tough year for public expenditure. Like health and education, training is a clear priority for the Government.

My right hon. and learned Friend's Budget has already resulted in several messages of support, including a telephone call from the new director general of the Engineering Employers Federation which represents 5,000 engineering companies. He welcomed the announcement of

"modern apprenticeships that are linked to achievements and competences"

and I believe that his view is echoed across the country. I look forward to working with others who are keen to make the new apprenticeships a success.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): So that the House can assess the right hon. Gentleman's apparently welcome announcement, would either he or the Minister replying to

the debate tell the House whether his apprenticeship scheme involves additional spending by the Department of Employment? If that is so, how much will it be and where will the cuts in the Department of Employment's budget come from, as outlined on page 117 of the Red Book?

Mr. Hunt: At the moment, there is a rising number of young people staying on at school—a few years ago, the figure was 48 per cent. and it is now 71 per cent. As a result, the youth training programme is declining substantially and it is underspending this year, as I have just revealed in a parliamentary answer, and is likely to underspend further next year. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor's Budget has allowed me not to impose the cuts which would have obviously followed, but to introduce a new, modern apprenticeship scheme to run alongside the youth training scheme and, in addition, to provide a rising tide of expenditure. That is the simple answer to the hon. and learned Gentleman's question and I am perfectly prepared to invite him and his colleagues to see me to go through matters in more detail.

The key to modern apprenticeships, for which I believe many right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have been pressing, is the qualification to NVQ level 3, which is equivalent to A-level. Provided the scheme is a success—I hope that everyone will work to make it a success, as the preliminary signs are good—we shall see more than 40,000 youngsters on that scheme every year working to NVQ level 3—more than three times the present number in factories, businesses and companies. We have an increasing gap at technician and craft level and we intend to more than meet that need in the economy.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the proposal is an investment in our young people for the future which will be of benefit to all businesses for many decades to come?

Mr. Hunt: Yes. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a tremendous investment in the future. It is no use the Labour party trying to downgrade NVQ level 3 to NVQ level 2. We are talking about a new skill target which is the equivalent of A-level. I want 150,000 new apprentices to reach that A-level standard in NVQs as soon as the scheme is up and running. I believe that all hon. Members will recognise the significance of that when they pause to think about it for a moment.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Will the Secretary of State comment on speculation in the press today that the cuts in unemployment benefit and the potential gathering together of the administrative arrangements for the payment of income support and of the new job seeker's allowance will lead to the abolition of the Department of Employment, which will make a fundamental difference to the administration of some of the schemes about which he is talking? Has the right hon. Gentleman really co-operated with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to abolish his own job?

Mr. Hunt: I am disappointed that my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), should so quickly seek to urge me to do myself out of a job. Any structures within Government are, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I believe very strongly that the new modern apprenticeship system and the fact that the Department of Employment is right at the heart of Government economic policy are good indications of the importance that the Government attach to employment and training policies, as I have just said.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): Does my right hon. Friend agree, in speaking further on the welcome news, that there is also a social dimension, which will benefit the country, in increasing the number of apprenticeships for young people? What will be the driving force in determining how many people go into particular apprenticeships? Will the job prospect at the end of an apprenticeship be a key factor?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with my hon. Friend. The key consideration in the new scheme is the ability to extend it and to spread it to a number of industries that do not have a tradition of apprenticeships as well as to the industries that have. With the old-style apprenticeships, the emphasis was very much on time serving. The emphasis in the new modern scheme is on reaching NVQ level 3, the equivalent of A-level.

Much will depend, to answer my hon. Friend's point, on the models and schemes coming forward. Much will depend on which industries and which employers seize the initiative now and work closely with the organisations involved and with the training and enterprise councils. I shall, of course, talk to the Trades Union Congress about how best to extend those schemes in the way that it feels is right. Bill Jordan plays a key role in NACETT. He has already made it clear that we need such a scheme, which I am happy to discuss with him, if we are to meet the ambitious national training and education targets.

I was also pleased that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was able to refer in his Budget statement to the fact that unemployment is already down by 137,000 this year. By contrast, I have been asked by a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends whether I will look up the equivalent figures for the rest of the European Union. I can reveal them to the House now. In the past 12 months, unemployment registers in the European Union as a whole rose by 1·6 million. There is only one country in the Community where unemployment is now below the European Union average and falling. That country is the United Kingdom.

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that the House is grateful for that information; we welcome any reduction in unemployment. I have looked at the figures for the 14 years under the Government. I must tell the Secretary of State that the number of years for which our figures have been below the European average is three plus one—four altogether. Those are the only times this country has been below the European average level for unemployment.

Mr. Hunt: I suppose that that comment makes a change from the comments made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). He used to say that we were fiddling the figures whereas the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) now says that we are fiddling with figures. However much the hon. Gentleman may try to make a noise in the Chamber, he cannot deny the fact that unemployment in the United Kingdom has fallen by 137,000 this year whereas it has gone up in the rest of Europe by 1·6 million.

Last month, I was able to announce a fall in unemployment of 49,000. In France, Mr. Giraud had to announce an increase of 40,000. In Germany, Dr. Blum

[Mr. Hunt]

had to announce an October increase of 56,000. Even in Spain, with its smaller population, Mr. Martinez announced an increase of 56,000 in October.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Secretary of State referred to figures. I am sure that he will not dispute figures emanating from the Department of Employment—the quarterly employment estimates for November 1993. The Department says that the number of people in employment had fallen by 508,000 from June 1992 to June 1993, and that in October 1993 the number out of work for more than two years was 42 per cent. higher than in October 1992 and 92·7 per cent. higher than in October 1990.

Mr. Hunt: I am not sure why I gave way to the hon. Lady. She omitted to mention two key statistics. I shall answer her question, but I shall then not give way for a little while. The first key statistic is that, last quarter, long-term unemployment fell for the first time in three years by 10,000. Secondly, according to the latest available statistics, the work force in employment rose over the three months by 42,000. That is an upgraded figure.

Let us get the whole matter into context and recognise how right my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was when he reminded the House that unemployment was falling right across the United Kingdom. It is falling in every region of the United Kingdom and it is falling for both men and women. Two thirds of those who become unemployed leave the register within six months. Most welcome of all is last quarter's fall in the number of long-term unemployed people, which I have just mentioned to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). That offers real hope to all unemployed individuals that the misery of unemployment will soon be behind them. The figures are remarkable.

The House may well ask why unemployment is falling at this time. I believe that there are four reasons. First, the recovery started in the first half of 1992. Since then, our gross domestic product has increased for six quarters in succession and it is now up by 2·4 per cent. over the period.

Secondly, the population of working age is stable and there are no longer large numbers of people coming on to the labour market. I remind the House that, over the past 10 years, the number of people in work in the United Kingdom has increased by 1·3 million. There are now 1·3 million more people in work than there were 10 years ago. As output rises, employers take on more staff, and unemployed people are the main source of additional recruits.

Thirdly, the labour market is now much more flexible. Deregulation and curbs on the abuse of trade union power mean that employers have the confidence to recruit people quickly to keep pace with increasing sales and output.

Fourthly, my Department offers more help than ever before to get people back into work. There are now 1·5 million opportunities on offer to unemployed people, and they work. Last month alone, 487,000 people left claimant unemployment, which is the highest monthly figure ever recorded. Those are the reasons unemployment is falling, and in a modern, open economy, by far the best contribution that Governments can make to prosperity is to promote supply-side measures to help industries to be more competitive. That is why the Department stands centre stage as part of the Government's economic strategy.

We are contributing all the time to job creation through our systematic deregulation and our progress in improving the United Kingdom training system. Continuing to reduce unemployment is a priority in my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget. From next April, the lowest rates of national insurance will fall by a full percentage point, so reducing non-wage costs—already among the lowest in Europe—by £1 billion in a full year. That will benefit all employers.

It is evident in the modern economy that small and medium-sized enterprises are the real engines of job creation. Small firms also need to be encouraged to invest in training their employees. I have, therefore, today announced three new measures to encourage smaller companies to boost their training efforts.

First, I am developing with three high street banks—Barclays, Clydesdale and the Co-op—arrangements for career development loans to be extended to small firms. Firms will benefit from an interest-free holiday during the period of training, and the Government will guarantee the loans. Once the necessary arrangements have been made, loans of up to £125,000 will be available from early in the next financial year.

Secondly, I am giving special help to small firms to achieve the Investors in People standard. I shall remove the requirement on those with fewer than 50 employees to make a matching contribution when working towards Investors in People.

Thirdly, I know that employee development programmes of the kind developed by Ford have proved remarkably successful, giving people control of funds for their training. Many training and enterprise councils are already supporting companies in developing such arrangements. I want TECs to encourage them further, in particular in small companies or groups of companies.

Taken together, the measures form a powerful set of incentives for small firms. They are good news for small firms and they are excellent news for all those who are looking for work.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The Secretary of State has been properly exercised in his office by announcing the new Government policies. Is he aware that when he was talking about announcing unemployment figures he made a slip of the tongue? It is not his job to announce unemployment figures; they are announced by statisticians in his Department. Government statisticians are having the greatest difficulty in re-establishing the integrity of Government statistics and trying to establish that it is not Ministers who are constantly cooking the books. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore make it clear that it was not he who announced the unemployment statistics, but the statisticians in his Department?

Mr. Hunt: The only reason statisticians find their position undermined is that the antics of Opposition Members cast doubt on the statistics.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The Secretary of State said that the key reason for what he described as the "improving" position is the increased flexibility of the labour market. On behalf of many thousands of people, I put it to him, with all the urgency that I can muster, that

what he sees as flexibility of the labour market is seen by many thousands of people as casualisation of the labour market.

I know of firms in the midlands that lay off 100 people on one day and the next day offer most of them short-term contracts. I know of a youngster who has worked for the same firm for one and a half years on the basis of 70-odd weekly contracts. Is that the way in which the Secretary of State wants the labour market to develop? That is deeply damaging not only to individuals but to the stability and security of our society.

Mr. Hunt: I do not accept any of that. I wanted to give the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East an opportunity to get into the debate, but I will not be able to do that if there are lengthy interventions from hon. Members who get upset if I do not give way.

If the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) looks at the labour force survey, he will find that the accusations of substantial increases in temporary and casual work are completely without foundation. The number of permanent jobs is increasing—there are now more than 20 million. The hon. Gentleman does his area a grave injustice by seeking to paint an alternative picture that has no truth and foundation whatever as a general statement of policy.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced several initiatives to improve the operation of the labour market. The new job seeker's allowance, to be introduced in two and a half years' time, will be an important step forward in the help that we provide for unemployed people. The name of the new benefit demonstrates a shift in focus; we are making it clearer than ever before that people will get benefit because they are seeking work, not because they are passively unemployed.

Everyone who is genuinely looking for work will be entitled to the new benefit for as long as he or she needs it. Those who have paid the requisite national insurance contributions will be entitled to a personal allowance for six months, regardless of their income, their partner's income or any savings.

At the heart of the new job seeker's allowance is new clarity about a principle that has underpinned our system of support for job seekers from Beveridge onwards: the principle of mutual responsibility between the state and the unemployed individual.

Ms Glenda Jackson *rose——*

Mr. Hunt: I have given way to the hon. Lady already.

Just as the state has a responsibility to support unemployed individuals, individuals have a responsibility to make every effort to find new work.

To make that duty clear from the start, we shall be introducing, with the job seeker's allowance, a job seeker's agreement. Each claimant will have to reach an agreement with his employment service adviser, identifying from the outset the steps that he will be taking to get back to work. He will then have to put that into action.

Last year we introduced job plan workshops. They have already given positive help to more than 112,000 people, with a success rate of more than 90 per cent. Building on that, I am today announcing a new restart course for those who have been out of work for more than two years.

I am also introducing three new pilot schemes in advance of the introduction of the job seeker's allowance. We shall pilot a job finder's grant, paying up to £200 to people who find work after being unemployed for two years or more, to help with the initial expenses of returning to work. We shall be setting up two further pilots to test new approaches to getting young people back to work as quickly as possible. Those measures will further improve our help to job seekers.

I very much welcome the Chancellor's announcement introducing, from October next year, new disregards for child care costs in working out families' entitlements to family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit. That will help 150,000 families, and it will make more explicit the Beveridge principle that the best way off benefits is into work.

That could be worth up to £28 a week in family credit alone, and will provide a powerful incentive for families to move back into work and be better off. It will particularly help those lone parents who want to work but have found that child care costs represent a barrier. That is in addition to the £45 million programme run by the TECs, under my Department, for out of school child care. That programme will create 50,000 new child care places.

The Government attach the highest possible priority to increasing the number of jobs, reducing unemployment and looking after those who most need help. But it is industry and enterprise that create jobs. Everyone of working age should be given every incentive and every opportunity to contribute. Economic growth on its own is not enough.

Much of the industrialised world has discovered the phenomenon of jobless growth, and Europe is particularly afflicted. Between 1979 and 1989—the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development economic cycle —the United States economy grew by 32 per cent. and the number of jobs grew by 18 per cent. In the same period, the economy in Europe grew by 24 per cent. but generated only 4 per cent. more jobs. As a result, unemployment in Europe has now reached 19 million, and it continues to rise. In general, it is where labour markets are most flexible that jobs are created. The United Kingdom has the most deregulated labour market in Europe and we have more of our people in jobs than any other major country in Europe.

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister went to Maastricht, he was presented with a social protocol that would have given European trade unions a direct role in legislating and opened the door to a whole raft of expensive burdens on business. That would be bad for Britain and bad for Europe, so my right hon. Friend had the courage to refuse to sign up to it.

Last month, the leader of the Labour party—I am pleased to see him here—was presented with a proposal for a statutory 35-hour week in the United Kingdom. That would cost our industries £20,000 million a year and prevent 14 million of our citizens from working hours that they want to work. That would be a very bad thing indeed. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has said so himself.

I have to apologise to the socialists because I have done them an injustice, for there is an opt-out at the end of their manifesto. It is for a country whose Conservative leadership fought long and hard to be excluded from the most intrusive European legislation. The socialists recognise that, and an opt-out was agreed. Lucky old Denmark.

The Labour party did not fight for an opt-out. Its leader just signed up, on the basis of sign first, ask questions later. Having signed up in Brussels, the Labour leader now claims to have experienced a mystical conversion on his

[Mr. Hunt]

aeroplane home. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East now says that there is a difference between the words "must" and "could". I agree that there is. I have the official document, distributed at the press conference at which the hon. Gentleman was present, and the word "must" is there. His leader signed up for "must" and not for "could". That is the difference.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has now given me a version that substitutes "could" for "must". Could he not go a step further? Could he not substitute "ought not to" for "must"? Perhaps it would be easier to say "must not". The charter which I have here, which is the unexpurgated version, states clearly:

"These measures must include a substantial cut in working time, to ensure a better division of the available work."

I know that Labour Members pretend that the document does not exist, but it does. Let me quote Glyn Ford, Member of the European Parliament, who has said that the Members of the European Parliament are going to campaign in favour of a 35-hour week across the EC. So, Labour still clings to the discredited social protocol.

Our partners, right across Europe, are abandoning that protocol and everything for which it stands. Increasingly, they recognise that there is a connection between job creation and deregulation and they are coming to see the social protocol as an expensive luxury. As Britain leads Europe out of recession, the argument is moving our way. Flexible labour markets and high standards of education and training are widely acknowledged as the twin routes to success. Modern apprenticeships, the new schemes for small firms and the job seeker's allowance are all part of an on-going revolution that will continue to release the enterprise of our people and create jobs for them. I commend the Budget, which is a Budget for jobs, to the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In an otherwise superb speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment used, as have other Ministers, the expression "European Union" in rather an extravagant and broad manner. This afternoon, in response to a parliamentary question that I tabled a couple of days ago, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made an authoritative statement on the Government's policy in respect of the use of the expressions "European Union" and "European Community". He said:

"Government policy is to use the term 'European Community' when describing matters specific to that pillar and to use the term 'European Union' when referring to all three pillars collectively or to matters specific to the two inter-governmental pillars outside the Community."

Would you be good enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, to take account of that when the expression "European Union" is used in the rather loose manner employed by the BBC and the *Financial Times* and now by some Ministers?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member has made his point, but it is not a point of order for the Chair. Mercifully, the Chair is not responsible for the accuracy or otherwise of what hon. Members say.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Secretary of State has been kind enough to say that he might have to leave before the end of the debate because his wife is going into hospital for an operation. I am sure that the House will join me in offering best wishes to his wife, and to him. I shall fully understand if he has to leave the debate. I hope that he will understand that I shall be harsh in my criticism of his Department. The debate is a bit of a surprise, because I thought that it would come on Monday. Things have changed rapidly.

I am delighted to see the Chancellor here with us as we debate the Budget. I recall that we both took part in a debate in 1987, when he was Paymaster General, in which he defended the so-called Budget for jobs. Unemployment has increased by about 1 million since then, although he told us that that Budget would be successful. He told us that there would be more firms, but there are 100,000 fewer than there were then. He told us that there would be an explosion in training, but there are 100,000 fewer places. Those were the predictions that he made as Paymaster General.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman was right about one thing. He said that there would be considerable growth in the economy. There was indeed a massive growth in the economy, with an increase of more than 1 million jobs, showing that if the Government feel that it is a priority they can create many jobs. The trouble was that it was one of those dashes for jobs—the booms and busts—so much associated with Tory Governments. Then the brake was put on—not on the expenses or wages of Members of Parliament, but on the unemployed. After that boom came the general election, and then 1 million people were thrown back on the dole. This Budget is designed to do something similar. Rather than dealing with the problems of today, it is designed to deal with any problems that might arise before the 1996 elections. However, I shall address myself to the problems of today.

The Budget is not a Budget for jobs. On his own admission, the Secretary of State expects it to create more unemployment. It is not a Budget for industrial investment. That will not be enhanced by the policies. It is not a Budget for ordinary people. It is a Budget for the City. If there is any doubt about that, I will quote a paper not known as a Labour paper—the *Evening Standard*. On Tuesday, I picked up the "West End Final", which said, "£15 billion share boost". That was while the Chancellor was speaking. Within half an hour of his sitting down, another "West End Final" was rushed out, which said, "£18 billion share boost". I picked up the *Evening Standard* again today and it said:

"Nearly £25 billion has been added to the value of the shares since Chancellor Kenneth Clarke's Budget on Tuesday".

That is what the Budget is about—welcoming the City back to the casino economy. Nothing has changed in our economy, but all those people dealing in stocks and shares have decided that they can make a killing out of what the Chancellor has done. It is all about a City judgment.

I noticed that during his speech the Chancellor had a smile playing on his lips when he said that he was prepared to exempt wine for Christmas. When the people in the City are drinking their champagne and toasting the Chancellor, I hope that they will bear in mind the price of what they have done to the country.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Will the hon. Gentleman at least acknowledge that the reason why shares were boosted so rapidly is that the people responsible for investing the pension funds of many working people were encouraged to invest that money in British industry? They thought that the outlook for British industry was improved by my Budget measures.

The hon. Gentleman is at least trying to adopt some sort of attitude towards the economy, which is more than the shadow Chancellor was able to do, but he is revealing a neanderthal approach to a free market economy.

Mr. Prescott: That is the second time I have been called neanderthal; it must be a strategy of the Tory party. First it was the Prime Minister, and now the Chancellor is saying "Get Prescott, the neanderthal man". The right hon. and learned Gentleman should address the arguments.

As to pension funds, the same headlines could be seen in newspapers in 1987 and the same people were encouraged to buy shares. The pension funds did not invest in manufacturing, but in property and assets other than manufacturing. That is what caused the problems in our industry.

I have heard many promises from many Chancellors and Secretaries of State for Employment about growth being around the corner, but I have yet to see it materialise. We will wait to see what this Budget produces. There is no doubt that it will have considerable consequences for many areas of our community.

The Budget does nothing for the workers, for the homeless or for the helpless. When the people in the City raise their glasses, I hope that they will bear in mind that what the Chancellor has done for their advantage will be at the expense of many people who can ill afford it.

Conservative Back Benchers who were cheering the Chancellor on Tuesday will perhaps pause to think when they are walking through that passageway that we all walk through and see that person wrapped up in blankets. The warmth that he got this morning was from a copy of the *Evening Standard* that he had stretched across him. The Budget offered him no possibilty of a job or an increase in the housing programme so that he might have a home. I hope that Conservative Members are a little ashamed when they walk past that person in the morning. I feel ashamed, but at least I shall be voting against the Budget. I hope that there are some decent Conservative Members who will rebel against the nature of the Budget and its unfair way of dealing with our people.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Budget is so inappropriate and awful, why is it that last year the Labour party produced a document entitled, "Labour's Budget Statement 1992-93" but this year it has not got one? Are they frightened of producing one or are they just plain incompetent?

Mr. Prescott: It may shock the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), but we are the Opposition: our job is to address what the Chancellor has done in the Budget and to be critical of it or to praise it. For example, we think that the increase in child care benefit is an improvement and will be welcomed by all in the House. We have to address the essential thrust of the Budget.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Are we finally to hear, for the first time in the debate, what Labour party policy is—to produce a Budget that takes no heed of City opinion? Does the hon. Gentleman recall what happened in the 1970s, when we used to have Budgets which did not take heed of City opinion and we ended up with the International Monetary Fund coming in to rescue the nation's finances?

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) should have a chat with his father and discuss how his father's party handled the economy during his time. He would be reminded of the collapse that followed the boom of 1987. That was a mistake which did a lot of damage. It reduced skills, levels of employment and investment.

We now have a new Chancellor, and this is the Budget that he has produced to address our current problems. In the Budget he has started to target a lot of people who should not be so targeted. It always used to be the Church and the trade unions that were targeted. Towards the end of his speech, the Secretary of State said that the good old trade unions were being attacked again and that the Government would not be entering into consultations with them, whereas a few minutes earlier he had said that Bill Jordan would be walking in through the front door to discuss the apprenticeship situation with him. Will the Secretary of State be discussing that kind of problem as an act of charity, but not as a right? Everyone should have a right to make a contribution to discussing problems of this type.

I welcome the "back to basics" proposal for an increase in apprenticeships. The Government have seen a bit of sense and gone back to apprenticeships, which are badly needed. Even with the current small amount of growth in the economy, there is a shortage of skilled people. We shall not get an increase in jobs from the growth in the economy because of the lack of proper skills. That situation was caused by the bad decisions made by the Government 10 years ago.

The Government are targeting not collective bodies such as the churches and trade unions, but individuals such as the disabled, the sick and the unemployed. They have decided that people who are unemployed—and many have been unemployed for a long time—will have to prove that they are job seekers. I do not know what 2 million people will have to prove. It was always a requirement that a person had to be available for work in order to get benefit. If the Department had any doubt about a claim, it had all sorts of fraud squads to investigate it.

I wonder what the new procedure will be. Do the Government want these 2 million people to get an employer to sign to say that they had visited the company looking for work? I can imagine the personnel department of some small company having hundreds of thousands of people queuing up and saying, "To get my benefit I have to get a chit from you showing that I have been seeking a job."

It is all very well for Conservative Members to screw up their faces, but presumably some form of proof will have to be provided. Will what the counter clerk thinks about an applicant's statement that he has been looking for work be sufficient? If that statement is not accepted, will the Department adopt the procedure for suspending benefit? Benefit used to be suspended for six weeks, but it is now to be for 13 weeks—a doubling of the delay in payment. How will the proof be provided? We have heard the criteria, but what evidence will be expected from a person

[Mr. Prescott]

who is on the dole? Those are major concerns for the unemployed, and why I say that we are targeting these people unnecessarily.

Mass unemployment, such as we have in this country, is the scourge of all developed economies. Anyone looking at unemployment in western economies will see that throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s it doubled every 10 years. That has happened in every country. We can quibble about whether our employment is going up or down, but mass unemployment is a substantial problem in the developed western economies. It is also a problem with eastern economies, but I shall refer only to economies similar to our own.

We have to address that particular problem. Our argument is that unemployment has reached and is maintained at far too high a level. Mass unemployment is something that will continue for a very long time, and what the Budget will produce is a low-paid, low-skilled, low-cost and low-value economy. We have no chance of competing against the Pacific rim countries. We must go for a high-wage, high-productivity and high-value production economy.

Everyone agrees that that is what we must aim for, but to achieve it we must invest in education and skills. The Secretary of State has told us that the extra money for the apprenticeships, which we all welcome, will come from another part of his budget—presumably from the budget for training people who will not go into the apprenticeships.

Only a third of our labour force have any qualifications, whereas some two thirds of the German labour force have some form of qualification. We have a long way to go, and the strategy of the Budget to produce more low-paid, part-time, low-skilled jobs is fundamentally wrong.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman is strongly criticising my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget for jobs. Perhaps he can explain something to me. France is likely to experience an increase in unemployment of 800,000 this year and Spain has an unemployment rate of 20 per cent. How can the hon. Gentleman think that we are so far out of line with other countries, especially as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said the opposite? We have already heard from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment that we have more than a million more jobs today than we had in 1979. How can the hon. Gentleman say that we are so far out of line with those other countries?

Mr. Prescott: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening instead of talking to his hon. Friends, he would have heard me say at the outset that mass unemployment has plagued all western economies and doubled every 10 years. Unemployment has increased under Labour and Tory Governments alike. My charge is that we have a higher level than is necessary and that things could have been done in the Budget to change that. Any silly fool can look at the figures and say that Spain and other countries are also affected. I conceded that right at the beginning. The hon. Gentleman would be better informed if he listened to what was being said instead of trying to jump in with questions that the Whips have given him to ask me.

The Budget is also designed to justify a wholesale attack on the welfare state. It is all very well the Secretary of State quoting Beveridge and saying that that is what he wants to achieve. The fact is that at the heart of the Budget is the view that we cannot afford the existing welfare state. The Secretary of State and the Chancellor have admitted that mass unemployment—whether the figure is defined as 2·9 or 2·8 million, we have mass unemployment—will continue at least until 1996-97. I do not think that anyone doubts that mass unemployment will continue throughout the Government's period of office.

Another proposition that we can accept from the economists is that growth will not create enough jobs to compensate for the high unemployment that prevails in developed economies today. It is unlikely that the growth estimated by the Chancellor will materialise—indeed, it is being suggested in some newspapers that the tax revenue of some £30 billion that will come out of the Budget is likely to reduce those limited growth figures. But even supposing that the Chancellor's optimism proves justified and the growth levels to which he has referred are attained, it will not do a great deal to reduce unemployment and will certainly not cure mass unemployment. We are therefore faced with a decision. Are we prepared to fund the welfare state? Are we prepared to fund the unemployed and the disabled?

What has been done to benefits for people with disabilities would certainly appear to be an attack on them. Those same people were driven on to the disability list because in the mid-1980s the Government discovered that they could encourage people off the unemployment register in that way. The Department of Employment's own doctors co-operated in that exercise. As Members of Parliament, we all knew that people could get more money in invalidity benefit. We drove them off the unemployment register and now we are about to drive them back because the Chancellor has discovered that the cost is too high. It is a consideration of the cost and whether such benefits can be afforded. The criteria by which a person is judged to be disabled are to be changed.

We can see the good old hand of the Treasury in all this. The Government did the same in the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act: when they found that more people were entitled to claim, they began to change the criteria and cut the cost. That is what the Budget is all about. We are talking not about meeting people's needs but about meeting the needs of the Treasury. That is at the heart of the Budget.

The Government have decided that they are not prepared to finance a welfare state. Under their present strategy, they cannot achieve growth and they cannot reduce the cost of unemployment, which is about £30 billion, quite apart from the loss of production. That gives rise to a major question, and the Budget sees us at the crossroads. What kind of society is Britain going to have? Is it to be one that balances work and welfare, which was at the heart of Beveridge, or is it to be one that lives with mass unemployment while seeking to eradicate it in the figures, eventually—I gather from rumours that are circulating at the moment—abolishing the Department of Employment on the ground that we will not then need a Minister to come to the House to explain why so many people are unemployed?

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that there is no case in any situation

for trying to constrain the cost of an ever-growing social security budget? If so, why did the Opposition set up the social justice commission?

Mr. Prescott: I am admitting that there is a fundamental question for us all to address. I do not think that there is any doubt that that question will be an issue at the next election. We are preparing ourselves for that argument and will have to present our case. Let us make no mistake about it. I am not arguing that there is no problem to be addressed, especially given that we are faced with mass unemployment. But decisions have been made about whether to give money to those who are well off or fund the welfare state, and the Government have decided to give tax benefits to those who are better off. That is what has created our problems.

The problem that the Chancellor has identified in his Budget is the public sector borrowing requirement. Let us leave aside for a moment the question whether the PSBR is higher than that in other countries and how it is measured. Let us accept, for a moment, the Chancellor's view that the PSBR is far too high—and we could argue about that. The £30 billion cost of unemployment is very high indeed. It would be far better to get people to work rather than leave them to waste away on the dole.

Other factors have contributed to the crisis, too. The problems in our public finances are in part due to the policies that the Government pursued in the 1980s. They wasted £100 billion worth of oil revenue—£10 billion or £15 billion a year. They privatised nationalised industries, stealing the silver to put quick money into the Treasury's coffers while losing the revenue flow from those nationalised industries—about £10 billion a year—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—£10 billion since they were privatised, then. As the Chancellor knows, we had both loss-making and profitable industries. But the net revenue was far higher than the tax that the Chancellor is collecting from the privatised industries. The Treasury has lost revenue. The introduction of the poll tax cost another £5 billion. The list goes on and on. The PSBR crisis has been caused not just by unemployment and welfare payments but by the Government's handling of our finances.

The Budget is being used to justify a massive attack on the welfare state in line with the Government's policy in Europe which is that we need to pursue the least cost option. That leads to low skill and to industries that do not have the necessary research and development and investment to produce the kind of wealth to pay for a modern welfare state.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is arguing that the point of the Budget is to cut back on a welfare state that we will not afford. Will he remind himself of the social security spending figures announced in our spending plans? The hon. Gentleman will see from the Red Book the changes that the Budget represents. In social security, the changes from previous plans are as follows: for 1993-94, £2,300 million extra; 1994, £1,600 million extra; 1995-96, £2,100 million extra. We have accommodated that increase of more than £5 billion by reordering priorities elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman has fairly praised the introduction of the child allowance and family credit. Whatever else he says, it is absurd to argue that the whole basis of the Budget is that we are not affording a welfare state. We are making proper provision for a welfare state but it is sensible to stop benefits being paid to those who were never entitled to them to accommodate growth in requirement.

Mr. Prescott: Expenditure on the welfare state has increased under all Governments. That is part of the problem. The Secretary of State has identified some growth but there have also been cuts. With ever increasing and mass unemployment, he has to pay more. I should add that, in a low-wage economy, income supplements and so on become available to part-time workers. Is it the Chancellor's view that we can afford the welfare state and the present expenditure pattern?

Mr. Clarke: We are demonstrating that we can. But the welfare state has been evolving ever since it was first introduced. It has never been a static social security system. I cannot recall a Government who have made no changes to social security for two or three years at a time. We are introducing new benefits for working mothers and there has been increased take-up of desirable benefits. The hon. Gentleman is standing there resisting attempts to cut fraud and to stop people claiming invalidity benefit when they are not entitled to it. That is an irresponsible approach to the welfare state, and an approach that the Government certainly do not share.

Mr. Prescott: It was unfortunate that the Chancellor used the word fraud, and it is fraud in the context in which I use it. The Secretary of State talks about a welfare system based on national insurance principles, and he is going to deny unemployed people the entitlement to 12 months' benefit. That is their right under the national benefits as they are. They make contributions and they are entitled to the benefits. If a private company did something similar, would it not be taken to court?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is challenging the part of the job seekers' benefit which states that one is entitled to benefit only if one is available for work. If the hon. Gentleman resists that element of the job seekers' benefit scheme, which is designed to ensure that people do not claim the benefit when they are not seeking work, he is resisting quite legitimate proposals to stop people claiming benefit fraudulently by pretending to look for work.

Mr. Prescott: The Chancellor has given a clear indication of how he stands on the matters. In my previous job, I made an allegation about the Chancellor—then the Secretary of State for Transport—when we were in opposition on another case. After what he has done to the railway pensioners with their pension funds, he is undoubtedly now about to raid the pension funds of the Post Office and the coal mines. There is no doubt about that. The right hon. and learned Gentleman told the railway workers that he intended to set them up with a self-funded pension fund which would have no accountability to the Secretary of State. He has since taken money from them, and he is now threatening their assets.

Mr. Clarke *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: The Chancellor may sit there and shake his head, but it is a matter of record. The Government are robbers, and they are involved in an act of fraud. They should make no mistake about it—that fact is known by the electorate. The electors know what the Government are about—it is clearly evident to them.

[Mr. Prescott]

The Conservative party is no longer credible in relation to a tax hike. It is a party that does not believe in high taxation. The Chancellor gave an interview on a radio programme in which he said, I believe, that it was now necessary to increase taxes. That will be done presumably to provide an opportunity to reduce them again at the time of a general election. That is how the Government play see-saw with the economy at the expense of the unemployed and the homeless.

One would have thought that the Department of Employment would be concerned about employment, but all that it has done so far is to encourage low pay. The Department and the Chancellor have designed a national insurance scheme which is a pathway to lower pay. There is an incentive now to employers to pay less, because the employer will make smaller national insurance contributions if they pay a worker less. That might be an incentive to try to get people at lower pay. If a mountain is built of people who are working part time, the employer will be encouraged to pay less and less. People will have less money to meet their needs. The justification given for the national insurance contribution scheme is that it will benefit employers—the consequences for employees are considerably different.

We hear a great deal about the deregulation of our economy. I wonder whether the Secretary of State might have told us whether he would guarantee in that deregulation that we will not see a reduction in health and safety regulations. Those regulations are contained in a clause in a provisional Bill to which my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) referred. Many people are concerned about this. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that he will not change the essential principle in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 which is

"designed to maintain ... improve the standards of health, safety and welfare established by or under those enactments"?

Mr. David Hunt *indicated assent.*

Mr. Prescott: I take that nod from the Secretary of State to mean that he will not change the health and safety legislation which has contributed to the reduction in the number of deaths and accidents in industry.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman seems to be relying on the Chancellor and me to make his speech for him. I will make it absolutely clear. We have consistently stated that the review of health and safety is to make the system safer and simpler. We have asked the Health and Safety Commission to give us advice on a range of issues, and we now await that advice. I am proud to say that we have one of the finest health and safety records of any country in the world.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State must be aware that that is because of the essential principle embodied in the legislation that any changes in safety regulations must be superior to the provisions that they are to replace. It is a simple principle. Do the Government intend to change that in any way? We have seen a Bill which contained that clause. Are they saying now that it will not be done? I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would make such a statement. That is equally as important as the apprenticeships.

Mr. Hunt *indicated assent.*

Mr. Prescott: I take that asurance from the Secretary of State to mean that it will not be changed. I am grateful to him for that assurance. That will be good for our people, and I am delighted about it.

On the business of departmental deregulation and the job seeker proposals, is not the rate of applicants to jobs either 21:1 or 35:1, depending on which area one takes? What is the point of a job seekers' scheme if people have no chance of getting jobs?

That ratio of applicants to jobs works against the 1 million long-term unemployed in particular. What is the position for them? The Secretary of State has acknowledged that special measures are needed for them, but employers will not deal with those measures. How are the long-term unemployed to be dealt with under the schemes? The Department has no sympathy for them. To see the ineffectiveness of the Department, we must look at the way in which it has dealt with education and skill training. That is a most critical area, as the Secretary of State made clear at the beginning of his speech. We welcomed that, and I presume that he did so at the beginning of his speech to catch the evening news, knowing that presumably we would not be able to comment. That is the nature of the organisation of business in the House.

The Secretary of State says that we are to return to basics. I will give him the figures concerning apprenticeships in this country. In 1979, there were 367,000 apprentices. In 1992, there were 240,000 apprentices. That is largely because the Government scrapped the training boards from which many of the skills came, whatever else was said about them. There has been a massive reduction in the numbers.

The Secretary of State has talked of 10,000 to 40,000 apprentices. I could not keep up with the right hon. Gentleman because somehow he shot off to talk about a figure of 150,000. I do not know what period of time he was talking about. I understood that there were to be 10,000 national vocational qualifications, rising to 30,000 or 40,000. Is the figure of 150,000 to be achieved in the next century? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It does not make for clarity when there are signs, whispers or seated interventions. The House must return to the normal way of conducting business.

Mr. Prescott: If the total of apprentices reaches the figure of 150,000 that the Secretary of State wants by the next century, that will be 10 per cent. of the number of trainees in Germany now—an ambitious programme indeed to get Britain going into the next century and to produce the skills which we want for our industry. It is absurd—absolute nonsense.

The figure is so low because the Government do not have the guts to tell industry that it must invest in people and in skills. If it is left to a voluntary system, industry will not do it. All the countries with skill training have a statutory framework and a levy principle. We broke away from that and since then we have seen a collapse in training, even in limited skill abilities which have always been a problem in Britain.

Now the Secretary of State comes along and looks at NVQs and training and enterprise councils and tries to deliver some sort of apprenticeships. I hope that he is

successful, because we desperately need those apprenticeships, but it is not enough: the Government must tell industry that it has to make a proper investment in the training of our people. That might need a compulsory element, but every other country in Europe has such an element.

Mr. Hunt *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary shakes his head, but he does not have the problem of not getting a job because he has no skill. That is reality for many of our people. Those are the consequences for our young people who have no jobs or training.

While I was getting ready for the debate, I read some of the promises made by previous Secretaries of State. They told the House what they were going to do to train youngsters aged between 16 and 17, but not one of their promises was ever achieved. All the promises were given with great confidence, but the record of the Department of Employment in producing people with skills is deplorable. That is quite apart from what that has meant for the economy. Industry should be ashamed of what it has done for the training of youngsters in this country. The Government are concerned with creating a low-pay and unskilled sort of economy. That is not the way Britain will go forward.

The Department of Employment talks a lot about the importance of skills, but even in that area it is a complete failure. It has failed to train a labour force, to implement fair employment practices and conditions and to influence a policy of full employment.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State say that the Department of Employment was at the core of economic policy. I wish that it was, along with the Department of Industry. But I did not think that the Government believed in strategy for industry or for employment. I thought that that was all given to us by the market.

I want to see Departments making a judgment and being actively involved and intervening. That is what happens in many European countries with Governments of the left or right. They need to plan, to intervene, to have objectives, to help industry and to train people. The Government have a role to play in that. But during the 1980s the Government copped out of that. The Department of Employment has been at the heart of doing basically nothing about it. It should be a powerhouse. That is important.

The Department of Employment could have done more to shape economic policy. I am glad that the Secretary of State acknowledged that it should have such a role and that will be a basis for part of our debate. The Treasury, in pursuit of money to reduce subsidies and to deal with the financial crisis that has come about as a result of its economic incompetence, has sought financial solutions which have been to the detriment of our economy.

The deregulation of the bus industry led to the collapse of a manufacturing industry. In order for the Treasury to save £100 million in subsidies, 7,000 buses have gone down the Swanee and a whole manufacturing industry has gone.

I hear that the Government are now talking about the west coast main line. Two years ago I put forward a plan to finance that line with leasing and new forms of private financing. The Government have not yet learnt those methods, despite them being used in Europe. Under such a system we could combine training, modernising the infrastructure, providing manufacturing jobs and developing our roads.

The Department of Employment should be arguing with the Treasury about how to produce jobs, provide a modern economy and train people, rather than skivvying around to get a few bob more from the Chancellor, complimenting him on that and then discovering that that money has simply come from another part of the Department's budget.

The Chancellor has given the Department of Employment nothing. Its money has been going down and down. If one excludes the unemployment benefits, it has had nothing. It is the handmaiden of the Treasury. It has not been the core of decision making where it should be. If it considered industrial policy, it could have been.

One thing that the Department could have done in the light of the Budget announcement of a cut in MIRAS, which, along with local authority housing cuts, will result in savings of about £1 billion, was to transfer that money to rebuild a housing programme.

Those savings under MIRAS could have been used to provide 100,000 houses and 100,000 jobs. Those figures are available. Instead of the Treasury using that money to pay the City so that it can have its profits, it should have been used to meet the needs of the homeless, to provide jobs and to stimulate the economy.

I intend constantly to return to what I call the jobs audit. We do not necessarily need to spend more money, rather to choose different priorities in order to get people back to work. The Government deliberately do not choose those priorities but rather maintain a high level of unemployment. Does the Secretary of State know what effect the Budget will have on jobs? Did he ask the Chancellor? Did they do a job audit? Did he ask how much unemployment would be created?

Mr. Hunt: First, a few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman referred to unemployment benefit being taken out of my Department's expenditure, but it is the Department of Social Security's budget; it is not in my Department's budget.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): Yes, it is.

Mr. Hunt: It is not.

Secondly, this is a Budget for jobs and growth. We will see the results as the months and years unfold. The hon. Gentleman still has not explained why the United Kingdom is the only country with unemployment below the Community average and falling. In every other part of Europe, it is rising.

Mr. Lloyd: How many jobs?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have intervention upon intervention, particularly when they are made from a sedentary position.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State is right; I did use those words. I was referring to employment services—payment for training, and so on. That correlates with what is happening in the economy, and if that figure is excluded there has been a reduction in his Department's budget. Even if it is included, one could say that there has been a reduction.

But, leaving that aside, the Secretary of State said nothing about the Budget's consequences for jobs. This is

[Mr. Prescott]

not a Budget for jobs. There are many different computer forecasts to play with. I shall use the one from Warwick. Cuts in housing and in local authority expenditure and the pay freeze for public sector workers mean that more people will be put out of work. That is the reality. There is no doubt about that.

Estimates can be made. They are constantly made. The Department of Social Security estimates the effect of its policies on unemployment. It has been shown that 250,000 public sector jobs and 75,000 manufacturing jobs—325,000—will be lost. To keep those people unemployed will cost £3·5 billion. Why do we not consider that? That is a charge on the public sector borrowing requirement. Why are we not concerned to reduce the borrowing requirement by reducing the number of those whom we pay to keep idle on the dole? Would not that be a better way to use money?

Housing cuts will cost a further £1 billion. There is only house building at the moment, no other construction. If the housing programme is reduced, as the Chancellor described—the Financial Secretary is here, he can confirm that—the inevitable consequence will be fewer people in work. Already, the building industry accounts for 250,000 unemployed people.

The Secretary of State's rhetoric shows that he wants to be at the heart of economic decision making. But one would have thought that a Secretary of State for Employment might have asked the Chancellor in the run-up to the Budget what its effect would be on jobs. He might have done and the Chancellor would have said, "Don't worry, there will be a growth in jobs." To which the Secretary of State would have said, "Thank you very much, Chancellor." Then he would have moved on.

The reality is unemployment. If the Secretary of State is in any doubt, he can ask the Financial Secretary about the consequences to the public sector borrowing requirement of the money that is being settled for the local authorities and the cuts in housing. The subsidies will go directly to the Treasury, not to the housing industry.

In reality, the Government are not interested in unemployment. If the Secretary of State accepts the consequences for jobs that I have just described, he is choosing higher unemployment than is necessary. That is our charge against the Government. They do nothing to provide homes for the homeless, skills for the unskilled, jobs for the workers and help for the helpless.

Our charge is not only that the Government are uncaring; they are incompetent and deliberately maintain high levels of unemployment. That is what this Budget is about and that is why we shall oppose it bitterly during its progress through the House.

6.27 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): In the early part of his speech, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) welcomed the new apprenticeship scheme that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced, and I hope that he and the representatives of the Liberal party will join the cross-party discussion and co-operation to get that important scheme off to a good start. We all know the necessity of giving young people good training, and the atmosphere will be hugely helped if there is seen to be cross-party support on that.

I welcome the Chancellor's firm restatement in his Budget speech of Conservative philosophy—a modern welfare state, a competitive British economy with low inflation, and a country that vigorously pursues policies which remove obstacles to an expansion of world trade.

The unified Budget has made economic policy more coherent to people and it has given us a chance for a much wider debate on the Budget than usual. I for one hope that the unified Budget will stay.

The Chancellor fully delivered his pledge to help all pensioners and the less well-off in the commitments and the figures that he gave with regard to VAT on fuel. I am also glad that he coupled that with a £35 million per year increase in the home energy efficiency scheme.

I previously had a financial interest in the window business. I no longer have such a interest, so I no longer feel inhibited in speaking about it in the House. I therefore looked up the 1990-91 regulations governing the making of a grant under that scheme. Among other things, they refer to a grant being made for draught-proofing and the insulation of any hot water tank or cylinder which is not already insulated.

What is missing from the regulations is the need to replace windows. If windows and external doors were replaced by double-glazed sealed units, fuel bills would drop considerably. We always want to take action to help people to reduce the amount that they spend on fuel. I hope that the regulations will be amended to enable people to obtain a grant to fit new windows and external doors if necessary. Ill-fitting windows and external doors add hugely to people's fuel bills. The regulations should be amended so that people can take advantage of my right hon. and learned Friend's welcome extension of the home energy efficiency scheme.

In his Budget statement, my right hon. and learned Friend said that a good social security system was one under which the better-off and people in work pay to support the poor and the disadvantaged. I support that view. However, there is one area where that aim does not fit, and that is the Child Support Agency. Many fathers on modest incomes are struggling to bring up a second family and simply cannot pay what is now being demanded by the CSA. Those fathers often made maintenance arrangements in a court of law, but the agreed figures have been overturned by the CSA.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the position is even worse than he has described because, in a matrimonial breakdown, it is now virtually impossible for solicitors to advise either fathers or mothers on any financial settlement, due to the unpredictability of the demands being made by the Child Support Agency?

Mr. Madel: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. and learned Gentleman. I am aware that he is a distinguished lawyer. I am sure that Ministers will have heard his point. Indeed, the Government are urgently investigating the matter.

Where there have been sudden changes to various payments, the Government have often introduced transitional relief. Therefore, a good first step might be for some form of transitional relief to be introduced in maintenance payments. That would help those who are

suddenly faced with the CSA overturning court orders. It is a serious problem, and the CSA's behaviour is contrary to my right hon. and learned Friend's philosophy on the welfare state and social security system—the better-off helping the less well-off. "Better-off" simply does not apply in many CSA cases.

My second brief point on social security is that we should never underestimate the damage done by the late Mr. Robert Maxwell to faith and confidence in private and occupational pensions. Maxwell pensioners are by no means out of the wood. A considerable number of them live in my constituency, and it is the deferred pensioners, in particular, who are racked by uncertainty and anxiety.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security is to introduce changes to the system. We need a battery of new laws to ensure that never again can some Robert Maxwell wreak havoc on those unfortunate enough to work for such a company. It is a thoroughly welcome change in the social security system. In a constituency like mine, with hundreds and hundreds of Maxwell pensioners, it cannot come quickly enough.

My right hon. and learned Friend referred to motor taxation. We cannot say that we have not been warned about future increases in fuel duty, in addition to those announced on Tuesday. It should accelerate research and development into even more fuel efficient engines. That in itself should create new jobs.

However, I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to keep two points in mind. The first is the future of the vehicle excise duty—the tax disc. There is a case for freezing that cost. My right hon. and learned Friend has frozen mortgage interest relief at £30,000, but there is also a case for freezing the tax disc, especially in view of the plans to increase fuel duty.

Secondly, we should not forget that world oil prices are now at a very low level. If they suddenly shot up again because of tremendous instability in the middle east, I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend would reconsider his projected increases in fuel duty. Rocketing oil prices, plus his proposals, would place the car industry in considerable difficulty, and put a considerable burden on motorists and other consumers.

The other interesting point mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend in relation to the car industry and the roads programme was that, when the technology is ready, motorway electronic charging will be introduced. That, too, should result in new jobs as the new technology is developed. I am delighted that the Government have opted for pay-as-you-drive rather than a flat rate charge. We believe in a shift of taxation from income to spending, and that charge is a form of spending.

However, if electronic charging is introduced for certain stretches of motorway, some traffic will be diverted to A roads that simply will not be able to cope with such an enormous increase in traffic. That applies in particular to my constituency. The thought of traffic pouring off the M1 on to the overloaded A5 through Dunstable is too horrible to contemplate. Therefore, when the technology is introduced, it must take account of the fact that certain stretches of motorway must be free of electronic charging, because the A road system would not be able to take the sudden increase in traffic.

I want to say a few words about education. I welcome the Government's success in having already reached the target of one in three of our young people going to university. I doubly welcome the confirmation in the Budget that university tuition will remain free. That is as good an investment in people as could possibly be imagined.

My right hon. and learned Friend referred to students' living costs, and said that the mixture of grant and loan would continue, with a movement away from grant and towards loan. I do not quarrel with that. Indeed, the Select Committee on Education and Science, on which I served, advocated that in the early 1980s. I hope that people will not forget the existence of the access hardship fund for students in difficulty. It is a scheme that the Government should certainly retain.

I am sure that there was a surge of relief in higher education and throughout the whole education system when it was confirmed that VAT would not be applied to books. Now that we have escaped that, we should refocus attention on the net book agreement. I understand that it is being considered by the Office of Fair Trading. I am sure that I speak for many hon. Members in saying that the price of books in this country is rather high compared with, for example, America. The net book agreement is not in the public interest. Books are an important part of student life, and prices could be reduced.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment mentioned the new apprenticeship scheme, which I welcomed in an intervention in his speech. It is extremely good news that, when young people have that qualification, it will be the vocational equivalent of an A-level. I support the principle of high-quality, work-based training. However, I reiterate my concern: once an agreement has been signed between trainee and employer, were the company to go bust or get into severe financial difficulties, there must be a system to enable the young person to resume his work-based training elsewhere. That will require a great deal of employer co-operation.

The truck manufacturing industry in Dunstable collapsed last year—imagine the damage that that has done. Industries do go bust, so if we are to increase the number of apprenticeships, there must be a safety net so that, should the worst happen, the apprentice can resume work with another employer without delay.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor mentioned many times the need to get unemployment down. Two things are most desperately needed to achieve that. The first is a deal on GATT, and certainly before 15 December. Every post-war surge in prosperity has followed a reduction in restrictions on world trade.

Secondly, we must make the EC single market work properly and fairly. It is of the utmost importance to this country that our EC partners come out of recession quickly, because we are so desperately dependent on them for our exports. It is of the utmost importance that they, like ourselves, pursue policies that lower the costs of providing employment and thereby create more jobs.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Budget's basic assumption that even the modest rates of growth that it predicts will be sustainable? As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, that will depend on the European Community emerging from its current deep recession, because it is one of our main export markets.

Mr. Madel: It is terribly important that the Community emerges from recession. I believe that the hon. Lady's constituency is near Ellesmere Port, where Astras are

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manufactured. The Cavalier is manufactured in Luton, and both plants desperately need increased opportunities to sell to the Community.

The conditions for industry expansion are extremely favourable. Paragraph 3.12 of the Red Book refers to oil prices, and assumes an average price of $17 a barrel during the forecast period. Paragraph 3.19 states:

"Low commodity prices and spare capacity in G7 countries should continue to exert downward pressure on inflation."

We have as good an opportunity for economic expansion now as since the end of the Korean war, after which there was a downward movement in world commodity prices.

We see the strains that high unemployment imposes on our EC partners, and must constantly look for new ways to boost manufacturing and business. I welcome the new venture capital trusts on which my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will soon publish details and invite comments. It too will be a real job creator.

My right hon. and learned Friend stressed that his is a long-term Budget to secure a much better economic future. He rightly promised no overnight miracles. We on this side of the House must remember Rab Butler's philosophy about the patience of politics. My party must show great patience and support for the Government in the next few years as we move into faster economic expansion, low unemployment and, above all, lower inflation.

6.41 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): The Chancellor's skill in designing his Budget was well demonstrated by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), who is a man of broad sympathies and of views that I find more acceptable than those of some Conservative Members. I hope that that remark will not do the hon. Gentleman too much damage in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman's ability to commend the broad sweep of the Budget, which adds hugely to taxation and makes such heavy cuts in expenditure, and to find details that he can also commend—and which we on this side of the House support, such as plans for road building and the introduction of road pricing—nicely characterises the Budget's shape as a political instrument.

As to the Budget's likely impact on the economy and its broad strategy, I will concentrate on what must be done now and in the future, and not parcel out credit and blame for past events and for the deplorable state of the economy today—with its huge imbalances of public borrowing, balance of payments and, worst of all, appalling unemployment.

First, I want to give the Chancellor more credit than he probably deserves. He is right to seek to reduce the public sector borrowing requirement by one means or another, not at once but over a period of five years. He is right to announce in advance changes in taxation and in planned expenditure levels that will make clear that balance for which he is arguing—realistically, as he sees it. However, I do not agree with the particular levels of taxation and expenditure that he chose.

Then there are matters on which I will reserve judgment. The Chancellor did not clearly explain his strategy for the balance of payments, the exchange rate and monetary policy. I do not suggest that he has no strategy or that his strategy is necessarily wrong—simply that he has not explained what it is. The markets, to operate confidently, must have a clear indication of the Government's monetary strategy.

Finally, the Chancellor is plainly wrong to cling to deregulation and benign neglect of industry as the panaceas that will restore the competitiveness and capacity of manufacturing and make possible the reduction in unemployment that we all seek. However, overall, and given the political constraints within which the Chancellor is working, the right hon. and learned Gentleman did what I would expect a competent Tory Chancellor to do.

The competence was to a degree thrust upon him, perhaps without the right hon. and learned Gentleman entirely appreciating it, by the discipline of having to launch a unified Budget. That made him examine economic issues as a whole. I gave a push in that direction with my amendment to the Industry Act 1975 requiring the Treasury to publish economic forecasts.

From internal evidence and the Budget, I suspect that the Treasury, in its advice to the Chancellor, may have gone further with the optimisation of policy, which was also covered by my original amendment to the 1975 Bill, which the House approved. If the Treasury has not done that further work—there are many ways in which it can be done—it should have done so. I believe that the Economic Secretary knows what I am talking about.

Since before the 1987 stock exchange crash, I have been publishing the results of policy optimisation on the Treasury model, using the Treasury's own computer programmes. It is a simple concept. Having identified priorities on inflation, unemployment, taxation, public spending, public borrowing, the balance of payments and so on, a model embodying the available evidence on how the economy works will show the policy changes that should be made now and those that ought to be made in future.

Each year, I have undertaken post mortems on those exercises, which have shown that, if Chancellors had followed advice available within the Treasury at the time, they would have avoided the main mistakes made since 1987—most notably, the excessive reflation of 1987 and 1988.

Models and forecasts are certainly imperfect. That is as true of the Treasury model as of any other. This year, with the help of three good research assistants, I undertook that policy optimisation exercise on not only the Treasury but on the London Business School, National Institute of Economic and Social Research and Oxford Economic Forecasting models. I gave the results at a seminar at Warwick university in July. Alan Budd, chief economic adviser to the Treasury—who in the early 1980s was an adviser to the Treasury Select Committee when I was a member of it—commented extensively on that paper at the seminar.

The results of that comparative study of policy design and optimisation were published in the "Oxford Review of Economic Policy", a copy of which is in the Library.

A fortnight before the Budget, a new version of the Treasury model was produced, revised in respects that I and others showed had been wrong. I have not had time to study the policy recommendations to which that new version leads, but with the revisions to the model to which the Treasury has drawn attention, I expect it to indicate the sort of Budget and forecast that the Chancellor produced.

For that reason, I do not question the likelihood that the figures produced by the Chancellor are based on the best

advice that he has received within the Department. I may be naive in that, but I am prepared to believe the attempt at objectivity in those forecasts.

That optimisation exercise, which has been or could easily be done in the Treasury, will show a consistent exchange rate and monetary policy strategy which the Chancellor did not announce in the Budget. As I have said, there is no monetary or exchange rate policy in the Budget.

All that does not mean that the results presented in the Budget could not have been achieved by other arguments or on the back of an envelope. The Treasury model is not a black box. The way it works is consistent with the economic common-sense terms in which the conclusions would, I am sure, have been presented to the Chancellor. A test of good methodology is that, after the event, everybody claims to have known the answer.

On the evidence that is published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", the exchange rate is vulnerable to the intractable deficit in the balance of payments. To have run a balance of payments deficit in the depths of a recession and not to offer any recovery to zero, even after the depreciation that we have had, and to stop short of the publication of the forward look into future years is at least to fail to produce the evidence that a monetary and exchange rate policy is sustainable and consistent with the fiscal balance.

To put the balance of payments right, supply side measures are needed which are not treated in the Treasury model. It does not treat the further deregulation and benign neglect of industry which has been pursued by the Government and which is recommended for future years, nor the effects of similar policies which will now be incorporated in the model and which have been shown to be insufficient in the past.

Also, it does not treat the positive supply side measures of the Labour party on investment, training and research, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) referred, which Conservative Members are bored with us constantly reiterating, but which are important.

Why has not the Chancellor set out an exchange rate and monetary policy strategy if his advisers probably have a good one under the table? First, he or his advisers may feel that they want to see more of how the strategy performs. That is wise in the light of the nostrums that we have had in the past and the experience of past monetary and exchange rate strategies. Evidence from all sources must be examined, and this is no exception.

Also, nobody but the Treasury and the Federal Reserve Board in Washington is equipped to do the sort of policy optimisation work on the Treasury model that I believe the Treasury has been doing. Academic modellers, the Bank of England, City economists and even journalists could do it, but they are not doing so. The technical details are fiddly, but the methods are well within the competence of intelligent graduate students, who can learn them in three months, though not at any British university.

In monetary and exchange rate policy, we are dealing with influencing people's expectations. It is no use the Treasury using an argument if its listeners are not equipped to follow that argument and react to it. The game does not work if one is seeking to influence people's expectations and they are not doing the sums necessary to work out how to form their expectations. They have to learn to play the game. If that game does not work for the Government, how much less will it work for the Opposition, given the barrage of misrepresentation to which the statements of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen are subjected?

We are now past the stage where politicians and their advisers cannot understand the arguments that are needed on monetary and exchange rate policy. It is the public and the pundits who need to catch up. No Chancellor has adequately acknowledged the sheer technical competence and integrity of Treasury modellers and forecasters—a competence and integrity so inadequately portrayed in the anodyne caricature of analysis which successive Chancellors serve up in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report". Of course, forecasts are not accurate, so let the forecasters explain why, and what the implications of that inevitable uncertainty are for policy-making, as I have tried to do.

The body in this country that looks at the development of models and forecasting is the macro-economic modelling consortium on which the three bodies represented are the Economic and Social Research Council, the Treasury and the Bank of England. The consortium has proposed that modellers—those whom it supports, such as the London Business School, the national institute and so on—should participate in the sort of exercise that my research assistants and I carried out this summer. That recommendation has come from the panel on which the Economic and Social Research Council, economists, Treasury representatives and the Bank of England are all involved.

The Treasury and Civil Service Committee—I do not see a member in the Chamber, but I am sure that it will take the point—could play a useful role in commissioning the exercise in future years, thus getting people in Parliament, the City and the media used to the idea of how expectations could be formed more rationally.

The Treasury's panel of independent forecasters—I welcome its operation, and it is doing a useful job—is in a more difficult position than the Select Committee. Even by asking the panel to do the exercise, the Treasury and its Ministers would appear to be endorsing the results that would emerge before anyone knew what they looked like. There is a limit to how far the Chancellor and the Treasury can try to lead public and technical opinion.

There is a further difficulty that the Treasury would face in spelling out monetary and exchange rate policy, which is consistent with the fiscal stance that the Budget adopts. An exchange rate policy that would work could require major improvements in supply side performance in manufacturing, for which the Chancellor and Opposition Members hope but for which there is not yet any solid evidence.

The country needs the stark realisation of the necessity of securing that supply side performance improvement. The objective may be achieved by people in industry responding more effectively to the Government's conception of supply side incentives, or it may need Labour's much more active policies on investment, training and research. What I suspect will prove to be the case is that it will need both.

Either way, the Treasury has the clearest evidence, and it should be spelled out. The longer the picture is obscured, the greater will be the delay in addressing the greatest economic challenge we face, which is to restore the competitiveness and capacity of manufacturing, the more difficult will be the task and the greater will be the challenge from overseas. No monetary or exchange rate

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

policy is likely to ease the fiscal stance: only effective supply-side policies will do that—and then only in the longer term.

Let us consider what the political effect is likely to be of the balance that the Chancellor has chosen in the Budget between the tax increases and expenditure cuts that he has had to make. The Government will certainly face grave problems on the issue of public sector pay and in maintaining an adequate standard of public services in the next three years—that is putting it mildly.

Economic models take a neutral stance in the balance between raising taxes and cutting expenditure and they do not measure the quality of services. As Members of Parliament, however, we are acutely conscious of the importance of those services and of the vital question of their quality.

Ministers evidently believe that the Opposition are stuck with having to choose between losing the election by increasing taxes or by incompetence in the conduct of economic policy. The Government believe that elections are lost by increasing taxes or demonstrating incompetence; that, they believe, is the problem facing the Opposition.

Despite my best efforts to defend the Chancellor's competence today, when the country judges the issues of raising tax or competence in the running of economic policy, it will condemn the Conservative party. That will not change before the next election. I have tried this afternoon to raise the competence stakes. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury could do much more.

7.2 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am delighted to be able to participate in the Budget debate. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his excellent Budget speech and on presenting a package of measures that will not only find favour across and in all sections of the country but deal with the economic and financial needs of our nation. In addition, the Budget projects us forward out of recession and back into growth and prosperity. It is at the same time an innovative and practical Budget and it should inspire considerable confidence in financiers, industrialists and the man or woman in the street. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will not even listen to my speech. I listened quietly to his speech and I now want to develop my ideas. I shall come to his speech later.

For my constituents, the most important economic factors are low inflation, economic growth and jobs. The Budget will pass the test on all three fronts. My constituents, of course, also want the Government to reduce their budget deficit and they accept that tax increases and reduced public expenditure are necessary to ensure a sound economy.

The whole community in my constituency, whether they work on the factory floor, in a shop or in an office, share the common aims of increased prosperity, better value for taxpayers' money and stable prices. People on fixed incomes, particularly those on pensions, are extremely keen that there is low inflation and that stable prices are maintained. Those with families are concerned about their jobs and job prospects. Those in work obviously want a secure future. All sections of the community, therefore, were looking forward to my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget with hope and expectation—hope that it would set the country on the right path for future growth and expectation that it would be fair. They looked also to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to rein in and curtail public expenditure. They have not been disappointed on either front.

I encountered much praise for the Budget and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor in my constituency yesterday. Considerable praise was expressed for his Budget speech on television because it was in simple language that the general public could understand. That was widely welcomed. His Budget was understood by more people because it was in simple language.

I do not wish to spend too much time on the Opposition because they appear to be quite bankrupt of new ideas about how to deal with our economic problems, but we all know that they would spend more and more money on just about everything. What they never say, of course, is how that would be paid and how the ordinary taxpayer would suffer accordingly.

We know that the Labour party is a party of high taxation. We heard that this afternoon from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East—have more taxes and use taxation for redistribution. That is what Labour Members are always after.

Mr. Prescott: Oh, yes.

Mr. Evennett: They admit it, and that is why they lose elections.

The Opposition have no time for the wealth creators, the job creators or the entrepreneurs in our society. There is no chance of the Opposition supporting them. They offer no initiatives, no support and no commitment to those who make the real wealth.

Labour is afraid of business—it always has been and business will never trust it. We know that Labour believes in more expenditure, more borrowing and more taxation. We have heard this afternoon about the social chapter, the minimum wage and new union rights. We have heard it all before, but we heard it again today. That is one reason why Labour Members will stay on the Opposition Benches and we will stay on the Government Benches.

In Erith and Crayford, people looked for action in four key areas, to which I shall confine my remarks: first, local businesses; secondly, reform of benefits, particularly the disability living allowance; thirdly, help for pensioners to meet the imposition of VAT on fuel and power; and, fourthly, tax increases that were perceived as fair.

Ms Eagle: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way on the point of fair tax increases. Does he agree that under the Conservative Government one third of the huge tax giveaways of the 1980s went to the top 1 per cent. and that the current tax increases are hitting the lower-paid and those who are least able to afford them? Is that his definition of fair?

Mr. Evennett: That is not only not fair but not true. I shall develop my argument on fairness subsequently. In the past 14 years, prosperity across all sections of society has increased. That has been very important.

Ms Glenda Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Evennett: May I carry on a little? When I reach the part of my speech on fairness, I will give way to the hon. Lady.

In Erith and Crayford, there is a large number of small firms and businesses. In the past few years, they have suffered a two-pronged attack—an increase in bureaucracy and red tape and the worldwide economic recession. They have urged my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury to understand their problems and plight and to take action.

Firms on my industrial estates of Thamesmead, Belvedere, Erith and Crayford, who employ many thousands of my constituents, wanted the Budget to deal with their real needs and issues. I know from conversations that I had yesterday with representatives of some of those firms that they are delighted with the outcome of the Budget. In particular, they welcomed the help for small businesses, with the raising of the VAT threshold, the abolition of compulsory audits for firms with a turnover of less than £90,000 and tax measures directed to help small businesses to get started and raise the necessary capital. Those are good news stories for businesses and small firms in Erith and Crayford.

Together with those measures, the deregulation legislation proposed in the Queen's Speech and the Chancellor's determination to tackle the problems of late payment of bills will go down well with my business men.

Cash flow is vital to smaller firms. Irrespective of how good a product is, if a firm does not get paid promptly on delivery, it can run into serious or perhaps terminal trouble through no fault of its own. Smaller firms therefore welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's comment in his Budget that he would reconsider this issue and try to deal with it for them. This year's Budget has been a Budget for business, a Budget for jobs and a Budget for training.

I welcome the speech that was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment this afternoon and applaud his new apprenticeship scheme for young people, which is innovative and will be good for young people. I also warmly support his three new initiatives for small firms to encourage training in the engine room of our economy, which is the small business.

The second subject which I wish to mention is the determination of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Secuirty to reform the social security system and the urgent need to reform the disability allowance. I know from my constituency casework that the number of people who draw that benefit has increased dramatically in my area. I also know that by no stretch of the imagination are all those claimants severely disabled.

All Conservative Members believe in helping people who are in genuine need. We believe that there should be a benefit to look after those people who are genuinely disabled to ensure that they are supported. However, quite a number of constituents have complained, at my surgery at Erith town hall on a Friday evening, that the present system is unfair and that disability allowance is given to too many people. We all know stories of people who can claim disability allowance who are not genuinely disabled. That was not what was intended when the benefit was introduced.

The new incapacity benefit which will take effect in April 1995—with a new objective medical test, which I believe has been long overdue—will allow the benefit to reach the people who are in genuine need. People who are genuinely disabled will not have a problem because we shall ensure that they obtain the benefit. It is those people who do not deserve or need it who need to be worried. The new benefit will remove arbitrariness and will be seen to be fair.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) asked about fairness. Many people in my constituency believe that the disability allowance is unfair.

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate; my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) asked questions regarding fairness. The question that I wished to ask the hon. Gentleman was, if the past 14 years have been so fair, why do a quarter of the poorest people in the European Community live in these islands?

Mr. Evennett: The hon. Lady wanted to intervene on the fairness issue and I said that I would allow her to intervene on the fairness issue later, so she is not correct even about that. I was referring to her, not to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). It is important that measures are perceived as fair by the majority of people. During the past 14 years, there has been an increase in affluence in all sections of the community.

The third subject which I wish to mention is VAT. In spite of all the pundits, especially those on the Opposition Benches, there was no extension to the VAT fold in the Budget. We all welcome that. Opposition Members have not even been able to acknowledge it.

Pensioners and people in low-income groups were genuinely worried about what would happen when VAT was applied to fuel and power. In early October, I went to the local meeting of the British Pensioners and Trade Unions Action Association. Apart from the usual party political nonsense that one hears at some of those meetings, many people expressed genuine worry about how they would be able to afford the increased fuel bill. I received many letters and had many telephone calls and meetings with other individual pensioners about the problem that they perceived that they would have. Many of those people who had small private pensions did not want to find that they would be excluded from help that would obviously go to those on benefit or very low incomes. They wanted the tax situation to be perceived as fair to them, too.

The fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given an across-the-board benefit to all pensioners should reassure individual pensioners and pensioners' organisations that the Government have been fair to all pensioners in the Budget.

Many pensioners in my constituency have told me that, although they welcome the reductions in interest rates for people who have mortgages and for all people who are borrowing money, they have noticed that their own private investment incomes have been reduced accordingly and they have been concerned. They might have another 10 or 20 years to live off their capital and they are concerned about the diminishing return for them. I am sure that they will be delighted with the new pensioners' guaranteed income bond, which they will greet with considerable enthusiasm.

I believe that the extension of the home energy efficiency scheme, which was mentioned in the Budget, and the extension of eligibility to all pensioners and disabled people, will also be welcomed by pensioners' groups.

Mr. Alex Carlile: It is very expensive.

Mr. Evennett: I think that all the measures will be expensive, but they will be perceived as fair to all pensioners, not just those on very low incomes. A large number of pensioners work for many years to enter retirement with a small occupational pension or savings. The pensioners to whom I spoke were naturally concerned about the future. The Budget has helped them and will continue to do so.

I shall now discuss general perceptions of fairness. Whether the Budget is greeted favourably or unfavourably in our area depends on whether people perceive it to be fair to all sections of society and fair in dealing with everyone. I believe that the tax increases that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has proposed are fair—there is to be no increase in income tax, a limited increase in excise duty on drink, but more substantial increases in the price of tobacco and petrol. Those are welcome measures. I passionately believe in increasing the price of tobacco. I should have liked my right hon. and learned Friend to put more tax on tobacco, because smoking is a health risk. I welcome, however, the tax increase that has taken place this year.

I believe that the benefit reforms will be regarded as fair by the vast majority of people in the country. Business people think that it is a fair Budget and will have great support.

This year's Budget has been a no-nonsense Budget from a no-nonsense Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has been crafted and constructed to deal with the problems that confront the country and to help those in real need. Obviously, tax increases are never popular, but I believe that the vast majority of people will recognise that they are essential at this time and that cuts in public expenditure are also important.

However, the fact that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has managed to continue to increase expenditure in the vital sectors of health, education and law and order highlights the Government's priorities. Yes, we have to curtail expenditure in certain sectors, but we believe passionately in developing policies in other sectors and we are prepared to spend extra money in those sectors.

I believe that, in time, this year's Budget will be regarded as a great Budget from a great Chancellor of the Exchequer. I also feel that people appreciate his common-sense approach and plain speaking. This year, the people understand what he has to say and they like it.

7.18 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): We have heard some interesting arguments during the debate and before I discuss broader issues I shall mention two. During the course of his contribution, with some of which I agreed, the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) referred to the venture capital trust and, I think, the enterprise investment scheme. Any scheme that encourages investment in industry, especially manufacturing and productive industry, is to be welcomed. I have read the detail, such as it is, that has been supplied so far about those schemes. I would urge on the Treasury the view that any such scheme is unlikely to succeed if it does not include front-loading of tax relief.

The business expansion scheme has been much condemned because of the way in which it was used to attract money into property-related investment. Some of that investment must have been beneficial for the building industry, which desperately needs help, and I make the specific point that the scheme attracted investment because those who invested could obtain tax relief as they put their money in. I urge the Government not to abandon that principle and to confirm that front-loaded tax relief will remain available, especially in the venture capital trusts, which should give a boost to the rather ailing venture capital industry in this country.

My second specific point is about something that the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) said concerning pensioners and their savings. He gave a broad welcome to the pensioners guaranteed income bond. I have read the press release describing what detail there is about the bond so far, which was issued by National Savings as the Chancellor sat down having delivered his Budget speech. I hope that the Government can avoid the accusation that seems justifiable thus far—that the bond is something of a confidence trick by the Chancellor.

We have been told that the bond will be introduced after the new year and, according to National Savings, its interest rates will reflect the market at the time of its introduction. We know that the Chancellor is likely to reduce interest rates between now and the new year, so it looks as if the bond will be introduced at an historically low interest rate. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury should tell us when he replies to the debate whether the bond will be linked in some way so that its interest rate rises if and when general interest rates rise. He shakes his head. That will be a great disappointment to pensioners all over the country, many of whom have small savings—£10,000 or £20,000, perhaps—which make a considerable difference to their standard of living. They have seen the return on their investments drop dramatically, and they too suspect, as we all do, that interest rates will rise.

Unless something is done to secure pensioners against losing because of future increases in interest rates, the bonds will prove unattractive, and financial advisers will rightly urge caution before investments are made in them. I ask the Economic Secretary to reflect on the effect of introducing the bond at an historically low interest rate.

The Chancellor delivered the Budget with his usual—and, to many hon. Members, enviable—self-confidence, but as a piece of economic thinking it was breathtaking, not so much because of what it told us but because of what it did not tell us. Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I have been examining the Red Book to see where the money will come from to fill the gap of £3 billion to £4 billion that was unexplained in the Budget speech. That is easily discovered on page 117 of the Red Book: it comes from the contingency reserves. The table on that page shows that the reserves are to contribute £3·5 billion in 1994-95, £7 billion in 1995-96 and £10·5 billion in 1996-97. The Chancellor did not tell us in his speech the effect that using the contingency reserves to that breathtaking extent will have on the economy and its future growth. It is about time that we were given an explanation, and I hope that we shall hear it later.

I shall now deal with employment policy, and unemployed people's view of the Budget. Five groups of people will have listened to the Chancellor's speech with bated breath. The first group is the young people who hope to be employed in future, and the second is people who are already on the employment market but who are unemployed. Then there are those who have worked but are now long-term unemployed, and those who have worked and want to work again but who are sick and

therefore unemployed. The fifth group consists of those who are in work but who, because their jobs are so badly paid, are very poor and need help: they are entitled to help from the Government because they are doing exactly what the Government urge, and are working even though their wages are very low.

All those groups will have looked for the prescription that the Government gave them in the Budget to deal with the ills that they experience. But some found the milk of human kindness prescribed only in the special form dispensed by the Secretary of State for Social Security. He is the dalek of the unemployed, uttering the word, "exterminate"—meaning, exterminate people from the statistics. One of the results of the Budget will be that for about the 29th time since 1979—I may be one out; it may be only the 28th time—the Government will be able to massage the unemployment statistics because of changes in policy. In the months to come we can expect a possible reduction of 200,000 in the official number of people unemployed, but that will not be a genuine reduction. I shall return later to the Secretary of State for Social Security and his plan for the sick and unemployed.

The first category of people whom I mentioned—young people who hope to be employed—cannot have greeted the Budget with anything other than the deepest gloom and depression. All over the country we have a vast stock of brilliant and able young people who can learn skills, technology and knowledge, who have the capacity to soak up the skills needed to enable the economy to grow—many Members of Parliament can no longer do that, because we have passed that absorbent age for learning.

Yet what prospect do those young people face? Those who come from affluent homes will be all right, because their mums and dads will see them through university, will give them the money to live on and will probably encourage them to take out student loans because they represent a cheap form of credit, but will pay off the loans on their children's behalf. Those young people will come out at the end of their higher education with a reasonable prospect of employment, because they will not be worried, at least at the beginning of their graduate life, about taking jobs with relatively low pay, if the prospects are good.

Then there are the others—those who come from poorer homes whose parents will not be able to help them out, except at the cost of extreme sacrifice in some cases. If they go to university, they will be saddled with loans that now represent about one third of the cost of being at university. When they come out, they will face what is effectively a form of substantial additional taxation—the repayment of the loan.

Let me give an example. The Government seem to think that £14,000 a year is a sufficient salary from which to start paying back the loan. I hope that many young people who come out of university will feel that school teaching is an attractive profession. In the early years of teaching they may earn little more than £14,000 a year. Are they really to be regarded as sufficiently affluent to start paying the price of their loans immediately at the beginning of their working lives?

Salaries of people starting work in another category, in manufacturing industry, do not on the whole compare with the salaries paid by firms in the City. Are able young people to be driven out of manufacturing industry because they feel that they will be able to repay their student loan more successfully if they work for a firm of accountants or become lawyers? That does not seem to be a way to potentiate young people and to enable the country's economy to grow. It is a depressing picture that will drive many even into the choice of not going to university.

There is also the question whether people can get jobs when they graduate. I know of many examples of young graduates who have no chance of jobs related to the skills that they have acquired. I was told by a constituent a few weeks ago of his son and daughter-in-law. The son is a brilliant first class honours graduate in a scientific subject and the daughter-in-law is a brilliant first class honours in history. Both had been promised research funding, which was removed before they could begin research; so they set about looking for work and obtained jobs selling hamburgers in the constituency of the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth), who is in his place. There is nothing wrong with selling hamburgers; it is an honourable occupation. Regrettably, there are rather more hamburger outlets in Chester than there used to be when I lived there as a young man and the fine, old shops were in greater abundance. People should not have to sell hamburgers if they have been trained in biotechnology or in microcomputer electronics or other subjects that are needed to enable the country to develop and grow.

The Secretary of State for Social Security has produced a test for those who are sick and unemployed that is more like a parlour game than a medical test. The consultation paper that was produced yesterday on the medical assessment for incapacity benefit contains items such as the following—a severity score of 17 points for those who cannot carry out simple mental arithmetic—that means that there will have to be a reshuffle in the Treasury. There will be 23·5 severity points awarded to those who are frequently muddled or confused—that will virtually wipe out the Government. There will be 4·5 severity points for those who cannot lift and push an unladen wheelbarrow—one of the tests that will be used to contradict the opinions of doctors as to whether people are able to work. Will doctors be expected to have an unladen wheelbarrow in their consulting rooms? With respect to those who sit in your Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one test that may be especially apposite is the 11 severity points for regularly losing track of conversations.

That is the regime that the Government are seeking to impose to decide whether people are fit for work. Until now, doctors—perhaps some do need to be more careful, for there is always room to remind the professions to apply high standards—have been respected for being able to decide whether people are fit for work. By those absurd tests, the Secretary of State for Social Security is to introduce a standard whereby civil servants rather than doctors will decide whether people are fit for work. Yet again the Government are set on conflict with the medical profession.

What about the poor and employed? The wages councils have been abolished. The Government have pulled from under the poor and employed those very structures that at least fought for them, and on a statutory basis, to ensure that there was some kind of fairness even in poorly paid employment. There is nothing in the Budget that encourages people to take the jobs that the noble Lady Thatcher used to urge upon them; and that the present Secretary of State for Social Security, and others who have been given illegitimate titles at various times by the Prime Minister, encourage them to take to justify the feeling that they are doing something worthwhile in obtaining poorly paid employment. Why should people work as packers,

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

assemblers or even hill farmers, who are no longer able to earn a decent income, if the Government cannot provide a minimum level of support to ensure a decent standard of living?

Even housing has been attacked in the Budget. In Wales, where there is a desperate shortage of housing to rent in rural areas, Tai Cymru—Housing for Wales—is being given less money to build. What on earth can be the justification for that?

In the Budget, we wanted to hear a strategy, not for the Conservative party or to call off the wreckers on the Tory Back Benches, but for the country for the years to come. If we had seen a real strategy for employment, our happiness would have been far greater than our regret at a Government success which might have deprived us of the opportunity of further by-election and election successes. The Liberal Democrats thought that the Government might have learned the lessons of their by-election defeats and the marvellous victories of my hon. Friends the Members for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock). We would have willingly said to the Government "Well done" if they had produced a strategy that would have enabled unemployed and poor people to look to the future with greater confidence. Regrettably, they did not do so. In due course, the Chancellor will be judged on results and not on rhetoric.

7.39 pm

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): I join others on the Conservative Benches in congratulating the Chancellor on his excellent Budget. I shall not repeat the words of praise that have emanated from others, but entirely support them.

The Chancellor was seeking to achieve twin targets of low inflation and growth. I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). As I understand his argument, he wanted to reduce unemployment but did not take too kindly to growth, and he did not accept that the Budget would lead to growth. I do not understand how he expects unemployment to be reduced other than by virtue of growth in the economy.

I listened to the hon. Gentleman attack the rising share prices in the City. He seemed to think that the confidence of City investors in Britain and from abroad showed that there was something wrong with the economy, instead of being, as it is, a declaration of support.

I also listened to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) who followed the traditional course of Liberal Democrat spokesmen by being a manic depressive. That party gets incredibly excited for short periods, then goes into a deep decline. Today was a time of such decline. We heard doom and gloom, we were told that interest rates would rise substantially thus depriving people of the advantage of the new investments that they could make.

We were also told that the Government should not eat into contingency reserves. The whole point of having contingency reserves is to have money available to support public services at a time of high inflation, when it is necessary for Government to divert resources because of emergencies. When we have stability in the economy, there is no need for such high reserves.

If the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery had thought about the targets of the Budget and about the success on which it was building, he would have appreciated that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was correct to reduce the contingency reserve. But doom and gloom will not allow that.

The hon. and learned Member complained about reductions in house building. He should have told the House that the Government have pledged that the Housing Corporation will build 20,000 more houses than planned. As a result of lower prices, we are creating more house building; that is what he should have told us. But that is not good enough for hon. Members on the doom and gloom Benches.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on his allocation of local government funds today, pursuant to the announcement in the Budget. He has said that there is to be more money available for local government. Although, clearly, there will be some pressure on general levels of council tax, my right hon. Friend has acknowledged in the distribution of grant the needs of particular areas, especially those with growth problems and on the urban fringes, of which my own authority is one.

I am delighted that Bromsgrove will be allowed to spend about £1 million more than it did last year, and that it will receive that same amount in extra grant, so that the council tax in my constituency can remain broadly the same, if the local authority chooses to spend at its new increased standard spending assessment level. That is welcome, and it is an acknowledgment of the needs of individuals and areas which is typical of this Government.

There have been complaints from local government that the level of increase is inadequate. Those who criticise fail to appreciate that 70 per cent. of local government expenditure is based on wages and salaries. It is for local government, as it has done on occasions in the past, to ensure that it gets maximum value for money and that it limits pay rises to a level which can be afforded by the nation as a whole. I see no reason why local government should not contain its wage expenses.

I pay tribute to the work of much of local government in delivering value for money; that drive must continue. We must look for extensions in competitive tendering and for more productivity in local government. Today's Audit Commission report points to fraud running at £25 million a year in local government. That is clearly one area in which action must be taken, and I hope that local government will note the Audit Commission's comments in seeking to deal with the problem.

I now turn to business investment. I welcome the help that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has given industry by creating a low-tax economy and by giving assistance to the self-employed in VAT limits——

Mr. Prescott: A low-tax economy?

Mr. Thomason: That comment comes ill from an hon. Member in a party that has consistently committed itself to increasing the level of taxation for business and for individuals.

Ms Eagle: Will the hon. Gentleman admit that his Government's Budget figures demonstrate that taxation collected this year, as a proportion of gross domestic product, is 34·5 per cent., and that it will go up by 1998, on the Government's own figures, to 38·5 per cent.? When

the Labour Government left office, the figure was 34·25 per cent. The Tory Government are a Government of high taxation, and their claims of low taxation have been exposed for the scam they are.

Mr. Thomason: I take note of the fact that, under the terms announced by my right hon. and learned Friend, the proportion of public expenditure will be reduced from 45 per cent. to 41·5 per cent. We shall have less government and not more government. The Labour party consistently argues for more and more and more public expenditure, and for more taxation.

There is a need to increase productivity, and much has been achieved to date by British industry. Management has been transformed in the past 14 years; much was done in the Thatcher years. We now have industry that is competitive. We have a work force who identify with the objectives of the employer in ensuring common success, not just for the shareholder and the manager, but for the whole work force. That transformation has been achieved on the back of a series of legislative proposals, and will be continued in the spirit of the Budget.

We also see delivered in the Budget an opportunity to improve the skills of the work force. There is new training for apprenticeships, and there is education investment. Better standards will be attained so that the new generation will be fit for the workplace. However, in the international league, Britain's productivity levels still lag behind those of some countries.

We need high growth and high investment. The two go together, which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has difficulty in understanding. He complained about being likened to prehistoric animals. When I heard some of his comments, I understood the relevance of that criticism. High growth and high investment, running together, lead to improvements in productivity. We need to ensure that there are adequate margins to allow for investment. The call I hear again and again from British industry is that it wants to invest more so that it can then achieve a level of productivity second to none.

We have a problem with short-termism, as even Opposition Members may agree. I hope that future Chancellors will have the opportunity to address that problem as the economy moves forward. We need to ensure that pension funds do not look just for immediate, short-term gains. We want the banks to be more flexible. We want less constraint on venture funds. Against that, we need to ensure that London maintains its position as a leading international financial centre, and we should not do anything that interferes overtly with that.

Short-termism leads to the search for a quick return rather than to long-term planning, and there is not sufficient incentive for plant investment. We sometimes invest in the wrong sort of business asset—in land rather than in plant. A pressure that is especially important for smaller businesses is the need for high capital repayment on loans which can hinder their cash flow.

I welcome the steps that the Chancellor has taken to deal with some of those problems, but I hope that he will go further in the years ahead. I hope that he will look critically at opportunities, when he can afford them, for capital allowances to be given. I hope that he will consider whether it would be appropriate for United Kingdom pension funds to bear tax on short-term gains. I wonder whether he will consider the liquidity requirements of banks, which might encourage them to look at equity investments and longer-term loans.

Above all, what is needed for a long-term investment strategy for British industry is stability. The Budget is an important step in producing that stability that industry requires. Entrepreneurs need encouragement. Family businesses want equity partners. Business starters require long-term help and industry must have new plant to boost productivity. We are on the road to economic success, and we need to ensure that we achieve it through long-term investment.

7.50 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I listened carefully to the speech of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason). He must be one of the few people to have visited Eurodisney, as he seems to have spent all his life in fantasyland. I do not recognise the society that he described.

I noted the lack of response on the prickly issue of tax rises when I questioned him on the overall tax burden. It is an untypical occasion in that it is our first ever unified Budget. Unfortunately, it is leading to a depressingly familiar mixture of wrongheaded ideological economic bigotry from the Government, and cynicism that is so glaring that only the British Conservative party seems to be capable of it.

The Budget is also revealing because Budgets are a time for choice. They reveal the Conservative philosophy behind what they do, their views on society, for which we shall soon call them to account in the run-up to the next election. The Budget is cynical because of the utter betrayal of all the Conservative party's election promises, none more so than on taxes. That is what this Budget represents.

We must go back to the Budget before the last general election in 1992 and see how the Conservative party then presented the economic state of the nation. First, there was a tax-cutting Budget. When we look at the Red Book from that time, we find that the deplorable state of the economy was either conveniently not noticed or wilfully covered up. I shall leave it to individuals to decide who caused the mistakes.

The £50 billion deficit on the PSBR, with which we are so concerned at this time, was absent from the figures and was much lower than those in the Red Book at that time. It was only after the general election that the small and conveniently underestimated deficit on the PSBR suddenly ballooned to £50 billion and became the centrepiece of the strategy for the two subsequent Budgets that we have had this year in the aftermath of the general election. We have a Chancellor who boasts about cutting the PSBR figure placed before the electorate in the Red Book by no less than £8 billion. That is £8 billion fewer for public services, schools, hospitals, investment in our crumbling infrastructure, welfare protection, transport, and so on. In the Budget, 3 per cent. of GDP was taken out of the economy. By any stretch of the imagination, that is a massively deflationary package.

The Howe Budget in 1981, which caused such a catastrophic depression, was openly described as a deflationary Budget for taking a mere £1·8 billion of expenditure out of the economy. Taken with its

[Ms Angela Eagle]

predecessor in March, there is no description for the Budget other than massively deflationary, and we must be worried about that.

The two Budgets must be taken together. Only then can one see the colossal switch in Government expenditure and values facing us now. It is a huge pincer movement. There has been a £23 billion overall increase in taxation. Who would have believed that from looking at the Conservative party election manifesto?

As I tried to explain to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove, the GDP share taken in taxes, based on the Government's figures, is forecast to go up from its present 34·25 per cent. to 38·5 per cent. by 1998. I must point out once more for the record that, in 1979, when the last Labour Government left office, the share of GDP taken in taxes—the overall tax level in the economy—was 34·75 per cent.

Income taxes are to be raised, albeit surreptitiously, by £5·2 billion, through the freezing of allowances, changes to the married couple's allowance and changes in national insurance contributions, all of which are the opposite of the pledges that were given during 1992 and will add the equivalent of 3p to basic income tax rates.

The Conservative Government do not raise income tax rates directly—they do not have the guts or the courage to do that. They raise them surreptitiously and try to claim that tax rises are not going on. But the facts are there. When people look at the deductions from their pay packets from next April, and as the tax increases begin to bite in the following years, they will understand, more than the Government believe, precisely what is involved in the Budget package.

It has been estimated that we have also taken back with the massive rises in taxes almost all the tax giveaways that were such a feature of Conservative Governments in the 1980s. But they have not been taken back from the people who received them in the first place. As I pointed out, almost a third of the money given away in tax increases in the 1980s—some £9 billion—went to the top 1 per cent., while only £4·5 billion went to the bottom 50 per cent.

That is why in the past 14 years of Conservative government there has been a reversal in income distribution, so that the difference between rich and poor, and the number of people who are now poor, is back to the level it was when General Booth first invented policy statistics and began to measure them in 1886. That is a deplorable record of which the Government should be ashamed.

As well as massive tax rises, we are seeing swingeing cuts in the welfare state. That is another way in which the Chancellor is trying to balance the books, which are so unbalanced by the Government's economic mismanagement. We have heard much in the debate about changes in the benefit system and the way that it will affect some of the worst-off people. That very much reflects the values of the Conservative Government: do not take back the massive tax giveaways that were given to those who are already rich, but instead tax those on invalidity benefit, and introduce VAT on fuel so that some of the poorest people in society can be taxed to pay for the economic mismanagement; but whatever one does, do not tax those who can afford to pay it.

We have heard announced in the Budget a vicious three-year squeeze on the public sector, which involves public sector pay and provision. I seriously doubt whether those spending targets can be kept. If they are kept, as a result of decisions taken in the Budget we shall have a public sector that is increasingly dilapidated and unable to replace essential goods, services and infrastructures.

We must also remember that the public sector has been grossly neglected over the past 14 years. It is already in a weakened state. The fairness of introducing a public sector pay freeze and expecting it to last for three years, on top of the annual freeze on the 1·5 per cent. increase for those who work in the public sector, beggars belief. It will be extremely difficult for the Government to make their pay policy stick.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Lady argues that the Budget is deflationary. Therefore, I can only assume that she wishes to increase public expenditure. If that is the case, which of the many taxes aired by the Labour party would she increase?

Ms Eagle: I shall come to the deficit shortly and explain what I believe should be the principles for dealing with it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wait until I get to that part of my speech.

None of the massive increases in taxes and vicious cuts in public spending was mentioned in the Conservative party manifesto. The manifesto claimed that the Conservative party was the party of low taxation; a claim that has been exposed for the cynical farce that it is. The Conservative party boasted about increasing public expenditure, yet as soon as the Conservatives have their greedy hands on the reins of power, they do the opposite.

The Prime Minister's promises—they have been much quoted in the House, so I will not repeat them—have been exposed for the cynical sham that they are. Soothing pre-election noises about the welfare state have been replaced with fundamentalist new brutalism, which was rampant at the Tory party conference. It is fairly clear from looking at the position of the Conservative party at the moment that the right of the party is on the rampage, and it is led by those in the Cabinet whom the Prime Minister one accused of being of doubtful parentage. They are beginning to get their way. The lunatics have taken over the asylum and they are in the driving seat. The Prime Minister is either with them and agrees with them, or he is too weak to stop them. In the next few months, we shall be able to judge which of those conjectures is true.

There is nothing new about the Conservatives' ability to play fast and loose with their election pledges. At the last general election, there was a famous and effective Conservative party smear about Labour's so-called tax plans. Hon. Members will remember all those posters saying things like "Labour's tax bombshell" on all those free poster sites given by the tobacco advertisers so that the Tories could put their propaganda around the country. The Conservatives claimed that, under Labour, a car worker earning £12,000 a year would be £359 a year worse off and an electrician earning £30,500 would be £563 worse off. As a result of the Budget, by 1996, a car worker will be £520 worse off and an electrician £570 worse off. I hope that the electorate will bear those illustrative figures in mind when they next consider which way to vote at a general election. The electorate will never trust the Conservative party again.

The willingness to deceive the electorate is nothing new for the Tories. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues are just following a discredited tradition that has existed for a long time in the Tory party. Recently, I was shuffling through a book shop when I came across a book entitled "My Style of Government: The Thatcher Years" by Nicholas Ridley. It was the late Lord Ridley's memoirs, which I got for £2·99 off a discount rack, presumably because the market was working. I want to quote a couple of his pearls of wisdom. First, writing about the run-up to the 1979 election, he said:

"They"——

the British electorate——

"were not invited to switch to a Government with clearly spelt out superior alternative policies. Margaret Thatcher was careful not to articulate them too clearly in public for two very good reasons. First, she was not at all assured of her colleagues' support for what she wanted to do. Second, it is never wise for an opposition leader to expose his or her detailed policies to the possibility of ruthless dismemberment by the Government."

Later, he said:

"Thus, the full nature of Thatcherism was not known to the electorate in 1979. Nor was it fully understood within the Parliamentary Party."

The Prime Minister has carried on that tradition and taken it further. Rather than hiding what he aims to do, he has said that he will do the opposite. That is progress in the Conservative party.

There is general agreement that the £50 billion deficit in the PSBR must be tackled, but there is no Government analysis of where the deficit came from. It is almost as if it just descended from above and landed on the Government and they now have to think of a way to deal with it. In reality, it is here because of the failure of their farcically named economic miracle. It is descended directly from the failures of their 14 years in power.

There is also £100 billion worth of North sea oil revenue to be taken into consideration. They have given it away in tax cuts for their rich friends, leaving British industry unmodernised and in a weakened state. The OECD recently said that two thirds of the public sector borrowing requirement is cyclical—it is unemployment related. The figures show that £27 billion of the deficit goes on paying to keep people on the unemployment registers, where they are unproductive.

Typically for the Conservative Government, they have decided that if close to half their deficit is a result of unemployment, they should cut benefits. They attack the victims and the symptoms but never the causes. Given the structure of the deficit, a job strategy should have been at the heart of the Budget. Noticeably absent from this Budget, as it was from the March Budget, is any such strategy. Most of us would welcome the sprinkling of supply-side policies, but they are irrelevant given the size of the problem.

We have to cut the £27 billion cost of keeping people on the dole, not by cutting unemployment benefits but by creating jobs and getting people back to work. The fatal flaw in the job seeker's allowance—it is a revealing name for the benefit, which causes cynical, hollow laughs among unemployed people—is that it blames the victims of unemployment for their situation. It does nothing about demand in the economy and it almost blames people for being on the dole.

On average, 22 people chase every vacancy. When the Secretary of State for Employment went into the job market after leaving university, there was a job for every person looking for one. The situation has since deteriorated markedly. Nobody would disagree with supply-side measures that make it easier for people to look for jobs, but behind the unwritten strategy is the assumption that jobs are there for them to take. Twenty-two people chasing every vacancy shows that the jobs are not there. Therefore, we must do something to stimulate demand.

The Budget is predicated on several dubious assumptions. The first is that the rather modest growth rates that the Budget predicts will be unaffected by its deflationary aspects. After the Howe Budget, which was less deflationary than this, growth plummeted. This time, there is no credit boom to fuel economic recovery, as there is a mountain of debt caused by the deregulation of the financial institutions that the Government introduced in the early 1980s.

Secondly, the Budget assumes that world trade will recover rapidly and grow, and possibly also that there will be a deal on the general agreement on tariffs and trade. Both those assumptions are dubious and not a predictable enough basis for an entire Budget strategy.

Thirdly, the Budget assumes that the public sector squeeze will stick, but there will be real troubles with that, and rightly so.

The Budget punishes victims and makes the wrong choices. It has the wrong economic and political philosophies behind it. We shall condemn it and vote against it for those reasons.

8.7 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I listened with care to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). She thought that the public sector deficit was far too high, but she did not want to put up taxes or cut public expenditure. She glided gently over public borrowing. Whatever his critics would say about the late Lord Ridley, they would never accuse him of intellectual incoherence, and the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends might do well to learn the lesson of intellectual coherence from the life and politics of Lord Ridley, rather than taking up one or two of his tactical hints, which they seem to have done successfully over the past few weeks.

I wanted to begin my speech on a non-partisan note. One of the fruitful disciplines of having a unified Budget is that it provides an institutional discipline for Whitehall Departments to think carefully about priorities within the context of the Government's overall programme and to consider how the policies of each Department relate one to another. The example that I had in mind was transport.

I was pleased that at the margins of the announcements of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was the decision to ring-fence money so that the crossrail project could proceed on its next stage. As my right hon. Friends know, I hope that that means that the Government are backing the project whole-heartedly and I look forward to the next stage and its eventual completion.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor announced measures that will affect transport policy. I welcome the decision to make it easier for the private sector to become involved in the planning and financing of infrastructure projects. That may have the beneficial side effect of making it more transparent to judge the cost and benefit of road schemes compared with rail schemes, which traditionally have been calculated using different analyses.

[Mr. David Lidington]

I also welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's decisions on petrol duty and an experimental road-pricing scheme. Those decisions raise difficult questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) said that A roads or minor local roads might be swamped with traffic if a motorway toll charge were so high as to force traffic off that motorway. The road-pricing and petrol duty measures will reduce congestion and pollution, but they would have the inevitable effect of biting hardest on poorer drivers, the ones most likely to be forced off the road.

The Budget provides us with a very welcome opportunity to develop a transport policy that is in line with the Government's environmental objectives. I was glad that my right hon. and learned Friend, in announcing his measures for the financing of transport and taxes on transport, referred to the United Kingdom's international obligations to reduce emissions. I hope that the debate that has been initiated by the Budget statement will be fruitfully taken further, both in the House and in the country at large.

I am aware from the controversy over the proposed A418 in my constituency of the difficulty that policy makers inevitably face in reconciling the competing demands of economic growth, the need for good communications, including good road communications, and the need to maintain a civilised environment in towns and cities and in the countryside, the beauties of which people can continue to enjoy.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): Given that we accept a degree of hypothecation in the road tolling proposals, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be helpful if the money raised by road tolls was not ploughed straight back into the motorway system but applied to transport infrastructure projects generally—with, of course, the assistance of the private sector?

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend has made a characteristically constructive proposal which I hope our right hon. Friends will take seriously.

I was interested in the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) raised the question of hypothecation, because my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor also referred to it in his announcement. Another unintended consequence of a unified Budget, from the Treasury's point of view, is that Ministers collectively will be bound in future to consider the Government's priorities, not only on spending but on what is the best means of raising the revenue with which to finance those expenditure priorities. I know that to speak in such a way is to challenge one of the most hallowed doctrines of Treasury theology, but I confess to being a fully paid-up member of the heretics and blasphemers tendency when it comes to that belief. I have already referred to the tension that inevitably exists between the priority to be given to economic growth and environmental needs.

Hon. Members have rightly spoken about the problem of unemployment. I welcome the Chancellor's Budget and agree with the plaudits given to my right hon. and learned Friend by Conservative Members by the business community and by observers in the media. When people look back on the Budget of autumn 1993, they will judge its effectiveness in terms of how far it was seen to promote the chances of more British men and women moving into productive employment in the medium term.

In my constituency, unemployment is still way below the national average—for which my constituents and I are grateful—but it is still high by Aylesbury's historic experience. Although I welcome the fact that unemployment has fallen in recent months, it is still too high and needs to be further reduced.

I welcome the initiatives in the Budget to foster and develop businesses, particularly small businesses. If every small family business could be enabled to take on one additional employee, that would make an enormous dent in the national unemployment level. My right hon. and learned Friend's announcement about late payments and statutory audit requirements will be warmly greeted by business men and women in my constituency.

The tax changes to encourage investment and reinvestment in family enterprises are also welcome, particularly the tax concessions for investment in the proposed business link schemes announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

One lesson which we have learnt as a country during the past few years is that it is all well and good to encourage businesses to start up—it is healthy that we should do so—but a number of people go into business without equipping and training themselves for the difficulties and challenges that that will bring. The business link scheme promoted by the Department of Trade and Industry is an important way in which the Government will be able to focus support and advice on small businesses during the crucial early years and months of their development.

I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry will soon give approval to Thames Valley Enterprise's bid to set up business link offices in Aylesbury and in two other towns in the Thames Valley area.

I welcome the measures that have been announced to improve the quality of the British work force and the priority to be given in the Government's public spending plans to education and training and to the apprenticeship scheme announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. As that scheme develops, he will be able to draw on the good practices of the many Government, voluntary and business initiatives up and down the country, including the scheme run by the Aylesbury industrial training group, which is an active client of Thames Valley Enterprise.

Despite the predictable criticism from the Opposition, there is everything to applaud about the principle of the job seeker's agreement. It is surely common sense that when an unemployed person presents himself or herself at a jobcentre, he or she should not only sign on and obtain a list of potential job vacancies or employers to approach but discuss a plan, tailored to individual experience and expectations, which he or she will be able to follow in his or her search for work.

There are measures that can be taken to improve the effectiveness of the job seeker's agreement and to ensure that, when it is introduced, it will be positively welcomed by unemployed people. It is important to ensure that Employment Service staff are adequately trained in developing such agreements with their clients. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, like every other Minister, has a finite kitty from which to draw, but I urge

him to look again at the time that we allow to elapse before such measures as job clubs are available to those who are unemployed.

Constituents of mine who have been unemployed for a long period tell me that they were at their most enthusiastic, determined and creative about finding new work in the weeks and months immediately after they were made redundant. By the time unemployed people qualify for extra help of the kind that we have understandably targeted on the long-term unemployed, much of that initial drive, commitment and self-confidence has dissipated. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider whether there are ways of giving people some of that assistance at an earlier stage in their unemployment.

Finally, I want to refer to the international scene. Despite what Opposition Members have said, the fact that the United Kingdom expects 2 per cent. growth at a time when our main continental markets are stuck deep in recession is something of which the Government and, more particularly, British industry, should be very proud. We should be looking not merely for a cyclical upturn in our main European markets but to long-term competitiveness in British industry and in industry throughout the European Community. We are talking about competing not just with Germany, America and France but with the fast-developing economies of the far east and, behind them, south Asia and Latin America.

Too often, the rise of the far east tiger economies is seen simply as a challenge to our way of life. That challenge certainly exists and increases the need for a flexible labour market and for an economy in Britain and Europe that fosters innovation and efficiency. The rise of Asian prosperity also presents a tremendous opportunity because it means that hundreds of millions of people in the world are now beginning to have the opportunity, for the first time ever, to buy consumer goods and services that people in western Europe have generally taken for granted for many years. It would be an act of madness for the European Community to connive at policies of protection that would cut us off from those millions of customers precisely at a time when we should be able to sell them the goods and services that we produce.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred in a celebrated recent article to some of the current preoccupations of the European Community as having all the quaintness and degree of efficacy of a tribal rain dance. The image that comes to my mind when I look at some of the goings-on in Brussels is one drawn from Galsworthy. It is of a group of elderly Forsyte aunts with a rather complacent view of past success and present wealth punctuated by the occasional querulous and disapproving comment about all those uncouth, self-made men in the new neighbourhood down the road who are rather getting ideas above their station. That is too often the reaction of EC civil servants and political leaders in some of our partners countries to the challenge and opportunity in the far east.

The Budget will be of great benefit to Britain's recovery from recession. Clearly, too, the continued prosperity of the British people does not rest alone on the Budget and the measures that will follow it. It rests perhaps above all else on the success of my right hon. Friends in fighting a battle of economic ideas both in the United Kingdom, against the forces of reaction on the Opposition Benches, and on a European scale—a battle for deregulation, for free markets and for free trade. I wish them well and I wish them every success in that task, for the prosperity of our nation and of the entire European continent depends crucially on their success.

8.34 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): It is with some pleasure that I follow the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington)—not because of the logical cohesion of his speech, but because of his disingenuousness in asking the Secretary of State for Employment to ensure that job seekers will welcome an agreement that will be imposed upon them, knowing that, if they refuse to sign it, they will not have their benefit reduced by six months but will receive no benefit at all.

As a Member who represents a London constituency, I awaited this year's Budget with some anticipation, not least—despite initial difficulties in obtaining a copy—because of the consultation document produced by the Secretary of State for the Environment earlier this month, entitled "London, Making the Best Better". I had read with interest how the Government would deal with crime in our capital, raise standards in education, improve housing and the transport system and, in the words of the Secretary of State,

"ensure a fair and open society for people of all backgrounds."

It was therefore with some regret that I noted the difference between that document and the words uttered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In my constituency—unlike that of the hon. Member for Aylesbury—unemployment is at heights that have never before been recorded. In some parts of London, unemployment is above not only the national but the European average, with 22, 26 and, in some parts of London, as many as 37 job seekers pursuing the same job.

Earlier this afternoon, the Secretary of State for Employment stated that the whole purpose behind the job seeker's agreement was to ensure that the job seeker pursued a job with all possible effort. As we are now a full member of the European Community, that presumably means that British job seekers will be expected to seek jobs on the continent of Europe. I wish that I had had the opportunity to ask the Secretary of State whether the financial provision that would make that possible will be furnished even though unemployment benefit is to be reduced.

Getting to the continent—indeed, getting around our capital city and these islands—is becoming increasingly difficult if one depends on public transport. The Chancellor pledged that British Rail and London Transport investment would be maintained at levels substantially higher than in the 1980s.

I am sure that no hon. Member will need to be reminded of which Government were responsible for the scandalously low levels of investment to which the Chancellor referred; nor that investment in our rail network is lower than it was in the 1970s, the 1960s or the 1950s; nor of the response of London Underground to the Chancellor's announcement about their forthcoming levels of investment. London Underground stated:

"There is not a limitless seam of self improvements to be mined and only so much can be achieved with an aged system, where many assets are way beyond their design life."

Compare that with the words of the Secretary of State's glossy brochure:

"London is developing to meet the challenges of the next century. Next year, Parisians will be able to get to London in around three hours using the Channel Tunnel."

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

What fantasy world is it that the Secretary of State is thinking of in which chic Parisians are whisked to and around a modern vibrant London on a modern state-of-the-art transport system?

Suppose that Parisians wished to visit London—and, following the kind and welcoming words that the Secretary of State for Social Security uttered at his party conference, what foreign national would not wish to visit this sceptred isle—what sight would greet them? Air that one can chew on, doorways that double as bedrooms and a transport system parts of which were designed not for the 21st century but in the 19th century.

Were Ministers out of the country last Thursday and Friday? Did not they witness or were not they told of the chaos which was caused when a fault in a 70-year-old cable —a cable laid before most of the Government were even born—shorted out and plunged half the underground system of our capital city into chaos and darkness?

Following that incident, I contacted officials of the Northern line, which serves my constituency. The officials informed me that that line has cables of a similar age and condition across their network. The officials added that, earlier in the previous month, a train had derailed near Balham, when more than 1,000 yd of track disintegrated. They added that, due to a lack of resources, the modernisation of a line that first opened in the 1890s would have to be shelved.

Today, the British Tourist Authority stated in the *Evening Standard* that investment in the Northern line—because of its link with the new Waterloo terminus—was vital for tourism in the capital. What has been the response of the Government to those derailments, power failures and continously shelved projects? The response has been to underfund London's transport budget in 1994-95 by £400 million.

How on earth can that be regarded as making the best better? Sixty per cent. of the signalling on Network SouthEast must be replaced within the next 10 years, and 2,000 miles of track must be renewed to avoid increased journey times. Over one quarter of the network's 6,000 coaches need to be replaced by 2002.

What was the Chancellor's response to those requirements? He cut investment in the rail industry by £247 million. Yesterday, the Chancellor was referred to in a number of media broadcasts as "the magician". That is clearly because he has completed the feat of sawing in half Britain's railway investment. Unfortunately, this feat is no illusion, and the pieces do not come back together again.

We heard a great deal yesterday about the burden that the nation is shouldering as a result of the public sector borrowing requirement. The Chancellor said that his overriding task was to place public finances on a sound footing. We heard nothing about the costs to the economy and to the Exchequer of allowing our transport system to decline to rack and ruin.

Perhaps, when the Minister winds up, he will outline how much revenue the City of London loses every year as a result of traffic congestion. Perhaps he would like to outline how much it would cost London Underground if all those who were trapped during last week's failure claimed compensation under the citizens charter.

Perhaps the Minister could estimate the attractiveness of the Central line to a foreign investor who is weighing up whether to sight his business in this country or in another European capital. Perhaps he could explain the environmental benefits of a road-building programme which will cost the taxpayer more than total expenditure on the railway industry, London Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority.

On Tuesday, the Chancellor claimed that any critic of the Government's car tax who claimed also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions would be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy. I would respectfully suggest that any Chancellor who claims to support both public transport and the environment, and who then embarks on a £2 billion road programme, has sailed so far beyond hypocrisy as to be now watching it vanish below the horizon.

The brochure "Making the best better" is littered with the phrase, "What is going on?" Probably that is the only phrase that is applicable both to that document and to the Budget. What indeed is going on in relation to the Government's transport strategy and their policy, such as it is, towards unemployment? I think that hon. Members and the people of this country have a right to be told.

8.35 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that other hon. Members want to speak, so I will attempt to be brief. It is good to follow the erudite speech of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), but I suspect that in my remarks we shall part company.

Any prudent Chancellor should set himself realistic objectives, and then expect to be judged by them. The present Chancellor set three key objectives—sustainable recovery, a climate for jobs and for growth, and low inflation. He said that the Budget would achive those, and would ensure sound public finances to secure a lasting recovery and rising living standards.

The Chancellor is to be congratulated on delivering a Budget that is capable of delivering all of those objectives. The previous Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), left two important legacies. The first was the unified Budget, which combined spending and tax raising, and the second was the separation of revenue and capital expenditure. The first of those is important, because it has ensured that economic management is now more efficient.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is to be greatly congratulated on holding public expenditure at the level he has simply by tightening the use of the contingency reserve, which is normally available as a surplus to Departments at the end of each year. The second is important because for far too long this country has spent too much of its wealth on consumption and not enough on capital projects.

In that connection, I warmly welcome the maintenance of the capital programme at £22 billion over the next three years. Unlike the Labour party, our Chancellor decides what is prudent to spend and then decides how to raise the funds. Labour does exactly the opposite. It thinks what it might like to spend, and then decides which taxes to raise to pay for that.

I warmly welcome the fact that the PSBR will shrink as a proportion of GDP from 7·5 per cent. this year to almost zero by the end of the century. That will be a remarkable

turnaround in the economy, which, when it is achieved, will take us to a situation similar to that which pertained in 1989-90. That can only be achieved by the fiscal responsibility shown by the Chancellor in the Budget and by holding public expenditure at a tight level.

To the dismay of the Labour party, and contrary to all the speculation before the Budget, we have not increased or widened the scope of VAT, with the small exception of putting VAT on insurance premiums. At the same time, there is a generous package of measures to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves—the sick, disabled and unemployed. I did not notice the Opposition giving one cheer of welcome for any of the measures. I have not noticed one shred of welcome for the fact that the Government have managed to fully uprate all benefits for inflation.

I was particularly pleased that the Chancellor announced a package of granny bonds, for which I have called for some time. I have constituents who have worked hard in fairly lowly jobs all their lives and who have saved a small amount which puts them above every benefit. They will take up these bonds with alacrity.

My constituents will also welcome the environmental fiscal measures which the Chancellor introduced in the Budget. The doubling of the home energy efficiency scheme is particularly welcome. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) is present. He and I, along with other hon. Members, have taken part in an energy efficiency inquiry by the Environment Select Committee. Our report said that, if we do not improve our housing stock, and particularly the energy efficiency of the stock, it will be like pouring carbon through a sieve. We must continue to ensure that our housing stock is more energy-efficient.

The human element in this is more important. The fuel bills of people on low incomes will be cut, so they will have much more of their income from benefits, or wherever else they get their income, to spend on other things.

I wished to concentrate my remarks on the measures for small and medium businesses. There are 1 million more small businesses today than in 1979. They have been the main contributor to the 1·3 million extra jobs to which the Secretary of State for Employment referred. Those businesses will continue to be the engine for growth in the economy.

I warmly welcome the package of measures for small businesses. I particularly welcome the fiscal measures—the raising of the VAT thresholds, the exemption of small firms from corporation tax, enterprise investment schemes, venture capital trusts and the new apprenticeship scheme which was announced this afternoon by the Secretary of State.

Businesses will be helped by the involvement of the private sector in large-scale public infrastructure projects. My constituents will particularly welcome the upgrading of the west coast main line, in which many firms in my constituency will hope to participate.

Even more than the fiscal measures, I welcome the deregulation measures for small businesses. In that respect, my right hon. and learned Friend announced four major measures. First, he said that he will look carefully at harmonising the tax and national insurance arrangements for employers. I would go further than that, and have a Government agent as a link man between all Departments and businesses.

When the VAT man came to inspect my books the other day, I told him of that idea, but he said that I could not expect a VAT man to be an expert on income tax, employment law and everything else. To which I replied that I was expected to be an expert on VAT as well as many other things. The costs to businesses could be cut by such an arrangement.

Secondly, I warmly welcome the limited audit requirements. As my right hon. and learned Friend has already announced, they mean that, with turnover between £90,000 and £300,000, companies will require an independent accountant's report, and below £90,000 none at all.

I have just one caveat which I hope my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary will bear in mind this evening—that creditors could be at risk. When the measure is introduced, I hope that those businesses will be required to add a caveat on their invoices, letterheads and quotations so that all their creditors and customers know precisely with what type of businesses they are dealing.

Thirdly, and most importantly, I warmly welcome the proposals on the late payment of debts. That will be difficult to achieve, but if a workable solution can be found, it will enormously improve the cash flow of many small and medium-sized businesses.

Fourthly and finally on these deregulation measures, I welcome the self-declaration and assessment measures for paying income tax. I particularly ask my right hon. and learned Friend to study other models in the world. I fear that there is a danger of the new system becoming even more complicated than the present system. In particular, I ask him to look at the American model, which is relatively simple and which I believe collects most of the tax due, which is surely the test that the measure will have to pass.

My right hon. and learned Friend has delivered a Budget to restore public finances and enterprise, which drove this economy during the 1980s to such success, and that against a background of low inflation, low interest rates and low unit wage costs. No wonder the markets have reacted so well during the past few days.

Under this Government, the economy will go from strength to strength as it is the only growth economy predicted this year and next year in Europe.

8.42 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I was particularly fortunate in having been given a sneak preview of the Chancellor's Budget speech about a week before it was delivered. I happened to be on a tour of a pools company at the time and we had reached the point where it kept its records of the major cock-ups in the industry.

I was shown a picture of a spot-the-ball competition which was run in a regional newspaper where, inadvertently, the ball had not been deleted. Fortunately, some eagle-eyed person on the paper had spotted that and alerted the company. Right next to the advertisement was a huge disclaimer telling the readership and the punters that the promoters had made that cock-up, that they were terribly sorry, that they would not be running the competition that week and that they hoped that people would understand.

In the following week's edition of the paper there was a story pointing out that, despite the disclaimer, 10,000

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

coupons had been returned—all missing the ball. I realised that I was being given a preview of the Chancellor's Budget statement, one week later.

The Chancellor was presented with a picture on which the ball was firmly planted. Not only that, but in large letters across the ball was written the word "jobs". In case the Chancellor missed that, one could see, hanging on the lips of the crowd behind the word "jobs". But he faced a dilemma because his party had already submitted its coupon and the crosses were all clustered on another part of the picture, so what was he to do? The Chancellor knew that those crosses would be the crosses that were cast in the future leadership election of the Conservative party. But the ball was somewhere else. It did not matter that his party was as disconnected from the game as they are from the real world outside; he had another agenda. So, like the magician that he is reputed to be, he put another ball in. He put it in the middle of the crosses that mattered, the crosses that belong on the Conservative Benches, and ignored the crosses that his Budget statement will impose on the backs of the British people.

I wondered, if the Chancellor had had the vision or the courage to see where the ball was, what he would have said. What would he have said if he had really been prepared to deliver a Budget statement that addressed the issue of jobs?

Well, today he would probably have insisted that we began the proceedings not with a debate which outlined how local authorities would face cuts and capping, but he would have been telling those local authorities, "Look, we are in a mess. I want you to go out and build and improve houses. I want you to go out and take the jobless off the dole so that we can take the homeless off the streets. That's what this country needs you to do. That's what I need you to do. We are going to build our way out of the recovery." That is what a Chancellor who was committed to jobs would have said.

The Chancellor would then have told engineers and designers in manufacturing, "Do us a favour, will you? Build us some buses. I am fed up with these milk floats rattling round our cities, congesting the roads where we used to have decent integrated public transport systems, with buses that we used to build ourselves. We are a Government who are in the business of buying buses and we want a manufacturing industry in Britain that is in the business of building them." The Chancellor would then have gone to the mills and said, "We need some steel. We need rolling stock for the railways. We need rail investment to match that in France, Germany and Japan. That is what the future of a manufacturing base of a Britain fit for the 21st century must be built on."

The Chancellor would have gone to the pensioners and said, not on a token basis but on a comprehensive basis, "We will come up with a plan to insulate your homes. It must be energy efficiency for all or none at all. We need such energy efficiency work because it is labour intensive. We can take people off the dole and give them skills and jobs as well as saving pensioners' lives. And while we are at it, you can forget about VAT on domestic fuel: it was a cock-up of our own, so let us ignore it if we can—least said, soonest mended."

The Chancellor would have gone to parents around the country and said, "You were absolutely right to demand a nursery place for every child that wants one, because they found in America that juvenile crime was best deterred in those areas where they invested in pre-school nursery care and education for all children. That is what we know we need to be doing here". The Chancellor would have said, "I can guarantee a Budget that will put books in the classrooms, in schools with roofs that do not leak any more".

As for the national health service, the Chancellor would have said, "We shall not be conducting this argument between the trusts or local hospitals and the district health authority, where they are left making decisions about shoving patients in critical states of health into the back of ambulances and sending them careering round local roads trying to find a bed that has a nurse to go with it. We shall be providing you with additional funding for the nursing staff that is needed to run our intensive care units properly within a properly staffed and resourced NHS."

If the Chancellor had wanted to be an environmentalist and an internationalist, he would have gone to the miners and said, "Look, we are really worried in Britain. Only a month ago the Government of the Ukraine reversed a decision to close down the remaining three parts of the Chernobyl reactor. Why? Not because they thought that it had suddenly become safe, but because they knew that they could not survive the winter without energy from those reactors. They know that they face a major environmental catastrophe. We know that they face a major environmental catastrophe." Three or four more Chernobyls would come across national boundaries and show no respect for Governments who have said, "It's nothing to do with us." The Government should be saying to the miners, "For God's sake lads, get down the mines and dig them some coal." We can afford to give them the coal. We need to give it to them because the choices in relation to environmental catastrophe are also our choices. The Government should also say to the miners, "While you're digging that coal, if there's any left over, pass it out among the pensioners until we get round to insulating their houses."

We did not get any of that in the Budget—instead, it took money out of the economy. Clearly, that will be deflationary and the problems of deflation will be borne by those who have least. It is a Budget under which the majority of people will pay for the recuperation of the rich. The period of unemployment benefit is to be halved, with no jobs at the end of it. The sick are to be taxed because they happen to be sick. Those with home insurance are to be taxed because they happen to have been burgled. Car owners will be taxed because they happen to have had their cars stolen. A Government who purport to be tough on crime will say "Tough" to an electorate who claim that the taxes are manifestly unfair. There is to be no strengthening of the position of the victims of household or car crime. Instead, they are to be punished for being the victims of the very crimes about which the Government wax lyrical when they talk of being tough and cracking down on crime.

The Chancellor tried to pretend a sense of even-handedness in the freezing of tax allowances, as though that was somehow neutral and there was no inflation in the economy. Life goes on and, unfortunately, such hidden taxes also go on. The idea of standing still and being neutral is absurd. It is a little like presuming that if we stood still on the deck of the Titanic we would all be fine. Sooner rather than later, someone would say to the person

next to them, "It's still going down." That is precisely what is happening in the British economy—it is still going down.

This part of the Budget amounts to little more than a series of windfall taxes for the Treasury. It would have been better if the Chancellor had said that. He will soon find himself the recipient of the deferred taxes that were provided for last year. They will soon start to roll into his coffers. The stand-still taxes will magically appear and fall in his lap. It is not magical, it is not divine and it is not an act of God; it is the act of a Chancellor who is not being honest about where and how he is raising his taxes. If nothing else, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has come close to resorting to the notion of immaculate taxation as a way of raising money.

I want to be sure that the House is clear about the proposed public spending cuts. There is no fat left on the bone of local government spending. There will be service cuts, which will mean job cuts which will result in rising unemployment and further calls on the Exchequer to pay for that. Goods will be in the shops but there will be no money in people's pockets to purchase them. Even by Tory standards, this threatens to be the shortest so-called recovery on record.

In response to criticism, many Conservative Members have asked, "What would Labour do?" It is not for me to offer a Labour manifesto, but I want to offer some ideas that this House and the Labour party should consider. We should not be apologetic about mentioning them. First, we should thank the Chancellor for the unified statement. It helps us to move forward and to deal with the areas on which we propose to spend money while identifying the areas from which to raise that money. It is not just about clearing deficits; it is about what we could do constructively with the wealth that the Government raise and use on behalf of the people.

However, we must point out that the Government have been forced into that position because after 14 years of their being in power the country is in deep economic trouble. The main conclusion to be reached is that reliance on the free market has been a catastrophe. Inasmuch as it is about putting Britain back to work, it has not worked at all. The Labour party should not collude with the myth; it should not endorse it as a notion worth considering. Instead, it should point in a quite different direction.

Labour should say quite simply that as a party it is unashamedly committed to progressive taxation. We should ask people to contribute on the basis that the more that they earn, the more they are able to pay. We should ask least from those who are least able to contribute. The progressive tax hand-outs to the wealthiest in society during the 1980s should be first among the targets of an incoming Labour Government. That source of revenue could be better deployed than being given to those at the top end of the income scale who have taken the money and done a runner.

We should begin with the notion of a 50:50 tax. All those earning more than £50,000 a year should be asked to pay at least a 50 per cent. rate of tax. That would raise about £4 billion a year. We should also think about what to do with empty properties. The Government like to say that they forced local councils to use empty properties, but we never hear any mention of the empty offices that litter our cities. Their owners get away with writing off money that should be going to the public purse. They should pay 100 per cent. of the unified business rate in the first year. In the second, that would be multiplied by itself. In the third year, it would be multiplied to the power of three. There should be a premium on putting the office space in our cities into productive use. Those who are happy to sit on those empty properties and leave them unused while people are scratching around to find premises from which to operate businesses are acting against the public interest.

Whenever the Government are in difficulty, they do not tackle the problem—they simply move the goalposts. A future Labour Government should study how the public sector borrowing requirement is defined. Rather than using local authorities as regulators of the economy, it is time that Britain embraced a different relationship between central and local government—something that is far better understood on the continent. Local government should have a degree of autonomy. Its borrowing should be based on its capital assets, with the requirement only that it balances its revenue accounts. It should function as a municipal enterprise. We should separate local and central Government borrowing and take those figures out of the PSBR.

We should also recognise the commitments of our party conference and commit this country to a level of defence spending equivalent to the European average. That would mean a PSBR recycling of £8 billion. Germany, despite its reunification problems, is still the strongest economy within the European Community. Its defence spending is 1·9 per cent. of its gross domestic product. If this country recycled its defence spending in the way that Germany has done, that would release funds equivalent to the entirety of manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom. A sum of £13 billion would be freed for productive investment in our manufacturing base. If Germany can do that from a position of strength, why cannot this country do it from the position of weakness?

I thought that the Chancellor's tax on flights was a novel idea. Bill and Betty on their way to Benidorm will pay an extra fiver, or about 3 per cent. of the cost of their return flight. I thought that the idea had something to commend it. If flights by passengers can be taxed, why not also tax the flight of capital? I asked the Library how much a 3 per cent. tax on that would produce. I was told that it would produce a massive sum, so I scaled down my original figure.

No less than £40,000 billion of speculative capital moves through the London foreign exchange market each year. If a tax of one eighth of 1 per cent. were levied on that amount, it would bring the Chancellor revenue of £50 billion. Even a Conservative Government would be hard-pressed to lose all that in one year. Why spoil the summer holidays of ordinary people but be terrified of spoiling the speculative holidays of the City of London?

An incoming Labour Government would need to know that the biggest threat facing planned recovery is the permanently deregulated financial markets—markets which have the power to undermine any serious, sensible investment programme aimed at delivering economic recovery based on full employment. An incoming Labour Government would need to examine the ways in which capital has restructured itself on a European scale over the past 15 years, and to understand why a Conservative Government no longer needs to rely on finance from manufacturing. Their source of revenue and political support is international capital, which does not give two hoots about jobs in this country.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

The Secretary of State mentioned the concept of jobless growth. At best, that is what faces us now. So long as we rely on the financial markets in the City to determine the pace and direction of economic policy, there will be no jobs in any growth package that emerges from this Chamber.

When the dust settles on this Budget, the British public will realise that the poor will be poorer, the homeless will still be homeless and this country will still be importing goods and exporting jobs. Far from having a Chancellor who is a magician, a one-in-a-million person and a visionary, we have a Chancellor who merely is one of the 10,000—a Chancellor who could not see the ball when it stared him in the face.

9.1 pm

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): The hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) made a number of points that I would have mentioned, had I more time. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was referred to earlier as neanderthal man. He seemed to take pride in that and was right to do so. By comparison with the hon. Gentleman, neanderthal man was advanced. The hon. Member for Nottingham, South, if not neanderthal man, was certainly homo erectus.

The failure of Oppposition Members to present any constructive ideas is the most distinguishing feature of the debate. We are used to them opposing Government policy, but they owe it to themselves and to their supporters to present a constructive view of their economic policies. We all have the message that they do not like the Budget—that is abundantly plain—but neither we nor the country know what are the Opposition's economic policies and how they would tackle the nation's deficit.

We heard many complaints from Opposition Members about the deficit, but have they ever asked themselves how it was created? It is the result of Government spending in areas that matter deeply to millions of people, including substantially increased health spending and increased expenditure in real terms on education in recent years. The Opposition must come clean: would they rather that money had not been spent? If they wanted that money spent, how can they oppose the Budget? That poses the Opposition with a real problem, and that is why we have not been given their answer.

I hope that in a moment we shall hear some constructive points from the Opposition, but the truth is that in their reaction to the Budget they have shown that they are bankrupt of any ideas for dealing with the deficit.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has approached the problem in a balanced and sensible way. If there is a deficit, it is because the Government are spending too much money and therefore it is right that the burden of the Budget should fall on that Government spending. That is appropriate. It is also necessary to raise taxes in order to create a balance and to sustain increased spending on important things such as health, education, and so on. I am sure that Opposition Members would agree with that. So why are we suddenly seeing the most massive volte face of modern political times with Opposition Members failing to approve the Chancellor's tax plans?

I shall continue to live in hope that some Labour or Liberal Democrat Member will propose a positive plan for dealing with the economic situation in this country. They owe it to us, their supporters and to the country at large to do that. Conservative Members are the only politicians who have answers to the problems that Britain faces today, and the country understands that fact more and more as time goes by.

9.5 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I am glad that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is present. The Budget, as with every Tory Budget, was greeted with glee by Tory Back Benchers. It always reminds me of Walpole's statement that today they may be ringing the bells, but tomorrow they will be wringing their hands.

This Budget, as with every preceding Tory Budget, unravels day by day and week by week. It is becoming increasingly clear that this Budget will force people to pay more and receive less in return. It certainly breaks yet more Tory election promises. Nowhere is that more true than in London. From April this year, London's 1 million pensioners will have to pay VAT on fuel and the Chancellor's compensation will not make up for that—50p is not enough. The cuts in funds for housing associations will mean that fewer houses are built in London so that more families will be left homeless or, almost as bad, left living with their in-laws. The cuts in Government funding for local councils announced today will mean that services will be reduced and council tax bills will rise. Many of London's 500,000 people who are out of work will face having their unemployment benefit stopped after six months having paid in for years on the understanding that they would be covered for a year. That is a case of the Government doing a Maxwell.

Children in London's schools face losing teachers, books, equipment and school dinners as a result of the Government's reduced funding for London's desperate schools. The rents of tenants of councils and housing associations will be forced up. Londoners will pay more insurance tax than people in other parts of the country because the premiums for household insurance are so much higher in London.

Those are all examples of people having to pay more and receiving less. It would appear that short changing the public is becoming official Tory policy.

London Underground is becoming a sick joke. Every day passengers experience delays and disruption. Every day they climb emergency stairs because lifts and escalators are not working. Every day somewhere on the underground system the signalling goes on the blink and millions of gallons of water seep into the tunnels. Deep down, tube travellers fear that one day that water will gush in rather than seep in. Last week a cable failed and closed down a substantial part of the system. Parts of the cable were said to be 70 years old. The younger parts, if that is they way to describe a cable, had been there for at least half a century. The average London Transport train is 24 years old. A quarter of the signalling equipment was installed 40 years ago; and, if people want to put that into perspective, 40 years ago England had never lost to a foreign team at Wembley.

The whole system is falling apart. Many passengers get a poor service. Staff are sick to death of taking the blame for all the inadequacies. With maintenance problems rising, fewer staff are being employed on vital maintenance work.

Things are going from bad to worse, but what do we get in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement? The Sir Humphreys worked on it carefully. It was worded thus:

"London Transport's investment programmes will be maintained at levels substantially higher than in the 1980s."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233 c. 25.]

My only response to that is, "I should hope so," but that is a cut in what was most recently promised. It is also a cut in what was promised in the Conservative party election manifesto, which said that £3,500 million would be invested in the Underground over the next three years. The Chancellor has broken that promise.

The most recent promise was to make £964 million available for investment in the tube system. The new figure is down to £900 million, but the real position is worse than that. Most of the money we have heard about will go on new projects. The money that is left to be invested in the existing system—the one that passengers have to use, which is falling apart—has been cut from about £525 million to £325 million. That represents a cut of £200 million, or 38 per cent.

I emphasise that that is a cut in spending on the shambolic system that is in existence. Every pound that is removed from that total results in more misery on the misery line, more breakdowns, more delays and more people stuck in tunnels and labouring up emergency stairs. That is what tube travellers face, even if it is not experienced by Ministers going round in their chauffeur-driven cars.

It may have been the fear that their chauffeur-driven cars might be delayed that caused even this Government to defer their proposal to deregulate London's buses. Bitter experience in other cities apparently revealed to them that bus deregulation could result in gridlock from Hackney to Hounslow, and would be unpopular with voters. Instead of fully abandoning that crackpot scheme, however, the Government say that they have just postponed it. Instead, they are to force London Transport to sell off its bus operations.

Until now, London Buses has had to compete with private would-be franchisers for franchises on various routes, but apparently it has been too successful. In open competiton, it has been winning too many franchises for the routes. That public sector competitor is to be closed and forced to sell its assets. When that happens, assets are always sold off at knock-down prices. I remind the Chancellor that takings for the Treasury from privatisation have been roughly half the book value of the assets of each nationalised industry.

It is worth reminding the Government, who say that they are promoting tourism, that today the British Tourist Authority has expressed concern about the possible disappearance of the red bus from London. It says that

"it is a symbol of London, which is recognised all over the world and an immensely valuable promotional tool."

Presumably, in future, brochures sent out by the authority to get people from around the world to come to London will contain photographs of buses of many colours instead of the red bus. Have the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Transport considered the impact on tourism and tourism promotion of getting rid of the red London bus?

One thing does not come at a knock-down price—the cost of travelling, not only in London but throughout the country. From January, passengers on London Underground, London Buses and Network SouthEast face average fare increases of 6 per cent.—three times the rate of inflation. That is another example of people having to pay more in but getting less back. The same increases will apply to many other railway passengers.

Will those other passengers get a better service? It seems unlikely. On some lines there has been a deliberate deterioration in the service following the introduction of the passengers charter. The journey times in some timetables have been lengthened so that a train that takes one hour 20 minutes for a journey is arriving on time; under the previous timetable, if it took one hour 20 minutes on that route, it would have meant that it was arriving 10 minutes late. It now meets the charter's requirement, so apparently everything is well.

Somewhere in the Budget figures, the Government will have hidden away the cost to the taxpayer of rail privatisation. They have managed to hide it until now, but it will come out eventually, and it will be money from the taxpayer and passenger, not a penny of which will be spent on improving services. Instead, it will be diverted into the pockets of merchant bankers and motley crews of City consultants.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, this is yet another Budget for the City. People in the City have been the principal beneficiaries of the Government's privatisation programme, and they have also done rather well out of our usually abortive efforts to involve private sector finance in railway projects.

All those projects have several things in common. They are announced with a fanfare of trumpets, and then they are re-announced time and again, by press conference, press briefings or official leaks. That is intended to achieve the impression that something is happening, and that Tory Ministers are skilled in negotiations. It would be hard to get further from the truth.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Transport were at it again yesterday and the day before, about the west coast main line. When the Tories came to power, that line, which links London to the major industrial and commercial centres in the west midlands, the north-west and the west of Scotland, was the most modern electrified railway in Britain. Today it is a national disgrace. It needs to be upgraded, but nothing has been done.

In his Budget speech, the Chancellor said:

"the Government are today giving the go ahead to three substantial new transport projects . . . the refurbishment of the west coast main line . . . linking some of the biggest cities in the country—London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 930.]

He carefully did not mention that not a penny piece of public money is going into the scheme, or that the improvements might well be confined to the line south of Crewe, or that nothing has been decided, no commitments have been entered into and no contracts have been let.

The Secretary of State for Transport announced yesterday that Railtrack would be "inviting expressions of interest" and that, in late 1994, a competition would be held to select a private sector outfit to modernise the west coast main line, but from Euston to Crewe only. Even if it all goes ahead, therefore, it will be another two years before the work starts on the ground. It will probably be the 21st century before any passengers see any improvements, and the Transport Minister warned yesterday that it will lead to higher fares.

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

All that was announced, with the usual fanfare of trumpets, as good news for the passengers, the railway supply industry and the taxpayer. There was the usual talk of its having top priority, competition's doing the work and a great commitment to driving it forward. Everyone who uses the line hopes that the project will succeed, but all this circus has happened before, and people will believe it when they see it.

It really has happened before. Five years ago, in late 1988, the Government and British Rail announced what they called

"first steps towards private sector investment in the Channel Tunnel rail link".

They were "inviting expressions of interest" and they proposed to hold a competition, so that someone from the private sector would build the line.

A year later, the then Transport Secretary, Cecil Parkinson, said that a preferred partner had been chosen —Eurorail, made up of Trafalgar House and BICC. It still needed the Government's final agreement, but Mr. Parkinson said that he was

"encouraged by the clear indications that the link could be financed commercially and brought into operation by 1998."

As everyone knows, that scheme fell through. Nothing has been done, and the completion of the channel tunnel link will be delayed to the year 2003.

When, two weeks ago, the Secretary of State announced that he was having another go at getting private investment in the channel tunnel link, we were back to expressions of interest and the idea that the Government might hold a competition.

Five years ago, when Cecil Parkinson made that prediction, the development of the channel tunnel scheme was at exactly the same stage as that of the west coast main line yesterday. Five years later, not a damn thing has been done. To say the least, the Government's track record is poor. They may make that approach work this time, but they may not.

The people, the industry and the commerce that depend on the west coast main line deserve better than that. That line is a major economic artery, and its future should not be decided by a private sector lottery. Strategic decisions are matters for Government. The work is needed and it must be done. How it is financed is secondary—just as the finance for the improvements in the east coast main line was secondary.

Why should people who rely on the west coast line not get the same treatment as those who rely on the east coast line? Clearly a commitment is needed from the Government; the absence of their unswerving commitment adds the sort of uncertainty that private investors are desperate to avoid.

Then there is the crossrail project for London. That is announced and reannounced with such regularity that it is rumoured that some Transport Ministers now believe that it has been built. But it has not, despite all the Budget promises to the contrary. The project is falling behind, not getting ahead.

Next there is—hallelujah—the Jubilee line extension, which has been on and off for years. Its construction apparently depended on whether the property speculators at Canary Wharf came up with the £400 million that they had promised. That may have sounded generous of them, but we must bear in mind the fact that their speculative development at Canary Wharf had already received more than £350 million in subsidies from the pocket of the taxpayer.

In the end, after long negotiations, the Government announced that the developers could manage to come up with a contribution of £300 million. However, that was not as good as it looked, because Ministers had not allowed for inflation. I am a simple soul, and I asked whether inflation had been allowed for.

I found out that the figure of £300 million that the Government had trumpeted—the Chancellor ought to pay attention to this, because it could affect his calculations—is to be paid over a 20-year period, starting on the day that the Jubilee line extension comes into operation, whenever that may be.

Its value will not be uprated for inflation, so if inflation averages 4 per cent.—the top of the Government's target range—over that 20-year period, the real value of the private sector contribution will have halved, to £150 million. If inflation averages what it has averaged over the past 20 years—9·7 per cent.—the private sector contribution will be worth about £70 million.

If that inflation rate of 9·7 per cent. were to prevail for 20 years and, because of stupid negotiations by the Government, the money were to be paid in the final year of the 20-year period, the private sector contribution would be worth precisely £20 million of the £400 million originally promised. With that sort of track record, one would not want the Secretary of State for Transport even to sell one's used car.

That is not the end of the story. One of the principal merits of the Jubilee line extension, in all the cost benefit analyses—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor of the Exchequer says that I am being ridiculous. Apparently he believes that it is right for the taxpayer to have to pay for the project at current values when the money is invested, but does not believe that the private sector should have to match that. In that case, he is not fit to be Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Jubilee line extension is, of course, the first major investment in the tube since the Victoria line was built some years ago. We shall invest more than £1 billion in the core London Transport underground over the next three years, and another £1 billion-plus in the Jubilee line.

That is about half as much again as we used to invest in the 1980s, and about seven or eight times as much as used to be spent by that ridiculous body, the Greater London council, which allowed the Underground to decay, and presided over the old wiring, the overmanning and the declining service. Supported by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the GLC preferred to spend its money on buying votes by keeping down bus fares. That was Labour's contribution to transport infrastructure in London.

Mr. Dobson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer in his present role ought to know that the Greater London council asked to invest more money, but was prevented from doing so by the Ministry of Transport and the Treasury. Indeed, the Chancellor may have been one of the Ministers who refused to give the GLC the permission.

One of the principal merits of the extension of the Jubilee line was to be a station at north Greenwich that would have allowed people from south-east London the

access to the tube system that they are presently denied. Although the north Greenwich station was listed in the Secretary of State's press release, as one would imagine, and featured on the map published with the press release, there was no commitment to build the station. The line will go through north Greenwich, but the station will not be built because it is dependent on raising some other private sector money and the Government have not quite got round to it yet.

There was another attempted con about transport in London in the Budget. The Chancellor said:

"the Government are today giving the go ahead to . . . the extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham".—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 930.]

That was partly true, but not the whole truth, because it is not the scheme that was originally announced. It is minus two important stations, which were left out for the most compelling of Tory reasons—they cannot get private sector help to build them. That brings the cost down, but reduces the usefulness of the line.

Rail schemes are not the only example of the incompetence of the Department of Transport. Its biggest spending programme is the roads programme and thus where its greatest incompetence is to be found.

The recent National Audit Office report shows that money from the roads programme that was spent on motorway widening has been squandered. Since 1989, the cost of motorway widening schemes has shot up by 46 per cent., and the National Audit Office estimates that it is likely to increase by over 78 per cent. by the time that the schemes are completed. Of the 18 schemes completed so far, 10 were investigated in detail by the National Audit Office and, on average, those 10 had cost double the original estimated cost. That is a disgrace.

We welcome the belated decision to reduce spending on the road programme, but call for some changes in its priorities. There is an opportunity for Ministers to be both right and popular—a novelty on both counts at the moment—but they are still insisting that roads schemes go ahead all over the country in the face of desperate opposition from local people, and are not going ahead with some schemes that are vital for economic development, the safety of passengers and would be clearly welcomed by local people.

Those vital schemes include converting the A1 north of the Tyne into a dual carriageway and ending the constant deaths that occur there, and to make the final few miles of the road to Dover docks into a dual carriageway. That would be welcomed by virtually everybody concerned, it would be good for the economy of both places and it would be popular. I hope that the Ministers will not use the Budget reduction as an excuse for further delays in those vital road-building schemes.

The Secretary of State for Transport announced today that he will be researching electronic road pricing for motorways. He has been seeing too many re-runs of "Doctor Who". That proposal has nothing to do with transport: it is just another Tory tax racket. I would not be surprised if they came up with a system that exempted Rolls-Royce drivers from having to pay. After all, the Chancellor's new airport tax exempts executive jets, as I am sure he will confirm.

If the Chancellor's little friend introduces motorway tolls on the road network, it is worth noting the list of the advantages of coming to Britain that was issued today by the British Tourist Authority. Item four of the 15 strengths is the high-quality, toll-free road network. That proposal will not do a lot of good. Did the Department of Transport or the Treasury consult the tourist industry or anyone before they went ahead with these propositions?

There is another aspect which the Chancellor did not mention in his Budget statement. He has raised tax on bus transport. Operators will have to pay the insurance tax, which will be passed on to the passengers. It does not stop there. The Chancellor put 3p a litre on road fuel duties and said that the duties would rise by 5 per cent. each year. What he did not mention—I cannot imagine why—was that the fuel duty rebate to local bus operators is not to be uprated, this year or any other year.

Perhaps he did not consult the Bus and Coach Council on the likely effect of this scam. The council has been in touch with me to say that its members are up in arms. The operators will pay more and more duty. They say that that will hit disabled and elderly passengers, because work to install wheelchair lifts and low floors will become more expensive relative to takings. Services in rural areas will suffer, orders for new vehicles are likely to be put back or cancelled, and fares will rise. It is like putting 2 or 3 per cent. VAT on public transport by the back door. It is entirely typical of the way in which this Government behave.

There is another transport aspect to the insurance tax. It is believed that about 1 million people do not insure their cars. A tax will be added to premiums that people do not want to pay in the first place. I freely acknowledge that such people are law breakers, but I know that we try to discourage and not to encourage law breaking. There is a danger that the imposition of that tax——

Mr. David Hunt: This is feeble stuff.

Mr. Dobson: The Secretary of State says that this is feeble stuff. If he thinks that it is feeble to say that we are in danger of increasing rather than decreasing the number of people driving uninsured vehicles around Britain's roads, there is something wrong with his own feeble mind. But he is only a lawyer, so I suppose that he can be excused. That also excuses the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Budget has done nothing for anybody in its impact on transport. It will increase the fares on trains, boats, aeroplanes and buses; I recognise that that does not rhyme, which is why the words were not used by Burt Bacharach.

The Budget will increase the cost of moving round the country and, as ever, the bulk of the increase will fall on the people who are worst placed to meet that cost. Well-off people will not suffer from those increases. Badly-off people will suffer from the increases, and many very badly-off people will suffer from the transport aspects of the Budget, just as they have been singled out by the Chancellor to bear the brunt of the Government's incompetence to date.

One of the most famous Tory Prime Ministers of all time, Benjamin Disraeli, was born in my constituency. He recognised—and convinced the 19th-century Tory party of this—that there was a danger of having a wholly alienated class of people who felt that they had no stake in the country. He said that it was vital that everyone was given a stake in the country.

The present Tory party is increasingly creating an alienated group, especially an alienated group of young people who feel that they have no stake in the country and

[Mr. Dobson]

that the Government have no commitment to their future. We allow that group to grow at our peril, and at the peril of our democracy.

9.33 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): I reject entirely the vision of despair for this country described by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). His speech, which was a rumbustious conclusion to a debate that started with jobs and ended with tubes, was nevertheless an important contribution. I am the first to acknowledge the importance of railway services and transport services more generally to the people of London.

Anyone who heard the hon. Gentleman talk would not have thought that we have a planned expenditure on transport of some £17 billion over the next three years; that we had a planned investment programme of £15½ billion; that there was a core London Transport investment of £1¾ billion; plus £1·3 billion on the Jubilee line, plus the docklands extension, plus the Heathrow express. One would not have thought that £3 billion was being spent on the railway, of which £2 billion was public money.

What seems to besot the hon. Gentleman is the matter of who pays: if it is public money, it is good investment; if it is private investment, it is not on. What matters to rail users is the delivery of the services and the infrastructure. That is happening.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Echequer opened his Budget statement by saying that his priority was to develop and sustain the recovery and generate a climate in which investment, jobs and growth were sustained and increased. That is at the heart of what all Conservative Members have reiterated in their speeches on the Budget. The fact that he put up front the priority of jobs along with growth was a significant signal on a day that started with a speech by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

We all acknowledge the importance of getting people back to work and the unacceptability of the present high level of unemployment. Little mention was made, other than by my right hon. Friend, of the more positive effect —that there are 1·3 million more people in employment than there were 10 years ago. Nevertheless, it is important that we strive to create more job opportunities for those currently unemployed.

That is what many of the programmes and changes proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor should bring about. It was therefore appropriate in the debate that the first Conservative contributor was my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), who has taken such a long and abiding interest in employment issues. He raised several points during his speech, particularly with regard to the new heating arrangements, the new subsidies and grants that will be available to help people with insulation.

My hon. Friend asked about windows, and we shall certainly take on board his point. As I understand it, the scheme was not intended to apply to that, but it should, because it may cover the whole cost and leave people with more resources to pay for other insulation methods. The importance of the scheme is that it will benefit half a million households and will be available not just to means-tested pensioners but to pensioners generally. That is a significant allocation of public money.

My hon. Friend also raised the issue of Maxwell, and as the Minister with responsibility for financial services, I shall take careful note of what he said. We are all extremely concerned with the plight of those who have lost money. That is why the Government allocated moneys on a short-term temporary basis as bridging finance until the restitution of assets can be made available. I appreciate all that my hon. Friend has said today, as I did his comments on fuel duty, the apprenticeship scheme and venture capital trusts.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who has written to me a number of times, raised the interesting question of the Treasury model. He put forward, as on previous occasions, the need for policy optimisation and the need for the formulaic approach of the model to be changed to take account of the policy maximisation theories and approaches that he has expounded.

We have reviewed many of the behavioural formulae that comprise the Treasury model and we have completed that process. As the hon. Gentleman will know, there is a regular process for re-examining that. We are open to suggestions. I have asked my officials to look carefully at his representations and I have offered him the opportunity to talk directly to Treasury officials. I hope that he will avail himself of that opportunity. I suspect that he and I may be in the minority of hon. Members who have taken the opportunity to use the Treasury model that was, and I hope still is, open to Members of Parliament. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of providing a service and a way to deliver indicators and statistics that can provide a firm foundation not just for Government economic policy but for Opposition parties, allowing them to attack and question the Government at any time.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we did not have an exchange rate policy and why there was no monetary policy. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor spoke of monetary matters during his statement, but foreign exchange currency rates are not a prime objective of policy. They are undoubtedly an assumption that we have to build into the mechanism, and we do that.

Dr. Bray: My central point was that if the Chancellor wants an efficient exchange rate and monetary policy—I was not questioning whether he has one—he needs to define it. That point was made by Sam Brittan in the *Financial Times* today. The Chancellor will find that if he does not deal with that issue now, he will have to do so at a later date, and I was offering him a way forward.

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful, but, for the reasons which I have given, that is not our approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) gave a warm welcome to the Budget. That he is very much in touch with his constituents was shown by the examples and representations that he quoted. I am grateful for his firm support of most of Tuesday's Budget statement. I particularly noted what he said about small businesses and about the package of benefits available, especially to elderly people. Like other hon. Friends, he mentioned the pensioner's guaranteed income bond. That is an important new facility available to those who want a regular monthly income.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) spoke about the enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital scheme. I regret the fact that he called it a confidence trick——

Mr. Alex Carlile: No, I did not.

Mr. Nelson: I immediately withdraw that accusation if that is not what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Carlile: I was speaking about the pensioner's bond.

Mr. Nelson: I shall be dealing with the pensioner's bond in more detail in a moment.

The two vehicles for investment should be important contributors to the liquidity of new businesses and we shall provide front-end tax relief for the enterprise investment scheme, but it will be at 20 per cent. instead of 40 per cent. One of the problems with offering the higher marginal rate for the EIS was that it would have facilitated round-tripping for business angels—those who take an interest in the business of the company and pay themselves a salary out of it. We hope that by instead allowing relief against losses, the lower rate of relief on capital will prove to be extremely attractive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) raised an interesting but much wider issue—the short-termism of our financial institutions, of Government and of investors generally. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has asked me to conduct an inquiry into that issue over the next seven months. The industrial finance initiative is two months under way, and the objective is to look at the financing of industry by all institutions and at the liability side of the balance sheet to see whether there is the short-termism to which my hon. Friend referred and whether supply changes can be made to increase the liquidity of capital to the manufacturing base, to help to start up companies and to ensure the reinvestment of capital.

I suspect that part of the answer will be that when one has a plateau of much lower levels of inflation and interest rates, there will be much more longer-term investment and one of the key components of the extent of overdraft finance and short-term investment interest has been the seeking of quick returns against rising and high levels of inflation. If we can deliver what the Government are determined to deliver—not just lower interest rates and lower inflation but a sustaining of those low levels—there is a real prospect of behavioural changes in the attitude of investors as well as of many others.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) spoke about massive tax rises. She got very excited and referred to Treasury Ministers as rampant lunatics at the driving wheel of the economy. We in the Treasury are modest men, cautious and conservative, and I did not recognise her description of us. However, when she picked up the autobiography of my late noble Friend Lord Ridley, I realised that she had been reading too many autobiographies, which perhaps accounted for her rather colourful description of us and of others.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary acknowledged yesterday that the Budget announced some tax increases above those that were announced earlier this year.

Mr. Prescott: Shock, horror.

Mr. Nelson: It is a matter of fact. There is no revelation in that. It is a serious Budget to address a serious situation. As my right hon. and learned Friend has said to the people of the country, unless we face up to our prime responsibility of addressing the state of the public finances, there is little prospect of sustaining the same level of personal prosperity or public services in the future. It is because of our desire to do both that we are determined to address the state of our public finances now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) spoke about transport policy—about the A418 in his constituency and about many other local and national issues that affect it. I particularly appreciate what he said about publicly financed projects such as the west coast project, the air traffic control project in Scotland and the docklands light railway. Those will be important projects, not recycled ones, and together with many other projects will bring real jobs, massive investment and lasting improvements to infrastructure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury also welcomed the small business package of measures. He made telling points about the issue of free trade and about the importance of Europe's adopting a free trade stance and not becoming protectionist against the free trade occurring in the Pacific basin and elsewhere in the world.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson)—who cannot be with us this evening—raised some points about London transport. I have already touched on those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made important suggestions, particularly with regard to small businesses. I am grateful for the welcome that he gave to the package of measures that my right hon. and learned Friend announced. We will look carefully at the detailed points that he made and I will write to him about those matters.

It was left to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) to do what no one else on the Opposition Benches has done. Despite our pleadings and challenges to come clean, not once has any Labour Member given the true alternative Budget strategy of the Labour party, other than the hon. Gentleman. I am grateful to him, and I appreciate his honesty and his coming forward with some ideas. Are those ideas the official Labour party policy?

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South said that he was in favour of a 50 per cent. tax rate for those earning more than £50,000 a year, and that that would raise some £4 billion. He was in favour of the top whack of rates and taxes on empty commercial properties, which would raise an indeterminate amount. He said that he was in favour of slashing the defence budget—not down to the European average, which would slash £8 billion off that budget, but down to the German level, which would slash £13 billion off our defence budget. It is at least honest. The hon. Gentleman at least made a suggestion, which is more than can be said for any Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. I want to know whether that policy is more widely held.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, South said that there should be a tax not only on the flights of people on holiday but on the flight of capital. That sounds as though he is urging the reintroduction of exchange controls. Is that the official stance of the Opposition? If so, we want to know. We want to know what the Opposition estimate the effect of that would be on inward investment and the creation of jobs, for which they so often call.

[Mr. Nelson]

My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Mr. Ainsworth) said that the deficit had built up because the Government had accepted their responsibility to the most vulnerable in our community. Goodness knows, there have been enough calls for that from the Opposition. We have delivered it to those who voted for it and have stood by them in difficult times. We are not ashamed of having fulfilled that commitment, any more than we are of saying, in improving times, that we have to address these problems.

In response to that, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made an interesting but derisive speech about the Government's motives behind the Budget. He said that the Budget would do nothing for jobs. He described it as a Budget for the City casino. He derided it, holding up announcements about the success with which my right hon. and learned Friend's strategy has been received outside the House. It is good news if my right hon. and learned Friend's Budget enjoys the confidence of international and domestic investors. The fact that the stock market has risen by 150-odd points in the last week and that long-term bond yields have come down is very good news indeed. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that, and I entirely reject his approach to the City and business, which usually comes out of the closet when he is pressed.

Opposition Members' true colours shine through in the deep prejudice that they bear towards business and enterprise and the financial services institutions. A recent remark by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras went to the heart of the matter. This is what he said about business and company directors:

"Yes, it's the politics of envy. We're envious of their wealth. These people are stinking, lousy, thieving incompetent scum."

That is the attitude of one of the Opposition spokesman——

Mr. Dobson: As a man who generally pursues the truth, may I put the record straight? In the newspaper piece, of which that was a snippet, I was referring to people who were very rich, had very large houses and very big cars and went on fancy holidays, but who paid their staff poverty level wages and supported the abolition of wages councils. I still regard those people as thieving scumbags.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman must take up his argument with *The Sun* rather than with me, but the words are typical and descriptive.

The theme running through much of the debate has been the importance of business as the generator of jobs and employment. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will acknowledge that, if we are to create greater prosperity through employment and through business, three things are essential: first, we need that elusive ephemeral trait of confidence and stability that has been lacking; secondly, we need low inflation and low interest rates, both of which have now been delivered; and, thirdly, we need as little taxation and as little regulation as possible on the income and employment-generating sector of the economy. The Budget delivers all three.

What of the Opposition's response to the Budget? What was the response of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on television last night? The hon. Gentleman went, as usual, as the disciple of despair—an ambassador for Armageddon. He stood up bleakly in front of the British people and trotted out figures that brought the country down again. He brought out a colourful bar chart showing selective dates and figures. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on!"] Oh, yes, they were very selective figures to show manufacturing output in Britain over 14 years. What the hon. Gentleman did not tell us was that had he taken figures from a comparable period from 1982 to 1992—from trough to trough—the picture would have been entirely different. Over that period, this country has had much higher manufacturing output than Germany, France or Italy. But the Opposition do not want to know the good news. They want to run British industry and British manufacturing down.

The business package announced in the Budget was an essential generator of prosperity and hope for the small and medium-sized enterprises at this stage of recovery. Let me reiterate some parts of that package: the increase in the corporation tax thresholds of the smallest companies will benefit some 30,000 companies and the foreign income dividends scheme, depending upon the behavioural habits of income retained in companies, will be worth some £100 million.

Mr. Prescott: What about jobs?

Mr. Nelson: I will come to jobs—the profitability and cash flow of British industry are important for jobs. The uniform business rate concession will be worth some £105 million. National insurance contributions will bring a net benefit, even after the additional cost of statutory sick pay changes. The late payment proposals will have a significant impact on the cash flow of industry.

The importance of the changes is that they will add to the liquidity of, and the investment in, British industry and business. That will create jobs in large and in small companies.

Mr. Prescott: How many jobs?

Mr. Nelson: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there are 2·7 million businesses, two thirds of which are small businesses. Three quarters of the employment in this country is in small to medium-sized enterprises. The combination of a reduction in interest rates and that package of measures will feed directly through to cash flow and give employment opportunities. There is no point in the hon. Gentleman going on about it—it is good news for British business. If he does not think so, British business does.

The Budget will not only promote enterprise and encourage investment but seek to reduce the red tape on business.

Mr. Prescott: That is waffle.

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Gentleman may think that it is waffle. I tell him to ask business men, who welcome the changes which will make a big difference to them. The changes with regard to audit requirements will benefit about 500,000 companies and will significantly reduce costs and provide employment-creating resources.

The increase in the VAT threshold to £45,000 will benefit 75,000 businesses. In addition—this has not received much comment—there is the change in arrangements for assessing national insurance contributions and income tax, which companies and businesses now have to work out laboriously; those arrangements will

be streamlined to make that work easier. I have referred to those costs to industry that prevent jobs. Our measures will release resources that will help employment.

In the final two or three minutes available, I will return to the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, who spoke for the Liberal Democrat party. At least his party came up with an alternative Budget in November, but it seems that the Liberal Democrats have got away unscathed from a lot of the criticism which has been rightly heaped on the Labour party.

The Liberal Democrats seem to face all ways. They will promise the earth to whatever audience they speak to, and they are a soft touch for every lobby. The party will not come clean on the fact that its alternative Budget proposes 1p extra on the standard rate of income tax and 4p extra on the upper rate. The party would impose a payroll tax which would be levied at 2 per cent. There would be increases in national insurance contributions. The Liberal Democrats promise higher taxes—we know where we stand and what impact that would have on businesses. Certainly, we know that that would not help employment.

We know that, as well as being a higher-taxing party, the Liberal Democrats are also a higher spending party. One issue that party totally forgets is the amount of the deficit. It simply will not face up to the responsibility of tackling the deficit. Perhaps that is not wholly surprising in view of a speech by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in Torquay in September. He said that there was no point in being mesmerised by debt, and that there was a strong case for limiting and targeting additional borrowing. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that, he is financially and economically illiterate. He is also irresponsible with regard to the affairs of the nation.

Like his party, the right hon. Gentleman does not have a clue about how to run the finances of the country. The party has no prudence and no responsibility when it comes to face up to the high and rising deficit. It is not prepared to announce how to deal with it.

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose*——

Mr. Nelson: I am not giving way. The hon. and learned Gentleman had his innings earlier.

The Liberal Democrats go up and down the country promulgating every policy which the party thinks will appeal to whichever audience it is speaking to at any one time. It would have us believe that, on the one hand, it will face up to the responsibility of sound husbandry of public finances and, on the other hand, it will not put up taxes. In addition, it has a magic way of increasing Government spending.

The Liberal Democrats have a fraudulent policy, a confidence trick and a stance which is wholy untenable. The electorate will look at them and examine the paucity of their proposals. The electorate will look at the black hole of the Liberal Democrats' economic policy and will understand that the party does not offer an alternative. Far from it—it offers the prospect of further job losses and a much higher tax burden. The party's preferences for second-guessing on public expenditure do not offer a way forward.

The Budget addresses the state of public finances. It does not take an easy or opportunist way out by seeking to please all opinions with money which the country cannot afford.

My right hon. and learned Friend knew when he framed the Budget judgment that, unless we were prepared to face up to tackling that deficit, we would run into the problems of a credit crunch at some stage in the future, when markets simply would not be prepared to finance a rate of borrowing of £1,000 for every man, woman and child in this country. He knew that unless we faced up to that, our public sector borrowing requirement would be an increasing proportion of our gross national product.

The vote of confidence, the money that has flowed into Britain and the jobs that will come from it come from people who recognise that we are on the right track, that we are addressing the issues and that we are living up to the necessity of reducing the amount of loans as a proportion of GNP. That is the responsible way forward. That is the way in which the Conservative party will ensure not only that we have electoral support——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

ESTIMATES

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 131 (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [25th November] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Friday 17th December, this House shall not adjourn until the Speaker shall have reported the Royal Assent to any Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 7665/93 and 8012/93, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by HM Treasury on 18th October, 5th and 22nd November 1993, relating to the draft general budget for 1994, the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 2nd November 1993, relating to a revision of the financial perspective, and European Community Document No. 7194/93, relating to the internal market, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee B.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Child Support Agency

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10 pm

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): This debate is about massive injustice being inflicted on families throughout Britain. Members of Parliament on both sides of the House are being deluged with complaints about the Child Support Agency. That is clear from business questions and questions to Ministers, and many of the cases are extremely disturbing, with havoc being created in the lives of thousands of ordinary families, more than 200 of whom were here today in the Grand Committee Room. It was unfortunate that the Department could not send along even one representative to address their grievances.

The national and local press have been active in campaigning on the issue and I pay tribute to the way in which they have highlighted the impact of the agency on families. I shall give examples of some of the worrying cases, but the important thing tonight is to concentrate on the principles involved.

The first thing to establish is that the agency is designed primarily to help not children, but the Exchequer. Parliamentary answers show that only about 10 per cent. of the money collected will go to the children. The other 90 per cent. will go to the Exchequer. Therefore, CSA does not stand for Child Support Agency but for Chancellor Support Agency.

We shall probably be told, rightly, by the Minister that with a £50 billion deficit the Government must be more careful than usual with public money. But in that case they must be honest with the public and describe the charge for what it is—a tax. It is a tax that is dramatically falling on certain groups of people in society and in the majority of cases it is, in effect, a divorce tax. Furthermore, the tax is retrospective, tearing up previous agreements and even court orders. It is interesting that, in the past, retrospective legislation has been looked on doubtfully by the House. But in this case we have retrospective legislation with a vengeance.

The tax will have immediate effect. When the Chancellor, who has just departed, introduced the increase in wine duty he left it until the beginning of next year before it came into effect, and similarly with other Budget measures. When the Government introduced the unified business rate, the ill-fated poll tax or the council tax, they built in transitional arrangements for individuals and local authorities. But there is no such transition for parents under this scheme. The full weight of it falls on them at once, often with dramatic increases in their obligations and often with a considerable debt arising from the delay between initial notification and the final assessment that comes through from the agency.

Nor does the agency seem to take account of payments made to the spouse during that period, so payment can be made twice over. Stopping payments in that period naturally causes enormous hardship and friction with the ex-spouse. Yet such debts can run into hundreds, even thousands of pounds in some cases, and impose a major burden on the individual and his second family. Even those who believe in the fundamental objectives of the Child Support Agency would, I am sure, accept the need for phasing in the increase because decent hard-working families, who have carefully worked out their budgets and been prudent in taking account of their obligations, find themselves faced with a dramatic change in their circumstance which threatens to plunge them into debt.

One of the arguments, or rather alibis, put forward by the Government and some of their apologists is that the Child Support Act 1991 supposedly received general support when it was introduced and that unforeseen problems arose only later. That mythology has formed the basis of a number of articles in the quality press.

The reality is rather different. It is true that there was general support for the principle of parents supporting their children. I am sure that that view is shared by all hon. Members here tonight. However, on Second Reading of the Bill the Opposition moved an amendment declining to give it a Second Reading. More important were the perceptive reasons given for that view. The amendment was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who said that the Bill

"leaves lone parents on Income Support not one penny better off, makes lone parents worse off where they receive maintenance just above Income Support levels and thus lose access to passported benefits, allows maintenance payments to be disrupted if the absent parent defaults, does not take account of property settlements which could lead to an increase in orders for the home to be sold"—*[Official Report,* 4 June 1991; Vol. 192, c. 194.]

and so on. Many of those problems have come back to haunt us.

Those points were reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). In winding up the debate, she said:

"Many separated or divorced women have negotiated with their former partners, without rancour, an arrangement whereby they forgo any maintenance but are allowed to keep the family home for themselves and their children. We must bear that in mind when we consider figures on the number of people who do not receive maintenance. The Bill could undermine that principle."

My hon. Friend referred to the question of shared access, saying:

"The child may spend weekends and school holidays with its father . . . In such cases that is seen as the father's contributon to the child's maintenance, although no formal handing over of money is involved. Are we saying that that arrangement must change—that a formal maintenance order must be made, disrupting and undermining the understanding way in which the couple may have dealt with separation or divorce?"

My hon. Friend also said, perceptively:

"I fear that we are in danger of impoverishing the second family to provide for the first."—*[Official Report,* 4 June 1991; Vol. 192, c. 236.]

That last point has been made to me time and again, in letters and at meetings, by second wives from across the country.

It was not just the Opposition who pointed out the flaws in the Bill. The Law Society—the body for England and Wales and that for Scotland—warned against a formula that it said was too rigid and would produce harsh and arbitrary results. It also argued for the need for a transitional phase and a more flexible system. It also said that the agency was inconsistent with the principles of the Children Act 1989, which was designed to ensure that all proceedings relating to one family could be heard in the same court. The point about that is that the court can look at the wide range of different individual circumstances that do not fit into the straitjacket of a national formula administered by a faceless bureaucracy. Unfortunately, the Government did not listen and the current chaos is the result of that.

I would argue that the agency is also misdirected in its priorities. The Second Reading debate included a number

of references to targeting those fathers who had abandoned partners and children and were paying nothing. However, it appears that those are not the first priority of the agency —that is for new cases. They are not the second priority —that seems to be where the mother is on benefit and the father is already paying maintenance. In other words, he is in a job, is fulfilling his obligations and is easily traceable. Such fathers are the soft, easily identifiable targets where the agency can show some quick and easy results and possibly earn bonuses. Those fathers evading payment appear to be only the third priority and there is already anecdotal evidence that a number of them are finding ways to get round the system.

What about the actual operation of the rigid formula, especially the way that old, clean-break orders are being ignored? As I said, that is where retrospection really comes in with a vengeance. It has caused enormous problems because no account is being taken of the transfer of the matrimonial home and, in particular, the payment of the mortgage on it. In those instances, the parent is faced with an appalling dilemma. He could pay maintenance, default on the mortgage and risk making his children homeless. One person who came to see me could not even default on his mortgage because it was with his employer and he would have lost his job. Alternatively, the father could pay the mortgage but not the maintenance and risk imprisonment. Of course, if he were a police officer, he would not have even those options as he would lose his job for being in breach of his conditions of service. That is the stark prospect facing many serving officers, a number of whom were at the meeting today and have been at other meetings around the country.

The formula does not take account of debts, many of which could have arisen as a result of the divorce, or the cost of contact—particularly when the ex-partners live some distance from each other. If for financial reasons parents will see less of their children, how will that benefit the children or the country? How will that help to produce the better citizens of the next generation? The formula also does not allow for the cost of travelling to work. One couple was told that the husband did not need a car, but the wife rightly pointed out that her husband, who would have to pay the support, had to be at work by 4 o'clock in the morning because he was a long-distance lorry driver.

The agency takes account of only 50 per cent. of pension contributions. A number of categories of workers, such as those in the emergency services, make mandatory contributions, but only 50 per cent. of their value can be taken into account.

All of that shows that the agency does not live in the real world. Its monthly-paid bureaucrats have difficulty understanding that overtime is often an erratic element in a worker's pay packet. An individual may be assessed during a period when his employer is doing well and has a number of orders. When that period has ended, the worker goes back on ordinary pay but still has to contribute a substantial sum at the higher assessment.

There seems to be no understanding of the effect of assessments on second families, especially when they are caught out by the transitional provisions. A father will have to pay for the children by his first marriage, but the children that he looks after in his second marriage may not be the subject of any support. That wife, because her new husband is employed and not on benefit, is not considered a priority case for support from her first husband. Real presure and crisis is forced on such families. The phrase used in hundreds of letters to me is, "Our world has been turned upside down". That is a real cry of misery.

In the past, courts could examine individual cases and circumstances and make judgments accordingly. They did not always reach the right decisions and there were often variations across the country. The Government would have done better, however, to set broader national priorities and categories subject to the broader wisdom of the courts—rather than have that overridden and be replaced by the CSA's rigid national formula, which is a dramatic assertion of the doctrine that the man or women in Whitehall always knows best.

There is special resentment at the £78 charge made for the agency's unwanted intrusion into family affairs. It is probably a precedent for future Government fund raising, and is about as insensitive as the policy of the Chinese who, after shooting a person, charges his or her family the price of the bullet.

Families throughout the country are facing a bleak Christmas as a result of the agency's activities. Only 56,000 families have been assessed; a further 500,000 are in the pipeline. We are seeing only the tip of the iceberg, but we already know the anguish that the agency is causing among thousands of families throughout the country. The CSA threatens second families and places them under enormous financial pressure. It reopens old wounds between divorced couples, in respect not only of financial arrangements but of access and the disposal of the former matrimonial home. The agency's activities run counter to the law on clean-break divorce and penalise those in work who are trying to build a new family life. It is unfair, and the problems are growing by the day.

The Government acknowledged public concern about the agency by establishing their own review. The Minister must accept that the CSA needs a fundamental rethink. The Government should suspend the agency's operations until it can be given fairer and better guidelines or the work returned to properly resourced courts which can deal with the problems in one go. That way we could bring hope before Christmas to thousands of despairing families not only in my constituency but throughout the country.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): I congratulate the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Speller) on securing the debate and providing the House with an opportunity to debate this important issue. I know that it is an area in which he has great interest and I look forward to further dialogue with him on the subject on Monday.

The hon. Gentleman made a number of valuable comments with which I shall deal shortly. I am aware of the lobby this afternoon. It is not always possible for Ministers to attend, but the hon. Gentleman was kind enough in his letter to me to suggest that we sent someone along. I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) who went along to that meeting and put a case. It was slightly churlish of him not to mention her contribution to the proceedings.

Mr. Spellar: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Burt: I am sorry, but no. Before I deal with the detailed matter, I should like to say a few words about

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some of the fundamental issues that are at stake. It might be helpful if I were to remind the House of the purpose of the child support scheme and its provisions.

The purpose of the Child Support Agency and the Child Support Act 1991 is to obtain maintenance for children and to improve on a discretionary court-based system, which had failed to stem a decline in the payment of maintenance. The scheme is designed to ensure that, wherever possible, parents pay for the maintenance of their own children, rather than making other people, including other parents, do so through their taxes. This principle was widely welcomed, as was the move away from the courts, by hon. Members from all parties and by the relevant lobby groups when the Child Support Act was introduced in 1991, and is unchanged.

The principle is not a new one. Parental responsibility for children has long been enshrined in the law of this country. However, before 1991 fewer than one third of lone parents received maintenance from the child's other parent. By 1997 our aim is to have raised that proportion to half. Maintenance payments are a valuable income which lone parents can take with them when they return to work—which many wish to do. It will ensure that many will no longer have to rely on income support as their main source of income.

The Child Support Agency has figured prominently in the media in recent weeks. However, much of the coverage has been misleading and one-sided. The majority of comments have centred around the amounts of maintenance that absent parents are being asked to pay. Little attention has been paid to the substantial benefits for children to be derived from regular payments of maintenance.

We said in the White Paper, "Children Come First", that the new scheme was expected to increase the amounts of maintenance paid by absent parents. We repeated this in debates on the Child Support Bill and the regulations and continued to make the point on numerous other occasions. We recognised that there would be concerns expressed by absent parents, which we are now seeing as the measures begin to bite. We must, however, remember that there are two sides to every coin: yes, absent parents are being asked to pay more, but parents with care are now receiving realistic amounts of maintenance for the first time.

It is understandable that absent parents, some of whom have previously paid little or nothing towards the maintenance of their children, and others who may have paid less than the formula now requires, would not welcome being made to pay more—I understand that—but many of those absent parents, wittingly or unwittingly, made settlements which involved any maintenance that they paid being supplemented by the taxpayer. It is clearly reasonable that those absent parents who can afford to do so should make a more realistic contribution towards the cost of maintaining their children, without such taxpayers' interest.

Contrary to some media reports, the amount of maintenance to be paid is determined not on an arbitrary basis by the Child Support Agency or by faceless bureaucrats, but by a formula which was extensively discussed both inside and outside Parliament and put into legislation. It ensures that both parents, where they can afford to do so, contribute to the maintenance of their child. It produces predictable and realistic levels of maintenance for children, taking account of the fact that they do not look after themselves, and at the same time ensuring the children share in their parents' increasing income. This important principle has not been brought out in media stories.

Another crucial factor rarely mentioned is that the vast majority of absent parents will be left with 70 to 85 per cent. of net income after paying maintenance, and those with low incomes will usually be left with an even higher percentage. In fact, it has to be said that some of the media coverage has been unbalanced, with journalists being selective, to say the least, with their presentation of the facts, very rarely taking the trouble to research fully the true circumstances of the parents with care and their children.

In the vast majority of cases in the papers, such research would reveal a parent with care and a child on benefit. One particular documentary, ITV's "World in Action", presented a series of cases, subsequently researched by *The Sunday Times*, which was heavily critical of the programme. *The Sunday Times* reporter who spoke to the ex-wives said that "World in Action" had made little effort to examine the full circumstances of the absent parents interviewed. The producer admitted to the newspaper that he had not contacted former partners.

In sensitive matters such as these—I appreciate the sensitivities on both sides—a greater willingness to present both sides of a difficult case would be better for everyone than merely putting a partial case. It would please me immensely if other sections of the media were to follow the lead of *The Sunday Times* so that the public could see some of the true benefits to children that are being derived from the scheme.

I recognise that people have genuine concerns about how the detail of the scheme has affected them, and I do not minimise the effect that this must have, but I have undertaken, as have my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, to examine those concerns and we are continuing to do so. I remain convinced, however, that the basic principles of the new scheme are sound and stand up to scrutiny and are supported by the vast majority of people in the country. If it is apparent that the scheme can be improved further, I will obviously ensure that that is done.

The hon. Gentleman made some specific points and I shall do my best to cover as many as possible. He said a lot, however, and I may not be able to cover it all.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the take-on strategy. Given the number of families involved and the need to ensure that each case is handled fairly and accurately, it was not possible to implement the new arrangements for all families overnight—but it was never our intention to do so. The agency aims to take on its full work load by the end of March 1997, but until then we have to prioritise the cases that it handles.

This year, the agency is giving the highest priority to all new cases, which have nowhere else to go. Newly divorced or separated parents who have care but do not have a court order or written maintenance agreement and who are not on benefits are no longer able to seek maintenance through the courts.

The second priority is parents with care who make a new claim to income support, family credit or disability working allowance. After these cases, the agency will cover, over the next three years of operation, cases where

the parent with care was already getting income support in April. Less than a quarter of such cases are receiving maintenance. The agency has always made it clear that, within this group, priority would be given to the parents with care receiving maintenance, and this strategy was set out in the leaflet, "Parents Who Live Apart", which was published in January 1993 and sent to all hon. Members.

The agency will also consider sympathetically, in the light of individual circumstances, any existing benefit client who seeks to be taken on early, including those where the absent parent has been avoiding paying maintenance.

The hon. Member for Warley, West mentioned targeting, which has caused much concern. It is simply not true that the agency is concentrating solely on absent parents who are already paying maintenance. We have always made it clear that all types of cases would be dealt with. The agency expects to deal with just over 1 million cases during the year, almost 640,000 of which will involve absent parents who do not currently pay any maintenance.

In the seven months up to 31 October, the agency took on 616,000 cases and estimates that more than 50 per cent. —some 330,000—were not receiving maintenance. This proportion will increase as the year progresses. I advise the hon. Gentleman that in nearly a third of assessments the absent parent has been assessed as either not liable to pay maintenance or to pay a nominal amount. That is hardly commensurate with targeting payers.

The agency has had considerable early success, which has not received the publicity that it should have, in finding missing absent parents—those parents who, unlike many others, have shirked their responsibilities and, in many cases, disappeared without trace. In the cases completed so far, it has managed to trace more than 9,000 absent parents where the parent with care did not know their whereabouts—a success rate of more than 90 per cent., which was unmatched by the previous court system.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of clean-break settlements. Much attention has been paid to what are widely known as clean breaks. There can be no clean break between parents and children, and there never has been under the court system. It has always been possible for the parent with care to return to the court to reopen the need for child maintenance if circumstances changed.

Where a parent with care has gained sizeable equity in a property, the true effect in most cases being dealt with has been that she has acquired a material asset while the taxpayer has supported her children's basic living costs. It must be remembered that for many parents with care this transfer of property is not one of a free-standing asset but one with an associated level of debt through the mortgage. In those cases where the parent with care is reliant on income support, the interest on this debt falls to be paid by the taxpayer.

Advocates of that approach overlook a real problem. In the vast majority of such cases, there is insufficient information to determine what proportion of any settlement was attributable to spousal maintenance, which is not dealt with by the agency, and what is attributable to child maintenance, which is dealt with by the agency.

It should be emphasised that the child support formula provides for the practical consequences of a clean break settlement because it allows for the absent parent's housing costs. For example, in not taking any equity from the family home the absent parent may well incur greater expenses in re-establishing himself in a new home. The formula allows for those costs, and the amount of maintenance that he will be asked to pay will thus be reduced.

The hon. Gentleman made the allegation that the Child Support Agency only benefits the Treasury. That is not the case. I emphasise, first, that the services of the agency are available to parents who are not in receipt of any benefit, so it is wrong to suggest that the scheme is purely a money-saving measure. The question which should be asked is not, "Should we have introduced an Act to save the taxpayer money?" but rather, "Should the taxpayer have been involved in the first place?" Where the absent parent can afford to pay, I think that the answer should be no.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the subject of second families and the difficulties caused to them. I understand his worries. The formula includes, as he is aware, a protected income calculation, which is designed to ensure that absent parents are not asked to pay maintenance at a rate which would take them down to income support levels. That is an especially important safeguard for absent parents with second families. The calculation takes account of the expenses, not only of the absent parent, but of his new partner and any stepchildren. It is in that part of the calculation that the absent parent's new partner's income is taken into account, because the entire household's income and expenses are compared to ensure that they keep a margin of income above income support levels. That calculation can only reduce the amount of maintenance that an absent parent is required to pay. Absent parents will never be required to pay full maintenance to the first family if it would reduce the living standards of the second family below the protected level. To that extent the second family takes precedence over the first.

The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the issue of phasing. As he is aware, some absent parents will have the formula amount introduced in two steps to help them adjust. He is aware of the provisions. It has been said that that matter could be reconsidered and that is one of the subjects that the current Select Committee is considering.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the important issue of policemen, service men and others and I am anxious to make a comment about that. We have spoken to the Home Office and the Minstry of Defence about that issue. They are quite categorical. Policemen and service men will not lose their jobs because of increased liability for child maintenance. Counselling will be available for individuals who experience difficulty in managing debts and help will be given in dealing with creditors. The police force and the services are well aware of the problems that can arise from an unexpected debt and it is not fair to suggest that in all those cases, or in any of those cases necessarily, people will lose their jobs solely because of the matter that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned expenses. It has been suggested that the assessment formula should take account of the absent parent's expenses, such as the costs of travel to work, contact with children and debts. The formula does make provision for essential living expenses and, additionally, absent parents are left with a significant proportion of their net income after paying maintenance. That ensures that they have choices about how to spend their disposable income.

However, as I put as strongly as I could to the Select Committee, we do not think it right to allow for other

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expenses in the formula, as that gives them precedence over the basic needs of their children. To do so would create pressure for more and more expenses to be defined as essential and for child maintenance to be pushed further and further down the list of priorities. The ultimate result would be a return to the unrealistically low sums which were common under the previous system and indeed the conditions that inspired the House to make a change from the previous system, because it did not adequately deal with the situation affecting the children.

The hon. Member has again called for the suspension of the operations of the Child Support Agency, as he did last week. Even if it were warranted—which it is not—to suspend the operations of the Child Support Agency, it completely ignores the impact of such action on many thousands of children, often in situations in which no maintenance had previously been paid. If the hon. Gentleman thought through the consequences of such a suggestion, he would realise that it would result in great hardship. Many parents with care would find that established maintenance payments would suddenly cease, and many would, therefore, be forced back to benefits. I am afraid that only a failure to understand both sides of the issue could have led the hon. Gentleman to make such a call.

I shall briefly make two or three final points. First, as to shared access, where an absent parent looks after a child for a period, the hon. Gentleman knows that that is catered for in the formula. Secondly, in relation to the question of overtime, the agency well understands that earnings can fluctuate and it can take account of that. Indeed, one of the benefits of the previous system was that it was difficult to go back to court to deal with variation orders. Under the new system, that can be done and it can be done without any increase in fees. If one went near a court in the past and one was charged new fees by a lawyer, it would turn out an awful lot more expensive than the fees charged by the agency.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman made arguments about the support offered by his party, in one way or another, for the principle of the Child Support Act 1991. As far as I am aware, the Third Reading of the Act was not opposed by the Opposition. The Labour party conference of 1992 urged repeal; the Labour party conference of 1993 did not urge repeal. I am still not quite sure whether the Labour party has now changed its view in any way.

The hon. Gentleman has advocated a return to a court-based system in what he said at the end of his speech. If that is now the view of Opposition Front Benchers, I would be very interested to hear it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 3 December 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Friday 17th December, do adjourn until Tuesday 11th January.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Madam Speaker: I have to inform the House that I have not selected either of the amendments. Of course, hon. Members are free to vote against the substantive motion if they are opposed to it.

9.35 am

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful to be called this morning, Madam Speaker, and I am particularly grateful to be called so early. There were times in the old days when the House had Adjournment debates which were not restricted to three hours, and which went on and on. It was a good idea to change the format, because a three-hour limit on the debate means that we have quite short speeches.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Get on with it.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Get on with what?

I want to raise a subject that I have raised before, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will not be surprised to hear it. It is not an airport or a hospital, but the question of affordable housing. I think that housing is a vital concern.

I fear that, if we are not careful, tenants in low-cost housing will increasingly depend on housing benefit. Any reduction in the housing association grant is likely to increase the numbers of tenants who are dependent on housing benefit, and more tenants would be trapped in the poverty trap.

I remind my right hon. Friend that the Select Committee on the Environment looked at the matter some time ago, and it fired a warning shot across the bows of the Government about the serious consequences if the rate of the housing association grant should fall below 67 per cent. The rate has fallen already to 62 per cent.

The Government must also bear in mind the effects, not just on people who need housing, but on the construction industry. I am told that around 500,000 construction workers have lost their jobs during the past three years. It has been said over and over again that the cost to the Government of every unemployed person is around £9,000 a year because of the cost of providing benefit, added to which is the amount lost in income tax and national insurance contributions.

The diminishing of the housing programme is bound to inflame that situation. We desperately need more low-cost housing. By building more, we will lower the unemployment figures, and also rehouse people who are in urgent need. I think particularly of the homeless, of people who are leaving institutions for care in the community, and of the increasing number of elderly people who require specialist housing.

I worry about people who want to help themselves and who go out to work, often for low wages. They sometimes find that they would have been better off if they had not gone to work but had sat back and relied on benefit. I do not want to see the growth of a benefit-dependency culture. I want more to be done to help people who try to help themselves. That particularly applies to younger people, but the elderly are also disadvantaged.

All hon. Members will have elderly constituents who, during their working lives, scrimped and scraped to put something aside for the proverbial rainy day. Those people find when they retire that their savings do not help them at all when it comes to getting assistance. As the rules apply at the moment, people with capital of between £3,000 and £16,000 find that interest is assumed—that is the all-important word—at the rate of £1 a week for every £250 of capital. I wish that somebody would offer me those terms for my savings—I would put my money with them immediately.

That gives the elderly no encouragement to save; I believe that it gives them a disincentive. I asked the Government earlier this year urgently to re-examine the situation, so far without a response.

I am currently concerned about the annual development programme. In the immediate future, the rented programme will be protected, but I am worried about what will happen in a few years' time. The 12 October edition of *The Financial Times* correctly forecast a £300 million cut in the annual development programme.

Working on that basis, the Oxford Economic Forecasting Unit predicted the loss of a further 8,000 jobs in the construction industry. However, the increased benefit payments and the loss of income tax and national insurance contributions will mean that the net saving will be only £200 million in the public sector borrowing requirement, not the £300 million that the Government are apparently aiming for. The net effect will be more unemployment in the construction industry and more misery for homeless and overcrowded families. On social and economic grounds, therefore, I plead for careful consideration to be given to the housing association programme.

I must admit that I get very depressed when I see people sleeping rough on the streets of our cities. I realise that it is happening all over the world, and I know the reason for it—there are more broken marriages than there used to be, and young people perhaps have more independence and leave the nest earlier—but that does not alter the fact that it is a blot on everything that we British stand for.

Secondly, I want to refer to a subject that is of great concern to my constituency. In August this year, the Department of Trade and Industry asked local authorities to bid for designation as objective 2 areas. The key criteria for description as a declining industrial area under objective 2 are, first, the average rate of unemployment over the past three years must have been above the European Community average; secondly, the percentage share of industrial employment in total employment must have equalled or exceeded the Community average in any reference year from 1975 onwards; thirdly, there must have been an observable fall in industrial employment as compared with the reference year chosen.

[Sir Fergus Montgomery]

Trafford—the council area in which my constituency is located—is one of 10 districts that comprise Greater Manchester, and Trafford council has been working with the other nine councils to formulate a Greater Manchester operational programme for objective 2 status for European funding.

On 11 October, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry announced with a great fanfare that the Government were including more of north-west England in the bid for European funds. He said:

"This is good news for the region. All current Objective 2 areas are on the list, plus new areas which face job losses, such as Barrow. The new candidates from the North West include Central Lancashire, Fleetwood and Lancaster and Morecambe. All the existing Objective 2 areas of East Lancashire, West Cumbria, West Cheshire, West Lancashire and much of Greater Manchester stay in the list the Government has proposed."

The parts of Greater Manchester that have been excluded are certain wards in Stockport and Trafford. I want my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to find out why. I remind him that the west midlands areas included both deprived areas and areas of structural decline, and affluent areas on the fringes of the conurbation.

I want to know why there is one rule for the west midlands and an entirely different one for Greater Manchester. The whole of the Altrincham and Sale constituency has been overlooked. It is impossible to understand what sort of objective criteria formed the basis of the decision.

The exclusion of certain wards in Trafford is damaging. Without objective 2 status, European regional development fund money, which aids capital projects, cannot be claimed. The exclusion will have significant effects on proposed economic and environmental initiatives in the Broadheath and Altrincham wards. The loss of objective 2 will also have a serious effect on the borough. It will undoubtedly mean a substantial reduction in European social fund money for the South Trafford college.

I draw my right hon. Friend's attention in particular to the Broadheath area in my constituency. That area contains an industrial estate—not as large as Trafford park, which is world famous—that was once noted for the part it played in the machine tool industry. In 1975, there were more than 6,500 jobs on that estate; now there are about 2,000.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Terrible, isn't it?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Yes it is, and the terrible thing is that the decline started when the last Labour Government were in power.

Mr. Cryer: Nonsense.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Oh, yes it did.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was a Minister.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Yes, when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister. There is no point in trying to put the blame on a particular Government.

Mr. Cryer: Do you remember?

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Yes. We remember some of the hardships that occurred during that time; some of us have long memories. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman has something to say, I wish he would stand up and say it.

Unemployment locally is above the Community average. Major companies such as Churchill Machine Tools, Kearns Richards, Linotype, Luke and Spencer and Record Electrical have all been casualties of the structural decline and economic recession.

Mr. Cryer: Under the Tories.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Under successive Governments since the end of the war.

For the life of me, I cannot understand the exclusion of Broadheath. In my view, it should have been a prime contender for European funding, because it seems to fit the objective 2 criteria like a glove. European funding would have meant new infrastructure investment to help business with better communications and improvements in public transport, and the local community could have continued to enjoy vital training initiatives organised by the local further education college using European social fund finance.

Broadheath is a prime example of the unfairness of the Department of Trade and Industry ruling, but there are other examples in Trafford, such as parts of Altrincham, where we have redundant British Rail sidings right in the centre of town and other evidence of decline.

I have a horrible feeling that someone in the Department of Trade and Industry thinks that my constituency is an area of leafy suburbs. It is true that we have good residential areas—I do not deny that—but we also have areas that have problems, where there is an industrial base, and I believe that we have been unjustly penalised.

My right hon. Friend knows that I never lose my temper and never raise my voice. I am glad to see that the Whip agrees with me. Similarly, I never repeat gossip. I am staking my claim to go upstairs—I do not mean to the House of Lords but in the hereafter.

Mr. Dicks: You mean downstairs.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: If I go downstairs, I know who I will see there.

Mr. John Marshall: Those two below the Gangway —the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Yes, I will see lots of old friends.

I want to tell my right hon. Friend that all those virtues that I possess will disappear overnight unless something is done about this matter. I hope that he will go to whoever made the decision in the Department of Trade and Industry and say how angry I am. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend is being subjected to all my rage, but if nothing is done, whoever made the decision will be subjected to it, too.

I hope that, before we rise for Christmas, my right hon. Friend will ensure that the relevant Ministers at the Department are aware of the anger in our area at the fact that Altrincham and Sale and other parts of Trafford have been excluded. I hope that my right hon. Friend will have some good news for me before I go home for Christmas.

9.46 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I agree with the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) about the need to build houses in Britain. For many years following the end of the second world war, we built more than 200,000 houses a year, but in the past 14 years there has been hardly any local authority building.

As for unemployment, I would merely comment that it stood at 1·25 million when the Labour Government left office. I voted against that Government 150-odd times; I was not altogether happy with what they were doing. But I can tell the House that most of my constituents would settle for 1·25 million unemployed now, given half a chance [HON. MEMBERS: "And the inflation?"] And the inflation, caused largely by the previous Tory Government, who left a right old mess, and by the quadrupling of oil prices and the rest. I am not here to talk about that: I just mention it en passant.

From the top of the hill where Bolsover castle is, near New Station road and High street, there is a beautiful view over the edge of the Pennines across from the industrial side straight over to the edge of the Peak district. About two years ago, some of my constituents in High street and New Station road asked me to see them regarding what was referred to as a landslip at Backhills.

The local newspaper reports talked about gardens that were disappearing down the side of a hill. Greenhouses were demolished, then garages. I immediately raised the matter with various Ministers, because I could foresee the possibility, given that we were talking about the side of a hill, that eventually some houses might go. That is what happened.

Having watched the television and seen the hotel at Scarborough disappear down the cliff face, and knowing that the Government had given more than £1 million in grant on that occasion, I thought that it would be feasible for the Government to assist people in the landslip area by allocating similar sums.

I was told by the Minister concerned that the Scarborough hotel received money from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Coast Protection Act 1949. We could not apply under that Act, but landslips that occur on the coast and landslips that occur inland should not be treated differently; we should not hand out grants on one hand and, on the other, tell people that they will have to grin and bear it.

I hope that the Leader of the House will pass a message on to the relevant Ministers that some way should be found to ensure that the people in the Bolsover area—four have seen their houses demolished, and another two houses are likely to be demolished in the next few months—are compensated in some way.

Derbyshire county council immediately tried to find out the cause of the problem. At first it was difficult because, very cleverly, British Coal, which had mined underneath the area, had ordered what it called a Mott Macdonald study to find out the reason for the landslip from its point of view. British Coal was very quick to get the study into operation, and it came up with findings that the landslip was nothing to do with coal mining—even though British Coal had been mining under the area as recently as 1973.

I believe that British Coal has some responsibility in the matter. I asked British Coal to compensate these people for the loss of their houses and other assets. British Coal said that, according to the Mott Macdonald study, it was not its responsibility. The study did not include, however, the fact that British Coal had been pumping out millions of tonnes of water in the area. Many local people consider that the dams of water that had built up were part of the reason for the landslip and the houses falling away.

It is significant that a few yards from the landslip stands the church, which is approximately 40 or 50 yd from the escarpment face. Several years ago, I raised in the House the subject of subsidence in Bolsover church, because of the problems that had been created. Arising out of my questions, a settlement was eventually made by British Coal. If it can pay for subsidence in the church, which is a few yards away from the escarpment face, there is surely an argument that the same should apply to the owners of the houses on High street and New Station road that have been demolished. British Coal still refuses to pay, and that is why the Department of the Environment and/or the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should find some way of assisting the residents of that area.

As I have said, the Scarborough hotel came under the Coast Protection Act 1949, but perhaps the houses in Bolsover could come under another heading. In the mid-1960s, there was a disaster in Wales at Aberfan, where 200-odd kids were killed in a school. I was a member of my local authority at that time. The Government of the day decided to send an inspector to every area in Britain where there were pit tips and said, "If these tips are dangerous, shift them—the Government will find the money." At Clay Cross, we managed to get rid of a pit tip during that period. The money was provided by the Government.

If it was possible in the aftermath of that awful Aberfan disaster for the Government to find the money to get rid of all those dangerous tips—not only in coalfields but in many other areas around Britain—it should be possible to draw the same parallel for the people in the Bolsover area.

Probably more than 80 houses are blighted. The house owners cannot get their homes insured—certainly not for the same price that they paid before—because the insurers have said that it is a bit dodgy. Those house owners have suffered in many ways over the past two years.

British Coal says that it is not its responsibility. I believe that it is, but let us assume that British Coal can sustain its argument that it is not. We then come to the question whether it is a natural occurrence that the people in the area could not have foreseen. It that is the case, it could be argued that Ministers should take a fresh look at the matter, and study the reports sent in by people in the area and the local authorities, to see whether they can assist.

Bolsover district council and Derbyshire county council have set up an assessment to find out what is causing the problem and what the cost of draining the area of the escarpment would be. There is a lot of water in the area, which we contend has built up from pit workings in the past. It is estimated that to find out what the problem is and how to eliminate it will cost £50,000, and that to elimimate it will cost more than £1 million.

The people who live on the side of that hill should not be expected to find £1 million to resolve the problem. The Department of the Environment should take the problem into account when making grants available to the Derbyshire county council, which is taking part in the study, and to the Bolsover district council, which is helping to pay for it.

The massive amount of money that it will cost to drain the whole area should also be taken into account. I hope

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

that the Leader of the House will inform the relevant Ministers of the need to look at ways in which this problem can be settled. I have discussed it with the various local authorities of the area during the past few days.

Will the relevant Ministers in the Department of the Environment and-or the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food meet Bolsover district council, Derbyshire county council and other local representatives of the tenants—the house owners have formed an action group—with a view to considering the possibility of building into the grant settlement, if nothing else, a sum of money to enable the local authorities to eliminate the problem once the assessment has been made?

The Department of the Environment should meet British Coal and ask all the relevant questions that I have sent to it from D. C. Carter Associates, which is acting on behalf of the residents. It is contended that the dams of water that built up in the area as a result of coal mine workings are part of the problem.

Will the Leader of the House pass those messages to the relevant Departments, so that a meeting can be arranged with the local authorities concerned? Those authorities will be pleased to come down to discuss the matter.

I do not believe that the settlements made yesterday took into account the amount of money that will be needed by that area. If British Coal refuses to accept responsibility, that money can come only from the people who live in the area and the local authorities responsible for its administration.

I hope that the Leader of the House will pass on those messages, and that he will be able to impress on the relevant Ministers the need for them to meet the local area representatives and the residents as soon as possible, so that we can get to the bottom of the problem and ensure that the matter is dealt with as speedily as possible.

9.59 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am delighted to be called to take part in the Adjournment debate. My subject is the family—at this time of year, as we approach Christmas, that topic is perhaps more important than ever.

Tuesday's Budget represents a turning point in the economic fortunes of the nation. All the economic indicators point to a period of sustainable growth and a gradual return to sound finance. It might be said that some of the social indicators are less favourable. The numbers of young people involved in criminal activities continue to cause concern. Our divorce rate—at four out of 10 marriages—remains at a high level. In fact, it is the highest in the European Community. The number of children born outside wedlock has soared in the past few years.

Teachers up and down the land pull their hair out over the unacceptable behaviour of a rising number of five-year-olds who are encountering school and authority for the first time. Policemen express concern at the number of teenagers who take their names and numbers and threaten to report them for assault or wrongful arrest. The nation wrings its hands and searches its soul over the James Bulger case.

What can be done to stop the apparent rise in the number of young people growing up with no respect for others or for authority, and no apparent knowledge of right and wrong? I wish to make my contribution to the debate on the social issues facing society today. I welcome the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in raising the priority of social issues in today's political agenda.

I strongly support the range of measures to be introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. Certainly, the balance of the criminal justice system needs to be restored—away from the criminal and towards the innocent. I also welcome the wide-ranging debate now under way about the size and shape of the welfare state. Those who oppose such a debate have obviously never read some of the speeches of Beveridge and the other founding fathers of the welfare state.

I wish to explore one aspect of our social fabric that remains undervalued in modern society. I feel strongly that the role of the family in the past 30 years has been sidelined in a way that has become a significant factor in many of our social problems today. I am delighted that 1994 is to be the United Nations International Year of the Family, providing an opportunity to promote the importance of family relationships.

As I draw on my own experience of 38 years, as I read report after report and article after article, and as I talk to those involved with law enforcement, I increasingly take the view that children who grow up in a balanced and stable home, where they receive care and affirmation, are much less likely to become involved in crime or to seek financial support from the state, and more likely to achieve well at school. Those factors are becoming as plain as a pikestaff.

A recent article in *The Guardian* written by Paul Webster stated:

"A French study of violent adolescent crime puts most of the blame for aggression on the failure of parents to provide role models . . . Psychiatrists Bernard Zeiller and Tony Lainé examined 600 files on violent juvenile crime in Paris for the national institute of health and medical research. These included seven murders, one by a child under 13.

Sixteen children aged 13 to 18 took part in a study aimed at drawing up a portrait of juveniles likely to become criminals. All had an image of a failed father who had not protected them from criminal impulses as they were themselves delinquent, or alcoholic.

Mothers had failed to provide an environment in which the child's personality could develop. The offenders suffered from narcissism and a constant feeling of insecurity and the fear of abandonment."

A recent article by Janet Daley which appeared in *The Times* on 25 November 1993 stated, about two thirds of the way through:

"Scientific rationalists that we are, we cannot accept the central mystery of the human condition: that we are all born with a capacity for evil and a readiness to be good. How most of us learn to be good rather than evil is a secondary mystery, but there is little doubt that it requires the presence of other people.

Good behaviour is taught and measured by others, whereas bad behaviour may grow in perverse isolation, feeding on its own introversion. Instructing the young to suppress their innate evil impulses is the individual and collective responsibility of adults. Without constant supervision (and the kind of moral instruction now regarded as authoritarian) the young can and will run amok into amoral, sadistic egoism."

Surely she hits the nail on the head.

Can we any longer doubt that each child is born with a potential for good and for bad? Each young life, if properly nurtured with love and consistent discipline, is able to learn from a responsible role model, and is much more likely to develop into a predominantly law-abiding citizen.

Of course I recognise that some children will have psychological difficulties whatever their parents do. There

are also those well-raised children who are derailed by incidents of circumstances later in life. However, as a general rule, children raised in stable and secure homes are overwhelmingly more likely to make a positive contribution to society, and are also more likely to pass on that capability to the next generation. As we debate the Christmas Adjournment, it is an appropriate time to consider the implications of the family in this nation.

An article in *The Evening Standard* on 4 March 1993 states:

"Mrs. Roberts, chief probation officer for Hereford and Worcester, told the association's annual conference in London: 'Tackling shortcomings and equipping young people with basic social skills are the components of the successful reduction of offending behaviour.

'These skills include dealing with people in authority, learning how not to lose your temper, getting what you need by legitimate and acceptable means and finding positive opportunities for creativity and achievement.'

In a reasonably stable and supportive home environment, young people were tremendously responsive, Mrs. Roberts said.

'But sadly, in some of the more desperate urban settings, motivation is less easily tapped,' she added.

'What is needed to reduce persistent offending is what most people acquire during childhood through stable family life, education, the learning of skills and the availability of opportunity.'"

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): We all agree about what we wish to see in society. I am concerned that the hon. Gentleman does not appear to be willing to define the family. Much has been written about the family as a nuclear family, with male and female parents and a number of children. However, does the hon. Gentleman accept that many studies have shown that, although the trauma of divorce greatly disturbs children, if they come through the divorce and are left with one caring, loving parent who teaches them as the hon. Gentleman has suggested, that parent can be just as successful in bringing up the child in a balanced way and keeping him or her on what the hon. Gentleman would call the right path?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I accept what he says. If he is patient, I shall come to that issue.

Sadly, it is also true that children raised in a setting in which mother or father or both do not care, do not love and do not discipline consistently, are much more likely to develop into adolescents and adults who live in conflict with others and end up in trouble with the law. Importantly, there is also a tendency to pass those problems on to the next generation.

I realise that I am making generalisations, but I trust that the House will not condemn me for that. I recognise that exceptions to general principles can always be found, but I believe that the evidence in support of my general premise is overwhelming.

The way in which a child is raised does not involve simply financial circumstances. Children from rich homes who are deprived of love and consistent discipline are also likely to develop into irresponsible adults. Children from the poorest home, where a mother and father valiantly try to bring them up well, are likely to grow into citizens who make a positive contribution.

My argument is that whether each child born in this nation develops into a predominantly law-abiding citizen, or someone likely to slide into crime or lean on the state, depends largely on the forces that shape and nurture that life in its early years in the home and then in school. Care and affirmation produce children who are at peace with themselves and others. A strong and stable family unit is the best vehicle—perhaps the only vehicle—for delivering children who make a positive contribution, because a stable family offers the best context for parenting and a role model for children.

If we are to find long-term solutions to rising crime or welfare dependency, we must find ways of encouraging and strengthening stable relationships between parents and their children. So many things that we now seek to do as a Government, or as local authorities or other statutory agencies—whether it be seeking to prevent crime or caring for elderly people—should and can be done better by the family. Many of our social problems would gradually disappear if we established family relationships as the cornerstone on which our society is based.

For that reason, I believe that Government should actively seek new ways to support and encourage the family. That would have long-standing and far-reaching benefits to our nation. If we strengthen family relationships, that will also strengthen individual responsibility and responsible citizenship. If we strengthen family relationships, that will foster a great sense of community and neighbourhood. The healthy future for our nation lies in the proper balance of individual responsibility, the stable family and active community, not in ever-increasing state provision.

Many will shake their heads and say that it cannot be done, that it is not the role of Government to tell people how to live their lives. I agree that freedom of choice is paramount, but surely it is the job of Government to set the direction and create the environment in which those choices can be made. When better to consider those matters than now, as we approach Chistmas?

It is also right to give a lead in social policy, and not merely follow behind people's choices, picking up the pieces no matter how high the cost. We must be prepared to make value judgments. If it is right that the personal, social and financial costs of family breakdown are so damaging to our nation, should we be reticent about saying so? If we believe that family relationships are important, we should say so and seek to give a lead.

We have allowed the fear of upsetting minority groups to undermine our moral leadership and social policy for far too long. It is now considered discriminatory to say that we wish to encourage the family. We fear a critical backlash from those who choose an alternative life style, so we remain silent. We must now move the agenda forward. The family is better because it is better for society as a whole. It is sound common sense. People who chose an alternative life style are free to do so, but we must not let the tail wag the dog.

The stable family unit should be our goal, not because of some fancy moral argument, but because it delivers maximum social benefits. It is a practical matter. We have the right to make that call. I do not hark back to a golden age of perfect family life, for it never existed. My call is to learn the lessons of yesterday and today to make tomorrow better.

It is important to stress that, in promoting the family, I am attacking not lone parents but neglectful parents. Research appears to support the view that two parents are better than one. The presence of mother and father enables the burdensome responsibilities of child care and breadwinning to be shared. Let me make my view clear: thousands of single parents up and down the land are doing

[Mr. Streeter]

a magnificent job in raising their children in difficult circumstances. They deserve our support, not our condemnation.

The challenge is to find ways to prevent so much family breakdown in the future, to produce better parents and reduce the number of children who grow up outside a framework of security and discipline. I hope that, as we approach Christmas, we can debate those issues.

Our divorce statistics are truly horrifying, yet when I speak to young people about their aspirations for the future, I find that they aspire to long-term commitment. Most people are looking for a partner to whom they can commit and with whom they can share their life. They want a secure home in which to raise their children. That is their dream, but sadly today, too many lack the skills, the understanding or the benefit of a role model to make that dream a reality for them.

In seeking to support and encourage the family, we are not cutting across the grain of people's aspirations; we are cutting with the grain, seeking ways to help people to achieve their goal in life. We have helped people to own their homes. Let us help them to achieve the personal security that we all seek.

What can be done? We need to reach a consensus that family is important, that family is better and that family can deliver the social benefits that we rightly seek. I suspect that we are much closer to that consensus now than we were even three years ago. What we lack is any clear view on how to take the debate forward and convert it into practical action.

In closing, I shall make some brief suggestions. First, it is clear that too many young people grow up without learning the skills of being a parent or a spouse. We must commit ourselves to educating young people about their relationships and the complexities of partnership and parenthood. A great deal more can be done in our schools to educate young people in those areas. Of course there is no magic formula to being a good spouse or partner and a good parent, but there are timeless principles involved that can be taught and passed on.

Secondly, there is value in more proactive counselling, and teaching young couples before marriage is entered into —and during it. For several years, my wife helped run a pre-marriage counselling course in our church in Plymouth. In some cases, it was amazing how little some young couples on the threshold of marriage knew about each other.

In every case, the course proved of benefit to those taking it. Approximately one in five young couples decided not to get married, or deferred their marriage, as a result of being confronted by important issues that they had not previously considered. Surely that should be seen as a success, not a failure.

We also know from our own experience and with being involved with other couples that expert and wise counselling at the right time for all couples going through a bad patch can mean the difference between reconciliation and separation. We need to explore ways of reaching couples before marital problems become marital crises.

Thirdly, having taught people the skills, and having given them the counselling and backup necessary, parents must be made to face up to their responsibilities. The Child Support Agency has made a valuable start in addressing financial responsibility. Although there is some concern about the way in which the Child Support Act 1991 is being implemented, no one appears to dispute that the principle is right.

We need to extend that parental responsibility to areas of conduct of children for which parents must be responsible. There should be few exceptions to that. There is no doubt in my mind that if parents knew that they would be increasingly responsible for the actions of their children, they would be more careful in how they sought to raise their children in the first place.

Fourthly, our primary school teachers can spot the extreme potential troublemakers and lawbreakers at an early stage of their time at school. Often, such a child is simply reflecting its background, and is unlikely to change its ways without special attention. We can do more in directing resources at that point in a child's life to seek to place that person on the straight and narrow, rather than waiting until he or she has broken into our homes or stolen our car. I should like to see more active thought given to how direct intervention into that child's life might take place in a way that would make a real difference.

Fifthly, we need a gradual increase in the penalties for crime. Having given the help and the skills to encourage people to develop as law-abiding citizens, we must then punish severely those who choose to offend. The absence of a realistic deterrent is one of the biggest issues facing us today. I commend my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for his excellent attempts to redress that imbalance.

Finally, it has long been my view that we should encourage responsible behaviour and discourage irresponsible behaviour through our tax and financial systems. More thought needs to be given to how our tax system can be designed to enable people to come together in long-term relationships and to stay together. Having recognised the importance of stable families, we should be ready to defend that institution through our tax and benefit structure. That would represent the investment in excellence that we need to see in our nation.

Not for a moment would I suggest that that is a matter for Government alone. I call upon the Church and all opinion formers to recognise the importance of strong family relationships and to redouble their efforts to promote the right message. Let us all work together on that vital task.

There are no short-term, quick-fix solutions, but we can do positive things to build for the future quality relationships in the home. It is a mighty mountain to move, but the lessons learned from some of the more extreme incidents of the past few years compel us to start that task. The tragic James Bulger case is but one.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given an important lead in his call to get back to basics and to espouse traditional values. It is for all of us to respond. As we approach Christmas, let us trust that the strong and stable family unit will once again become the foundation on which our nation is built.

10.21 am

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I shall raise a rather more parochial issue—although one that is of concern in other constituencies apart from mine—than that addressed by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter). It is that of the A34, the Euro-route that passes from

Southampton up towards the midlands and is the main trade route from our south coast ports to the midlands. The road has been improved year after year in its various different parts, until now the only remaining section that is not at least dual carriageway is that just to the south, and through parts, of Newbury.

Hon. Members will no doubt remember that in March this year the Government made a dramatic announcement that the route for the Newbury bypass had finally been agreed, and it would therefore go ahead. Interestingly, that announcement was made only a short while after it became clear that there would be a by-election for the parliamentary seat of Newbury. I am sure that the Government would not wish it to be felt that that announcement had been made purely because the by-election was about to take place and that they would not wish the electorate to believe that any such announcement could be made before a by-election and then not fulfilled after it.

Therefore, it is disappointing, to say the least, that since May this year, there has been no firm guarantee that the money for that bypass will be forthcoming. Indeed, we have heard from the Minister that he is conducting a review of the full roads programme, and it seems likely, in view of the Budget announcement, that at least some of the roads that we had believed would go ahead will not be built—or, at the very least, will be deferred.

I spoke to the Minister the other day about other problems on the A34, when I and those with me suggested that the traffic could only get heavier once the bypass had been built and the road was dual carriageway from Southampton to Birmingham. He said that we could not make the assumption that the bypass would be built in the near future. That was a great disappointment to me and the people of Newbury.

The problems on the A34 are many and numerous. There is the immediate problem that the traffic through the centre of Newbury is extremely heavy and there are long queues, particularly during the rush hours in the morning and the evening. Those are a cause of great annoyance not only to those trying to get across the country from Southampton to Birmingham and vice versa but to the inhabitants of Newbury trying to go about their daily lives.

There is also the problem of blight along the route of the A34 bypass. A number of people live in houses that are not close enough to the route to be subject to compulsory purchase but are close enough to be severely affected once the bypass is built. Those people cannot sell their houses on the open market, and the Minister, sadly, is being slow to use his discretionary power to purchase them.

Thirdly, there is danger on the route itself. The section of the A34 immediately to the south of Newbury is a notorious accident black spot, with accidents every month, if not every week, frequently causing damage not just to vehicles but to people. If all those problems are to be solved, we badly need the money to be firmly allocated to that project.

Another problem with the A34 is the noise it creates. I am speaking here particularly on behalf of the two communities of Chieveley and East Ilsley, just to the north of where the A34 crosses the M4. New road surfaces, some of which are still being researched but some of which have been proven, can reduce the noise on trunk roads. Sadly, they are more expensive and harder to maintain than the normal surfaces.

There is a major noise pollution problem near trunk roads, and the A34 is a case in point. I urge the Minister to ensure that we take note of the need to introduce one of the new surfaces wherever there is a significant noise problem, even if that means a greater expense.

The Government have often made it known that they wish to do something about pollution, and I suggest that they do something about noise pollution, just as they are aiming to do something about atmospheric and water pollution. Apart from the new noise reduction surfaces, a number of other measures, such as noise reduction fencing or banking, can be used. I urge the Minister to consider those solutions as well in our case.

Perhaps the most significant change that could be made would be to legislation on noise pollution. It is ridiculuous that some people are eligible for grants to install noise insulation and others are not.

Let us take a hypothetical case of two towns joined by a major road, which passes through two villages, which constitute two bottlenecks. The Government decide to improve the road on the route, and remove one bottleneck through one village. Unfortunately, the other bottleneck still exists, so the increased traffic on the road will not reach the level at which grants for noise insulation are triggered.

The Government go ahead with the futher improvement in the other village at that point, and because both bottlenecks have been removed, the traffic up that route suddenly increases considerably. The grant level is therefore triggered, and the second village becomes eligible for grants for noise insulation. Unfortunately, although the traffic has risen by exactly the same amount in both villages, only the village where the work is being done is eligible for grants. That does not seem to be either logical or fair. As I said, it must apply not only to Newbury, but to other parts of the country.

If a route is improved and traffic levels increase, all affected houses on the route should be eligible for noise insulation grants—as in Chieveley and East Ilsley—not merely those immediately adjacent to the final work.

In the case of those two villages, the main reason why they are not eligible for grants is that the road running through was improved in advance of the new grant mechanism coming into play. Nevertheless, they suffer, because the road has since been improved in many other places and has gone from being a small, rural route to a major Euro-route that carries all the freight traffic that passes between the south coast and the midlands. That has led to considerable noise pollution in the villages, and so far Government have refused to do anything about it, either through noise reduction methods or by allocating grants for insulation.

Those problems on the A34 deserve urgent attention. I urge the Minister to ensure that something is done to address the problems with the bypass, which will solve some of the traffic problems in central Newbury, and the problems of noise pollution along the line of the A34 as it passes through Berkshire, and I ask that the necessary legislation is introduced before Christmas.

10.32 am

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): It is somewhat ironic to follow the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) when I, too, wish to discuss roads in my constituency and would not wish the House to adjourn

[Mrs. Jacqui Lait]

until I have had some response to the special issues that I wish to raise. The hon. Gentleman's complaint is that there is too much traffic on the A34; my complaint concerns the need to upgrade the roads to make Hastings prosperous. I make no apology for once again returning to the subject —one which my predecessor raised regularly as, I suspect, shall I. I hope that hon. Members will bear with me.

The economy of Hastings is exceedingly fragile and, as if in recognition of that, while unemployment fell across the country in the past month, it rose in Hastings. I know exactly where that unemployment arose. Some of it related to what I consider to be a welcome decline in the need for such an extensive defence industry. However, I have enormous sympathy for the people who are consequently on the unemployment register. This shows how large decisions can have a dramatic impact on a small town such as Hastings.

Because our problems in Hastings were recognised, it was granted assisted area status, which is exceedingly welcome, especially as the Department of Trade and Industry has received well over 100 grant applications for assisted area status grants. However, the Department of Trade and Industry was clearly not prepared for the sheer volume of applications. Hastings is perilously close to losing potential business because the Department is not responding as quickly as it originally thought it could and it is even extending the revised period in which grants will be awarded to people in Hastings.

The key reason that Hastings has assisted area status is the appalling state of our roads. One local business man in my constituency recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport and he has gone even further in his condemnation of the roads than my usual argument that they would be recognised by 18th-century smugglers. His view is that if the current state of our roads had pertained in 1066, King Harold would not have been killed at the battle of Hastings as nobody would have been able to get in and out of town.

The A21 is a single-track country lane—the main road through which 40-tonne trucks carry goods and services in and out of Hastings and it is almost blocked because of resurfacing work. The A259, the main south coast route, is undergoing significant remedial work to the west, and the eastern part has been totally closed for what has become seven weeks, but was allegedly to be 10 days. That has caused enormous problems not just for business but for residents trying to do what little shopping they can in Hastings in the run-up to the Christmas period. Clearly, local business men and women are exceedingly upset. Our problem is not just that the roads are worn out, hence the remedial work, but that they are not of good enough quality to create the stable economy that Hastings needs.

I was struck with terror during the Budget speech when I heard that there were to be reductions in, and a slowing down of, the roads programme. It is ironic that almost every roads proposal produces instant and aggressive reaction but few hon. Members do little other than recommend more roads for their constituents. There must not be any further delay in the upgrading of the A21 and the A259 in Hastings. I understand that the Department of Transport is actively considering a number of bypass proposals, any one of which should improve our roads. However, they are all at different stages of development and none is linked. The A21 ceases to be a dual carriageway south of Tonbridge. There are at least six different proposals—all at different stages—for draft orders and public inquiries, but none has been given the go-ahead. None of the proposals for the A259 has yet reached public inquiry stage.

The problem is not only that delays are being built into the schemes and that the Minister for Roads and Traffic promised draft orders for the Hastings bypass in spring, but that he is now promising the orders in late autumn. As I reminded him in a recent letter, there are only four weeks before the end of the year. How is late autumn defined?

The links between the various proposals are out of phase and are not logical, resulting in excess costs. Each time a bypass is proposed, and because it is not logically linked to a subsequent portion, we dodge backwards and forwards across the A589 and it becomes a zig-zag instead of a straight line. That costs extra money, when the road is eventually built, and takes extra time. I am not surprised that the Department of Transport has come up with ideas to reduce from 11 years the time taken to get a road from the original proposal stage through to final planning permission stage.

When I was first selected for Hastings and Rye, a venerable gentleman metaphorically patted me on the head and said, "Don't worry about roads. We have been trying to improve them since before the first world war." I should hate to think that there would be another world war or that we could not get our roads improved. We must ensure that we link many of the bypasses and that we use the speeded-up process so that we get a logical road. We must move quickly so that my constituents can benefit from logical and sensible roads which will help them to build up the economy of Hastings, which we all wish to see.

It is dispiriting to talk to people wishing to invest in Hastings who say that it is only half a town and that the other half is the fish in the channel. It is hard enough to attract business to a small town on the south coast without penalising ourselves and without the Department of Transport penalising us by slowing down the roads programme, which is so crucial to ensure that our unemployment goes down and that our average wage, which is one third of the national average wage, becomes a competitive wage so that we can ensure that we have prosperity in a town that desperately needs it. I should hate us to go into the Christmas recess without some comment from the Department of Transport about its proposals for the A21 and the A259 to benefit my constituents.

10.41 am

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Having heard several pleas for roads, it comes to my mind that everyone has a road in which he or she wishes to see some investment. I put on record my disappointment that the Scottish Office is unwilling to fund the bypass that would avoid the Avon gorge between Lothian and Central regions. There have been a number of serious accidents there, although, thank goodness, no deaths, over the past 20 years. However, that is not the reason why I stayed in the Chamber to speak today.

I was interested that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) let us know that he was involved in church work and I was interested by his definition of the concept "saved". He spoke about pre-marriage counselling for some of the people in his church and said that he saved

one fifth of them from taking the step of getting married. That is a new definition of "saved" for me. I refer him and other hon. Members who listened and nodded sagely to a new book by my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the second-in-command on our Front-Bench Treasury team, called "The Century Gap". Males especially should read the book. Her thesis is that whereas men are living in the 20th century, women have advanced into the 21st century, and that it is about time that men joined them before they find themselves out of step. We would achieve better results for our children if we regarded their upbringing not as a family matter, but as a parenting matter. It is not only the structure, but the quality of relationships that is important for the future.

I stayed to speak today because I was informed that there would be a debate on agriculture on the motion for the Adjournment. Scottish agriculture is suffering badly at the hands of the European Community. I feel some debt to the National Farmers Union of the Forth valley and I wanted to speak on their behalf. It is a pity that we are not having such a debate and I hope that we shall have it at some time. I recall the change to the sheep meat regime causing consternation among the hill sheep farmers. We had a debate here about that. People in Scotland are suffering.

Another problem is the milk quotas. When I was leader of the council in Stirling district, it was predicted that one tenth of farmers would be out of business, and would have to sell their farms or give up their tenancies by the end of the decade as a result of the quotas because they had invested heavily in new milk parlours. That has come to pass in the Forth valley and it is a great shame. There is a deficit in the milk supply in Europe, yet we do not transfer quotas across boundaries to this country. As a result, many of the companies that process milk have gone to other European countries, taking manufacturing jobs with them. That was verified when we met the Food and Drink Manufacturers Association just before the Budget statement. We have been remiss in a number of areas.

In cereal production, set-aside is being forced on Scotland next year because of the quality and productivity of Scottish farming. I deprecate the fact that Scottish farmers will be punished when cereal production quotas could be transferred to Scotland to allow them to continue to produce cereals. It is a pity that we did not have an agriculture debate today. I would have been happy to take part in it and to speak on behalf of farmers, although there are few in my constituency. It is a national problem in Scotland and it is probably also a United Kingdom problem.

I intend to speak about a matter that is not as specific as the roads pleas earlier. I shall speak about the orange badge scheme—the disabled sticker scheme. I do not know whether the scheme works in the same way in England and Wales. In Scotland, it is becoming a regime that takes away a small benefit which gives disabled people a quality of life that they could not otherwise have.

I hope that the House will think about the scheme. It is not a great financial gift and it is not a licence for people to park wherever they like. Many road traffic schemes, especially double yellow line schemes, mean that people cannot park on certain roads even with an orange badge. Last Christmas, Strathclyde clamped down heavily on parking. A person with an orange badge who did not know the regulations well enough parked near the shopping centre. When he came back to find his car, he saw that it had been towed away by a private security firm hired for the purpose. He had to pay more than £50, and he was lucky enough to have money and a credit card with him so that he could get his car out of the pound. However, he had to walk and to take a taxi for almost a mile and a half.

People cannot use the scheme to park wherever they like, and that is correct. However, I wrote to Strathclyde council saying that it was being rather harsh and that there should be some zoned parking on roads that had double yellow lines near the shopping centre at Christmas for people with orange badges. The incident was a great shock to my constituent, and there has been great hardship for many orange badge users who have had to park far away from the shopping centre.

The scheme has been amended by regulation, not by debate in the House. The purpose of the regulation was to stop abuses, and I applaud that. There were many abuses. When the Labour Government were in power, my good friend Lord Ewing of Kirkford, from whom I took over, was a Scottish Office Minister. He spoke to some of my pupils when I was a teacher of children with learning difficulties. He told them about the orange badge schemes and he pointed out the many abuses. The problem became greater as the 1980s went on. It is right that the regulations should be used to stop abuses, but they have now gone too far and the scheme is far too rigid.

The regulations seem to make it practically impossible for people to get a new orange badge unless they can prove that they have had a double amputation and that they cannot even wheel themselves along. They are asked whether they can travel 200 yds by any means. Let us consider the case of my constituent Mr. Andrews of Grangemouth which illustrates the point well. He had had an orange badge for more than five years and he was told that he had to fill in a new form. He is a very honest gentleman in his mid-70s who has for some time suffered a number of problems with walking and who has had several operations. He said that if he leant on his wife's arm and stopped every 20 yds or so for a rest, he could probably travel 200 yds without a wheelchair. He was then denied renewal of his orange badge. The bottom line was that he could travel 200 yds by some means. It would not have mattered if he could only get himself over 200 yds on his hands and knees. He would still have been denied renewal of his orange badge.

I applaud Mr. Andrews's attitude, which I recommend to anyone who finds himself in such a situation. With personal advocacy that would have done any hon. Member proud, Mr. Andrews took the matter up in the press and contacted the television company; he fought a battle. The council did not say that it was wrong. It said that it would send him a new form and that if he wrote that he could not travel 200 yds under his own steam, it would give him a badge. That is ludicrous. He had to be less honest than he wanted in informing the authorities of his circumstances, to obtain an orange badge. The scheme is now so strict that people who need badges are losing them and that small addition to their quality of life is taken away.

I am reminded of the new incapacity allowance. The suggested method of proving that one qualifies for that allowance reflects the same attitude. One must prove that one is so incapacitated that one cannot do anything for oneself. I hope that is not the purpose of the allowance, which should be to add to an individual's quality of life, not to transform people from being vegetables into active citizens.

[Mr. Michael Connarty]

The inflexibility of the new orange badge regulations works against those who are temporarily incapacitated for one or two years and who have been advised by their doctor that they cannot get about under their own steam. The provision of a badge would help such people more easily to shop and in other ways. The regulations do not allow for a temporary badge. Must the applicant lie and state that he or she is permanently incapacitated, and not admit that—if the doctor is right—they will be able to get about in one or two years? Are such people merely to state that they are disabled and, after a couple of years, hang on to their badges as long as they can? To use a phrase that is common in politics and in life generally, such people are caught between a rock and a hard place. It is time that the Government examined the scheme's inflexibility.

Mrs. Reid from Bo'ness is one constituent who has written to me on that subject. The Scottish Office says that the regulations are set, but that a flexibility clause allows a local authority to use discretion but not grant temporary badges. There is something wrong if flexibility and discretion cannot be used to assist a person who is temporarily disabled or incapacitated. I will be harsh on the Scottish Office and say that it sets the regulations and then passes the buck. That is a favoured way of doing things. I was for 10 years the leader of a council that was weighed down with regulations with which it had to conform, but it was not given the resources to do so.

The transport planning authority appears to have chosen a person—I will not name the gentleman—having the least heart and soul in the bureaucracy to administer the scheme. The terms and tone of his letters upset people, in that he does not countenance any flexibility if he can get away with it—and the regulations allow him to deny flexibility. The Scottish Office Minister responsible should add flexibility to the regulations and exhort local authorities to use the discretion that will give the incapacitated the small addition to their quality of life that the orange badge scheme can provide.

The regulations appear to give plaudits and prizes for being rigid and inflexible, and I am sure that is not the scheme's true purpose. I enter a plea on behalf of my constituents and other people in Scotland and in England and Wales who find it difficult to renew their orange badge, and who are expected to enjoy a lower quality of life. The Government are providing a lower quality of life in everything that they do, but I am sure that they do not want publicly to be found out. I ask the Minister responsible to reconsider the scheme and to introduce a regulation that will provide for easier orange badge renewal by people who have owned one for a number of years—and certainly for those who are in the later years of their life—but which still keeps abusers out of the picture. I hope that we may see changes in the next couple of months.

10.53 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): The House should address four matters in the context of my constituency before it adjourns for Christmas. The House will not be surprised to know that they are the high-speed rail link, as it passes through Kent; grant-maintained schools; the application for objective 2 status within the European Community; and the routing of ambulances.

The high-speed rail link has been a major problem for the people of Kent, as alternative routes have twisted and turned across my constituency and elsewhere in Kent over the past five years. I will highlight the plight of 90 households at Pepper Hill, under whose properties Union Rail currently wants to drive a tunnel. Union Rail blatantly states that those residents will suffer no noise or vibration. That is why I called for a geological survey to be commissioned, to assess the noise and vibration impact on those residents—what I call the rumble.

As the A2 action group of local residents and I are not experts in geological surveys, I asked the then Conservative-controlled Gravesham borough council to appoint a geological expert to investigate the Union Rail survey. I understand that the council eventually did so, and that that expert is already at work.

The ball is now in the court of Union Rail. Last month, it delivered to me and to the borough council a preliminary report on its geological survey. It promised—we know about British Rail's promises—that the result of laboratory tests would be delivered to Gravesham borough council by 29 November. They have not yet been delivered.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport kindly gave Gravesham borough council and myself until 31 December to give our views, which will not least be based on the results of the geological survey. I ask that all pressure be put on Union Rail to deliver the test results now, as they are already nearly one week overdue.

I believe that the rumble will be felt by those residents living over the proposed tunnel, which strengthens the case for the alternative route 226. It would take the tunnel—and a tunnel would be of advantage to all residents of Northfleet—away from properties, to run under an electricity substation.

I understand that the National Grid Company, which owns and operates that substation, produced an option report on the costs and practicalities of renewing that ancient switching substation or resiting it. I hope that the Department of Transport will study that report with a positive mind, to ascertain whether a solution can be found. One must be found, because the existing plan is totally unreasonable for the residents concerned.

The Department of Transport paper for the channel tunnel rail link high-level forum, "Property Purchase and Compensation Policy", commented on compensation safeguarding when the route is announced by Ministers in January. That paper states:

> "Safeguarding also brings into play the statutory blight provisions (and purchase notices) of Part VI of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. A blight notice may be served by the owner of any domestic property within the safeguarded zone seeking purchase."

I cite the case of six householders sandwiched between the A2 motorway, which itself will be widened southwards nearer to their homes, and the high-speed rail link route announced. Those houses have for many years been sandwiched between two main transport arteries. They are four houses at Longview off Henhurst road, Cobham, and two houses in Scalers hill, also in the parish of Cobham.

The capital and amenity values of those properties have been ruined by public transport, and their owners must be compensated. I am told that their owners want to move. Those properties should be included in the safeguarded zone, so that their owners' rights will be taken into account.

Reverting to the 90 households over the tunnel, I note that the same document states:

"Blight notices would not be accepted for properties within safeguarded zones over bored tunnels except where there are surface works such as ventilation shafts."

That is quite wrong as a policy. The tunnel does damage to the capital value and amenity of the 90 households that live above, and it is not fair to claim that the costs of that compensation make the high-speed rail link that much less viable. It is not fair to the residents, because the other side of the coin is that the proposal makes the capital value, and amenity value, of residents' houses equally less valuable, and they are less capable of sustaining that loss.

I shall now discuss grant-maintained schools. Conservative Kent county council was traditionally in the forefront of local financial management. It put, as a matter of policy, 90 per cent. of the funding of schools directly local financial management. It was not surprising, therefore, that, with the advent of grant-maintained school status, many Kent schools advanced to take 100 per cent. responsibility for funds and decisions relating to education.

It is not surprising that the support of parents of children in so many schools for adopting grant-maintained status was overwhelming; indeed, 50 per cent. of secondary schools in Kent have already become grant maintained. In my borough of Gravesham alone, five of the eight secondary schools and two of the primary schools have voted to become grant maintained, and two further schools are balloting for such status at the moment. Those that have become grant maintained have been successful. They are vibrant; they are go-ahead; they give good education to the young people concerned. The response of the new Labour-Liberal coalition that runs Kent county council has been one of unremitting hostility. The Lib-Lab coalition that is running Kent has allocated £100,000 of education funds to the mindless pursuit of opposing the will of parents in grant-maintained schools—£100,000 from the education budget, which could have been spent on new classrooms, on repairs to school buildings and on new equipment for our schools, just to pursue the petty party political prejudices of the Labour and Liberal parties.

What justification do they give for that approach? The Labour education spokesman on Kent county council, County Councillor Mrs. Esterson, said that, in previous votes of parents before the most recent county council election,

"parents voted against Conservative Kent County Council."

Let us consider that. Now, at St. John's Roman Catholic Secondary School in Gravesend the parents have voted on the matter, and 75 per cent. voted for the school to become a grant-maintained school.

Let us see the logic of Councillor Mrs. Esterson. Presumably the parents voted against the Lib-Lab coalition that runs Kent county council. What rubbish! Of course they did not. They did not vote on political grounds. They voted on the grounds of the education of their children. They voted positively because they felt that in that school they had a good headmaster, good governors, good teachers—indeed, a very good school—and they believe that they will get better education by having 100 per cent. power over the decisions and the spending of the education funds relative to their children.

That does not bother the new Lib-Lab coalition that is running Kent county council. The council is now circulating a misleading letter to parents who are due to vote in such cases. I shall take as an example the letter sent to parents of children at the St. Joseph's Roman Catholic aided primary school in Northfleet.

The first claim made to the parents by the Lib-Lab Kent county council is:

"The Grant Maintained sector has not grown as Government Policy had hoped."

That is an odd statement to make, because what the Government hoped is irrelevant. What counts is what the parents decide, and progress has been made, because in those schools the parents have decided that it is in the interests of their children.

That letter goes on to ask, rhetorically:

"Do you want your Headteacher and senior staff to be heavily involved in non-educational duties? Or do you want money spent hiring extra staff to do such work?"

Non-educational duties? When one has those "Headteachers and senior staff" working on the delivery of quality education locally in their school? That is what they are working on, and they are deciding the best means of so doing. When one bears in mind the fact that the school gets an extra 10 per cent. of funds, they can judge what to spend it on, and that may be partly on administrative and clerical support if they so judge.

The letter also says:

"There is no published evidence whatsoever which indicates that standards in the Grant Maintained sector are either better or worse than in Local Authority Schools."

Where have the authors of those letters been living in the past few weeks? We have seen lists of exam results from schools up and down the country, and what does one note? The grant-maintained schools predominate in the top of that list.

I would point out that high up in that list is the Northfleet school for boys in the borough of Gravesham in my constituency—not a grammar school—a school which is exceptionally well run. The parents are so supportive that the school has become grant maintained, and it has done exceptionally well, as those lists prove.

Here is another extract from that letter from the Lib-Lab county council:

"Whilst the early schools which joined the Grant Maintained sector received significant additional money this was not 'new' money. It has been and is being removed from existing schools, in other words robbing Peter to pay Paul."

That claim is the most pernicious of all. The logic of transferring that 10 per cent. of funds is that that is the amount of education funds that had to date been spent on administrative and advisory support to those schools from county hall. The grant-maintained decisions show that the schools believe that they can get better value for the same money locally in the school than can the county hall bureaucrats.

The problem for Kent county council and other councils is that they are losing that 10 per cent. of funds. How do they react? They should either win contracts from the grant-maintained schools to provide those same services, or they should cut the bureaucracy that provided those so-called services proportionately. Given the petty warfare of Kent county council, under its Lib-Lab control, against the grant-maintained schools, it is unlikely that they would win any such contracts.

My constituents, and even hon. Members, are great enthusiasts for that television programme "Yes Minister". We remember that Sir Humphrey always presented to Ministers painful cuts in services rather than cuts in Sir Humphrey's empire. That is precisely what is happening at the moment at Kent county council.

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

Let us remember that the letter referred to "existing schools". The new Lib-Lab masters of Kent county council go on about cutting schools and nursery schools as a consequence, but they are addressing the wrong options. At the very first test of its competence, the Lib-Lab pact in Kent has failed. It claims that Kent taxpayers are confronted with only two options: either to pay higher council tax or to cut education services. That is not the choice. The bureaucracy has a responsibility to scale down accordingly, and we shall be watching to see whether it does so.

Incidentally, I welcome the 13 per cent. increase in the revenue support grant from the Government to Kent county council, and I would think that, with that 13 per cent., it should be well able in the coming year to develop services and impose no council tax increase whatsoever on the people of Kent.

Lastly, I shall discuss the British application to the European Community for designation of north Gravesham —indeed, of a wide area of Thames-side in Kent—for objective 2 status for European structural funds. My hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and I have long campaigned for such status, with the support of our Member of the European Parliament, Ben Patterson, and the local borough councils.

We particularly appreciate the enthusiasm of our right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry in making the application, and I should like to highlight two projects to which objective 2 funding from the European Community could contribute.

The first is Northfleet town bypass. Northfleet is an historic urban area which has always been dependent on heavy industry, but its roads were not built for heavy goods vehicles. Northfleet high street and the Springhead and Dover roads are quite inadequate for the heavy goods vehicles that daily pound along them.

There have been long-standing plans for such a bypass known as the Thames-side industrial route fourth phase. It is now known apparently, as the south Thames development route fourth phase. It would extend from the Springhead lower roundabout westwards to Dartford. This would be a very good project, with which financial support from the Community would help.

The second project that I wish to highlight is the north-east Gravesend access road. There is poor, ancient access to the two business areas—the Norfolk road industrial area; and the Old Denton industrial area, which has large companies such as Comma and Southern Water. We need a new road from the Lion roundabout to the Denton industrial estate, over the north Kent line and onwards to Denton wharf.

This road would bring relief to the residents of Old Denton, an historic and compact area. Heavy goods vehicles are currently rumbling along ancient roads such as Range road, which are lined with very small terrace houses that cannot withstand the vibration those vehicles generate.

We have heard in the House that paramedics on our ambulances now have the expertise to diagnose emergency patients and therefore take them directly to the most appropriate medical centre. In particular, Ministers have highlighted the fact that paramedics can identify appropriate cases and take them directly to trauma centres —intensive care units. My belief is that if they can diagnose up to specialist cases, surely they can diagnose down.

Our intensive care unit in Gravesham is at the Joyce Green hospital, Dartford—an excellent unit, but many miles away. The accident and emergency unit to which all ambulance cases are taken is at West Hill hospital in Dartford, which is also excellent but is miles away. If we now have highly specialised paramedics, I do not see why they cannot diagnose down emergency cases that require, for example, stitches or treatment of burns, which could easily go to the casualty unit at Gravesend and North Kent hospital, which is in our town and is far more convenient. I hope that the national health service will consider this proposal for convenience and for cost-saving.

11.12 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I shall speak reasonably briefly because time is, alas, too short, which is one of the reasons why I tabled an amendment. On Thursday, 21 subjects were requested for debate. The proposal that we should abandon Parliament from 17 December to 11 January seems wrong. The notion that we should occupy only three hours of a Friday when five hours are available for debate is entirely wrong. There are enough Members here well to fill the three hours available and I have no doubt that other hon. Members, had they been presented with the opportunity of a five-hour debate, would have been here to debate issues.

Mr. John Marshall: Where are they?

Mr. Cryer: It is inept of the Government to allow a three-hour debate when five hours are possible.

If the Parliamentary Private Secretary, behind his master, keeps making little jokes, I shall have to analyse in great detail all his silly comments. The Conservative Members behind him, who wish to take part in the debate, will be very reluctant for him to continue his silly antics.

May I continue last night's Adjournment debate on the Child Support Agency? I was here for part of the debate, which was instituted by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar), and was particularly interested and concerned by the Minister's reply, because, like many hon. Members, I have been presented with cases that are disturbing and distressing for the people involved and for hon. Members.

The Minister's response to my hon. Friend's valid points was simply lacklustre and inadequate. There is a head of steam to get the Child Support Agency legislation changed; the Government should take note of it, because people from all walks of life are adversely affected.

It is worth remembering that the Child Support Act 1991 was presented to the House as legislation to ensure that irresponsible fathers who were not paying maintenance would be traced and would make a contribution to their children. Everybody regarded that as a perfectly just and proper aim, but the aim of the agency is now to tackle the easy money—that of fathers who are paying, who are known, but who are being subjected to an entirely restrictive and unfair formula.

Hon. Members who write to Ministers who piloted the Act through Parliament are shrugged off with an inadequate response, and told that the chief executive will reply. When a reply is received, it is simply a straightforward computer printout that tells Members, for

example, that courts previously made decisions about this matter—something, apparently, that the agency believes only people on Mars knew.

Of course we know that information, and that cases varied from court to court. Sometimes that was a strength, because courts took into account differing circumstances. The letter goes on in a pedestrian way, saying that the person can ask for a review, and if they are dissatisfied with it they can appeal. In the meantime, they have to pay for the assessment and collection, which is rubbing salt into deep wounds.

Last night, as the Leader of the House will confirm, the Minister admitted that, in 616,000 cases, the agency has traced only 9,000 absent fathers. I believe that Government policy is to use the Child Support Agency not as a child support agency but as a Treasury support agency. It has been given the task of raising money from people who already accept their responsibility and pay maintenance.

I have a typical constituent's letter. I shall not give his name, because these circumstances are always private and distressing to the people involved. He writes:

"I am an 'absent Father' who firmly believes in the paying of maintenance for my 3½ year old daughter. I made a voluntary arrangement with the DSS . . . to pay £28·00 a week. I have never missed this payment ever since it was agreed by all parties concerned, approximately 18 months ago. I am currently making arrangements through my solicitor to transfer my equal share of the matrimonial home and its contents into my ex-wife's name.

I parted from the marriage with my car (value £1,800·00). The house has equity of approximately £12,000·00 plus contents.

I am now in a relationship with a Divorcee who has two children from her previous marriage. She receives £5·00 per week for child maintenance on an irregular basis.

I have recently had a form from the CSA and find that they do not take into account the fact that I am now in a new relationship with my new partner and that I also provide for two children aged 9 and 4 years. The CSA say they are not my responsibility. I am their Daddy as far as they and everyone else is concerned. They together with myself are going to suffer badly, to a point where we may have to sell our home, if the CSA is allowed to continue.

I ask you to look at the CSA formula and tell me if you agree with it.

For the sake of my family, myself and thousands of other absent parents who willingly pay maintenance, I implore you to do something".

That is not uncharacteristic for a person who is acting fairly and handing over equity in the home.

The Minister's response is that it is simply nothing to do with the formula that the Government have laid down. That is grossly unfair. If the Tories claim that they are the party of the family, the Child Support Agency is bringing pressure to bear on families which will lead to further break-ups. If they are trying to save taxpayers' money, if there are further break-ups, that will mean further claims on the welfare system. I strongly urge the Leader of the House to pass the information to the Minister who replied so inadequately last night. Things must be changed.

I shall conclude my remarks about the Child Support Agency by mentioning a female constituent who has written to me. She has received six maintenance payments in three years and has complained about the lack of maintenance. She is the sort of person whom, we were told, the Child Support Agency was designed to support.

The Child Support agency took several weeks to write a letter. It then got the address wrong, although it had been given the correct address, and then said that it wanted information about the income of the former partner within two weeks. The former partner refused to give that information, so the agency allowed another two weeks. The woman wrote to me within the past few days to say that the information was still not available. On that example, even when the Child Support Agency is doing the work, it is not effective, and the figures given by the Minister bear that out.

Another young women wrote me an appealing letter. She had a baby and does not seek maintenance. She did not say so in her letter, but she said that she wanted the name of the father on the birth certificate. She does not have much money, but she would like the DNA test to be taken by the man, who disputes the claim. She is having great difficulty.

I referred her to the Child Support Agency, which told her that it would be three years before it could tackle her case. She is an ideal young woman for the agency to help, because she is a single parent and simply wants the name of the father on the birth certificate so that the child is not fatherless. That is not an unreasonable aspiration.

Another example is that of a man in a high-earning category—he earned as much as a Member of Parliament. He fathered a child and accepted his responsibility. His marriage has recovered from the sense of betrayal that had been incurred, and he and his wife were settling back. He has two teenage children to look after, and they are ready to go to university.

Through the door came a letter from the Child Support Agency. There was nothing private or confidential about it. His wife opened the letter—they were exchanging correspondence—and all the old wounds reopened. That day, when he returned from his well-paid, responsible position—a pillar of society, if one likes—his wife had packed her suitcase ready to go. He told me that it had been a difficult week, but it looked as though the marriage could be saved.

That is the effect in thousands of houses up and down the country. Yet the bland, ineffective reply of the Minister yesterday made it sound as though it was all some sort of administrative procedure. We are talking about an area of great sensitivities and difficulties. Relationships are being trampled on with hobnailed boots. I hope that the Minister will take the message. It is fair to say that the message is not simply coming from Labour Members. Some Tory Members have criticised the agency—there are anxious mothers and fathers battering at their doors as well.

Another subject that I shall mention is one that I have raised in the House previously—wheel clamping. I am raising the subject again because it has been raised again in Bradford—wheel clampers have been about again. In this case, they clamped the car of an articulate young women who, I am happy to say, will sue them. They held on to her and kept her by her car for two hours while she organised the recovery of the imposition of £75. I have had an Adjournment debate on this subject, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar).

Wheel clamping is taking place in Bradford, and women are being placed in jeopardy. They are often clamped late at night, at 11 or 11.30 pm. We are not talking about people parking cars in other people's back or front gardens—we are talking about what appears to all intents and purposes to be wasteland. People come out of the Alhambra theatre in Bradford to find that their cars have been clamped and they must find £75. A few months ago, the fine was increased from £50—an arbitrary imposition.

Many people are angry, because they are placed in danger by these cowboys. Indeed, in one case—it is not West Yorkshire Outdoor Securities Ltd., although that is the most prominent cowboy organisation in Bradford—

[Mr. Cryer]

one clamping company was clamping cars without the permission of the owners of the land. It was simply putting on a clamp and extorting money from innocent car owners.

A consultative document was issued by the Home Office, and responses to it had to be in by the end of May. However, there is still no sign of any activity by the Home Office. It should produce some proposals as soon as possible. The matter is causing concern.

I must tell the Minister about a woman who came to Bradford—she is not one of my constituents. She came 10 miles with a companion to go to the Alhambra theatre. Her car was clamped. The last bus and the last train had gone, and she had no other means of getting home. Fortunately, her companion had £50, which was handed over, and she was able to get her car. She went to the police. The police sat on their elbows and said that it was nothing to do with them—it was not a breach of the peace.

I shall tell the House what I say to people who are clamped and do not have the support of the police. I tell them to say that they will picket on behalf of the National Union of Mineworkers, and see what the police will do then. During the miners' strike, the police discovered all sorts of laws that could be utilised. However, in the case of men and women whose cars are clamped late at night, they cannot do a single thing.

The law needs clarifying along the lines of the Scottish court decision that clamping on private land in this way is extortion and theft. Since that court decision, there have been no traffic jams in Scotland, following the removal of those cowboy crooks.

My final point relates to a matter raised yesterday—the "Dispatches" programme about Aims of Industry and British United Industrialists, which have been raising money for the Conservative party. In response, the Leader of the House said that there were all sorts of conspiracies, and that it was not worth troubling his mind about them.

The Conservative party is a continuing conspiracy. On the programme broadcast on 1 December, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), a former Prime Minister, made the clear statement that, if people were asking others for money for political parties, it was a political donation. A Scottish Minister said exactly the same thing about British United Industrialists. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup made the point generally, but specifically referred to Aims of Industry.

It appears that not only Labour Members are concerned about this—distinguished former Tory Prime Ministers are saying that such donations are for political purposes and therefore should be recorded as political donations. If that is the case, firms such as Lucas, which was named on the programme, are in breach of the law in not declaring such donations as political donations.

It was made clear that Aims of Industry and British United Industrialists know what they are doing. They are raising money which they have repeatedly said is to help the Conservative party at general elections. That should be sorted out and, if the 1985 legislation has been breached, the Government should call on the relevant Departments to institute prosecutions.

It was made clear by a member of the Wallasey Conservative party that Aims of Industry had campaigned on behalf of the then Lynda Chalker in Wallasey. If that happened—the programme has strong evidence that it did—the election laws of 1983 must also have been breached.

The Leader of the House is cautious and believes that the Conservative party is the party of law and order. Here is a test: if it is the party of law and order, he should pass on the message to the Home Office to institute prosecutions against Lucas and other companies that have made illegal donations without admitting them, and certainly to ensure that Aims of Industry is prosecuted over its activities in Wallasey.

Everybody knows that public buildings and taxpayers' money are being used to subsidise dinners at No. 10. Many of us believe that those who turn up for such dinners include representatives of tobacco companies, which is why there is no ban on advertising cigarettes. The industry influences the Government through the money that it donates to the Conservative party. I believe that the beer barons are also making massive contributions to the Conservative party, which is why they did so well in the Budget.

If I am wrong, I expect that the Conservative party will want to raise its head over the sleaze surrounding it and start the prosecution process, so that it can refute, clearly and firmly, any accusations by people like me on the basis of evidence provided by television.

11.31 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I wish to discuss the subject of credit card fraud, which is particularly important at Christmas because we are expected to spend some £15 billion in the shops this month, much of which will be transacted on plastic. Unfortunately, fraud using credit cards has doubled in the past five years.

People in this country have far more credit cards than our European neighbours. The French have 20 million cards and the Italians have only 5 million, yet we have 83 million credit, cheque guarantee or retailer cards.

Banks and retailers that issue cards are losing more than £400 million a year, or £761 every minute of the day, at the hands of fraudsters. Last year, more than 2 million cards were reported stolen. Of those, 150,000 were taken as a result of muggings and 300,000 during burglaries.

Black market prices in London suggest that, once stolen, credit cards can be sold to a middleman for between £50 and £150. The platinum cards—whatever they look like—can be sold for some £300. Once a middleman has bought a card, he passes it on to an encasher who uses a team of petty criminals to buy as much as they can using the cards. Those goods are then sold at knockdown prices from the back of a lorry, at car boot sales or elsewhere. By the time the process is completed, the average loss on a stolen card is £600.

Another problem is counterfeit cards from the far east. The police estimate that between 25 and 50 per cent. of gold card fraud is committed on counterfeit cards. So what measures can be taken to cut that fraud? Credit cards can be passed through an on-line system, which detects whether a card has been stolen. However, that system is expensive and not all retailers are linked up to it. Another system is to check the signature on the back of the card. Hon. Members will have noticed how many times their credit cards are returned to them without the signature being checked. Unfortunately, that is happening too often.

Moreover, how many times do signatures differ during the day? Mine certainly differs from time to time, so even that checking procedure is made more difficult.

The result of the over-reliance on signatures and the reluctance to use on-line system means that 60 per cent. of all card fraud is committed after a card has been reported stolen. Barclays bank has its own system for Visa and Barclaycard. It looks at the purchase pattern of the person using the card and, if it is irregular, will check up on it. However, the scheme to which I am most attracted uses photo identification and laser-etched signatures on the back of credit cards. It is being used by the Royal Bank of Scotland, the National and Provincial building society and the Trustee Savings bank. The Royal Bank of Scotland launched its pilot scheme in October 1991, when 30,000 customers at 39 selected branches in Edinburgh, London, Glasgow and Manchester were invited to apply for the new-style cards. They are "highline" cards with a photograph on the back and an etched signature.

The results achieved during the trial period were remarkable. Of the 360 cards lost or stolen, only three were used fraudulently, with a total loss to the bank of £494, as opposed to the £45,000 that it would normally have expected. Following that success, the card is being tested further in Lancashire and is now available to all Royal Bank of Scotland customers.

The National and Provincial building society has experienced similar success with its photo credit card, which differs from the Switch and hole-in-the-wall card of the Royal Bank of Scotland. Just five months after it was made available to the society's 300,000 Visa card holders, more than a third of the customers have taken up the offer to have their photograph put on the back of the card. It is an encouraging take-up rate and 1,000 customers a day are now applying for those new credit cards. Staff at those branches have Polaroid cameras with which they can take photographs of the customers. They charge £2 for a photograph, which is what customers would expect to pay commercially. Remarkably, no fee is charged for the cards. Too often, customers are asked to pay £12, £20 or even more for credit cards, even without photographs and laser-etched signatures.

The beauty of having a signature etched on to a card is that a third of cards used fraudulently are intercepted between the time a company sends out the cards and the time the recipients receive them. If a signature is already etched on a card, it is much more difficult for a fraudster to put his signature on it, thus helping to crack down on such fraud.

The public seem to like the new system. All the polls show that people using the cards back the use of photographs and laser-etched signatures. Retailers also like it and it has been endorsed by the British Retail Consortium because it helps it to crack down on crime. Scotland Yard has also welcomed the scheme. It pointed out that, even if a fraudster could remove the picture of the owner and replace it with his own, he would be reluctant to do so because, where suspicion occurs, the card is retained by a member of staff and the police then have a good idea of what the fraudster looks like. So thieves and fraudsters hate such schemes.

I am not enamoured of the idea of making such a scheme compulsory, but the evidence shows that companies issuing cards should embrace such new technology. It is a wonderful addition as a form of identity in general. I favour the idea of identity cards. A cheque guarantee or credit card with a photo on the back is an absolute boon. The cost of a card without a photograph is about 25p and with a photograph it is £1·20, but the massive savings that can be achieved will more than pay for the extra price.

Banks should not drag their feet over implementing new technology to reduce credit card fraud. It wastes police time, when such fraud could be stamped out. Given the fantastic reduction in fraud through using that technology, why should police time be wasted by not using it? Consumers who do not use that technology pay for the fraud every month through credit card protection schemes, inflated borrowing rates and card charges. It is up to us as elected Members to call on the banks to make every effort to tackle this problem. Our constituents have the right to be protected against credit card fraud and no stone should be left unturned in pursuit of that aim.

11.40 am

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) for his kind comments. I had better not go further because if I did the political editor of *New Statesman and Society* will see yet another conspiracy. The Leader of the House will be pleased to know that I will not go into the subject of the Child Support Agency which I spoke about yesterday in the Adjournment debate. As I said then, many of the problems being experienced with that agency were raised when the right hon. Gentleman, as Secretary of State for Social Security, introduced the measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South spoke about wheel clamping. I shall give a brief history of how that matter has been pursued in the House by a number of Members, including myself. In the summer, I secured an Adjournment debate on the subject and had some meetings with Ministers and civil servants. Unfortunately, that did not bring any results, so I introduced a ten-minute Bill, and a consultation document was published. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South said, responses to that were due by the end of May, which was a fairly short response time. Since then, there has been nothing from the Home Department. I have tabled questions and had correspondence with the relevant Minister, but there is still delay in taking a decision.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South said, for well over a year private wheel clamping has been banned in Scotland and there have been no horrific consequences or enormous traffic problems. Such wheel clamping still takes place in other parts of Britain, although there has been a bit of a lull recently. I was interested to hear that there are still problems in Bradford. During the Christmas period, people drive into areas with which they are not familiar to do Christmas shopping or to go to pantomimes. From previous years, we know that that is the peak time for clamping. There will be an upsurge in cases and more unfortunate people will be subjected not only to considerable indignity and inconvenience, but to occasional danger and certainly considerable cost. Given the increased charges in Bradford, it is obvious that the clampers there do not think that inflation is only 1 per cent., as the Chancellor said in his Budget speech.

The construction industry is facing a bleak Christmas and is experiencing its longest recession for years. As we know, many famous companies, household names, have gone out of business, and the industry believes that at least

[Mr. John Spellar]

one other major contractor is likely to go under. The problem affects not just the big names but it is widespread in the industry. Subcontractors are being squeezed at all levels. More than half of the brickwork contractors who were in business a couple of years ago have disappeared. They are experiencing dramatic reductions in orders and a considerable squeeze on their cash flow.

There has been comment about the time that it takes to get money from main contractors and clients, and I am pleased to see that such matters are being addressed. A former Member of Parliament, Sir Michael Latham, is looking at the issue of contracts in the construction industry, and the industry is looking forward to a report from a man who is knowledgeable in this area.

I was pleased to hear the Chancellor acknowledge some of the difficulties that are being experienced not just in the construction industry, although that is the industry in which difficulties have been exacerbated, but by small companies who experience delays in the payment of their bills. The Chancellor is looking at some remedial measures including, I am pleased to hear, the German system of compulsory interest after a specific delay. That will help companies to stay in business.

Such difficulties are also experienced by the work force, the operatives in the industry. There have been major reductions in the number of people working in construction. One of the industry's worries is that many people with valuable skills who have been made redundant two or three times during the prolonged recession will have left the industry never to return. The industry wonders what skills shortages it will face when there is an upturn in building.

Those who are still lucky enough to be in work face considerable problems over pay reductions and the worsening of conditions. Wages for skilled craftsmen in London have reduced by about a third over the past two or three years. Many of them have been forced into casual employment and, effectively, companies are nodding and winking at such people who also claim benefit. Many companies would not be able to price jobs at current levels and people would not be able to work for current wages if they were not illicitly claiming benefit with the collaboration of companies. If the Chancellor is looking for cuts, I suggest the return of some degree of regulation and proper contractual employment in the building industry.

Quite apart from what will happen on deregulation, companies face pressure on health and safety standards. Underlying all the problems is the fact that the industry is experiencing its worst slump since the war. A couple of weeks ago an east midlands builder told me that that week he had advertised for bricklayers and for the next three days he was inundated with calls. Many of those who called had been laid off in the previous few weeks because house building companies had constructed to the first level and were leaving the sites vacant over the winter while they waited to see what would happen in the housing market. Far from being static, the situation is declining further.

The Secretary of State for the Environment should give some encouragement to the building industry about future prospects. The Chancellor of the Exchequer could have done that. Although there was a welcome announcement about the Jubilee line, the commercial property sector is quite flat and house building is still just staggering along and is the only area in which there is likely to be any development. It is worrying that public sector housing is not receiving the necessary support through the Government allowing councils to use capital receipts or encouraging housing associations. Such moves would give a much needed boost to house building.

Government Departments have not been helpful to the industry, as we have seen with the celebrated Bristol case. The curtain walling contract for the Ministry of Defence procurement office in Bristol will be awarded to a foreign company because only overseas companies were allowed to tender for the project. That was based on an out-of-date, 18-month-old report from the Bath technical institute. That situation has now passed, and British companies would have been able to complete the project.

The House does not have to take the word of the institute. I have talked to major developers who have been involved in similar projects who say that they have had satisfactory work within an adequate price from British companies. Unfortunately, the attitude of many Departments is to encourage overseas competition in a futile attempt to cut prices. That is done in a way which is inconceivable to any of our foreign competitors. It is unlikely that the French army would allow a British contractor to tender for a curtain walling contract or that the European Parliament in Brussels would invite any non-Belgian company to tender for its roofing work.

It is also as unlikely as the Bundeswehr inviting a number of overseas companies to tender for its ammunition contracts, as occurred in the infamous bribery case involving a Ministry of Defence official. The core problem is that the Government are encouraging overseas competition to the detriment of British companies. That occurs in a number of areas, but particularly in the Ministry of Defence.

Finally, I think that the House should review the period of the recess. Prolonged breaks are damaging to our standing with the public. It is not bad for hon. Members, who are thick-skinned about the matter, but it is bad for democracy when the parliamentary representatives are constantly attacked in the press. Hon. Members may safely rebut criticism from highly paid journalists who write about our pay, because they always seem to be reluctant to put their wages and conditions alongside ours. That is a challenge that they seem reluctant to take up.

We make ourselves targets by having prolonged breaks. There are so many issues which the public are crying out for us to debate and scrutinise. We should not adjourn until those issues have been fully discussed.

11.52 pm

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): In the Christmas spirit which should characterise the debate, I should like to begin by asking my right hon. Friend——

Mr. Dicks: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With great respect, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) has not been here for a great deal of the morning. Some hon. Members have been here from 9.30 am waiting to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. It is entirely for the Chair to choose who is required to speak. To my knowledge, the hon. Member for Eastleigh was here before the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful for your ruling on that issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will try to keep my remarks brief, so that my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) will have a chance to make points for his constituents.

In the Christmas spirit, I will ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to pass on the thanks of my constituents to three of his ministerial colleagues for actions they have taken to help my constituency during the Session.

First, will my right hon. Friend thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport for receiving a delegation from Eastleigh to consider the future of the British Rail Maintenance Ltd. works? There has been considerable concern about how the jobs there will be affected by rail privatisation. My right hon. Friend received the delegation in a sympathetic way and suggested the setting up of a railway liaison group, which is meeting later today to consider ways in which those jobs can be saved, and my right hon. Friend has promised to attend meetings of the group regularly. In view of his busy schedule, we are extremely grateful for the interest which he has shown.

Secondly, will my right hon. Friend thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for his sympathetic view of the future of Hampshire in the context of the local government review? There is a strong feeling in Hampshire that it would be wrong to move towards unitary government. Hampshire county council is older than this Parliament, and it is an effective county council which is widely respected. Hampshire brought in the lowest shire council tax in the country last year, and I believe that it would be wrong to abolish the council. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for saying that Hampshire might be an exception which would be allowed to retain a two-tier system.

Thirdly, I am particularly grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor. Only 10 days ago in the House, I made a speech about unemployment and suggested two measures which I though would be of concern, particularly in my constituency, but also across the country. I thought also that those measures would help to reduce unemployment.

The first measure was more help to small business and, in particular, action to penalise companies that did not pay their debts on time. The second was more help to provide training. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend adjusted his Budget at the last moment to take account of those two concerns and that he made recommendations in those directions.

I should like to address my main remarks not to either Front Bench but to the Press Gallery, which is characteristically packed for today's debate. I spent 20 years as a journalist and I have great sympathy for those who ply the trade. I think that journalists come in for a lot of unfair criticism. People do not realise how speedily journalists must produce their articles. One need only look at the coverage this week of the Budget. It was remarkable that most newspapers were able to produce such detailed and extensive coverage within a few hours of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor sitting down.

I believe that most journalists do a remarkable job. This country is blessed with a press which is much more entertaining than most papers abroad. When the British press is compared with *Die Welt*, *Le Monde* or the *New York Times*, one sees that it is a pretty good read. It is also diversified. We have the highest newspaper readership of any country in Europe. We must admire the quality of the press, which maintains a high standard of language, unlike some of our television companies. One reads much less bad language in the press than one hears on BBC 1 or ITV of a Sunday evening now that swearing and bad language have become commonplace on television.

Two issues concerning the press have been raised. The first is the question of privacy, which has been extensively discussed and which I do not wish to discuss further this morning. The second—which I believe most people would regard as more important—is the accuracy of the press. I was interested to note that the chairman of the Press Complaints Commission said that 70 per cent. of the complaints that the commission receives deal not with privacy but with accuracy.

As I said, producing accurate articles soon after an event is difficult. Inevitably, mistakes are made. We all make mistakes. Only this week, we have seen typing mistakes in the transcript of the messages between the Government and the IRA. The information was produced quickly and mistakes were made, and that happens in journalism, too. I once made a terrible mistake when I was working for the BBC. The former leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) was standing in the European elections in Italy. We followed him around for a day and watched him eat spaghetti and talk to the Italians, then rushed to the studio to record a piece for the six o'clock news. The opening line in my commentary was, "Sir David Steel is the first Englishman to stand for election in Italy." Within a few minutes, the BBC switchboard was jammed with hundreds of thousands of calls from people complaining that I did not realise that the right hon. Gentleman came from Scotland.

It is easy to make mistakes, but sometimes there is too much of a rush to produce an article without properly investigating the circumstances. Only last week, I was rung up at 11 o'clock at night and asked about a report that money was being filched from the railway pension fund to pay for the royal train. Late that night, I contacted my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who made it clear that there was no truth whatever in the report. I pointed that out to the BBC "Breakfast Time" programme, but those concerned were not interested in whether it was true—it was too good a story, so they ran it, with comments from Opposition Members.

I regret to say that two newspapers did the same, not just reporting the untrue allegations but suggesting that they were true. *The Guardian* said:

> "The Government has taken £730,000 from the British Rail pension fund and transferred it to the royal train's budget to make the train more attractive for private investors to take over."

We do not look for favours from the *Daily Mirror*, but we do expect normal standards of journalism to apply sometimes. That newspaper ran the headline:

> "BR regrets that £730,000 has been diverted to Royal Train".

The story reads:

> "Transport Secretary John MacGregor has shunted hundreds of thousands of pounds away from British Rail pensioners to keep the Royal Train running."

The Guardian at least had the grace to publish a letter from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport two days later pointing out how untrue the story was—although, interestingly, right at the bottom of its correspondence column. To my knowledge, the *Daily Mirror* has made no such apology.

[Mr. Milligan]

Newspapers have a duty to try to check the accuracy of stories before they print them, and when they get them wrong, as inevitably they will, to print proper corrections. Some newspapers have now introduced local ombudsmen who look into complaints and that is a significant improvement. I should like to suggest another simple change. Most newspaper editors could adopt the practice of American newspapers such as the *New York Times* and print a regular corrections column—not dictated by politicians but in the interests of their readers, and put things right where mistakes have been made. That would be good for the readers and for the reputation of newspapers. *The Times*, when it was the top people's newspaper, made a regular habit of printing corrections. Alas, that happens no longer. If local and national newspapers introduced a regular corrections column, they would be doing their readers a great service. In the Christmas spirit, I offer that suggestion, and I look forward to hearing my right hon. Friend's comments.

11.59 am

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I was in the Chamber for the start of business and, except when I went to the toilet on one occasion, I have been here ever since.

I should like an answer before the Christmas recess to the issue that I am about to raise. It is almost a business question and, as the Leader of the House is here, perhaps he will agree to a debate on airport capacity, particularly as it affects Heathrow airport in my constituency.

Everyone knows that Heathrow airport is the busiest international airport in the world and that there is a great deal of pressure on it to expand. A planning application for terminal 5 is currently with the Secretary of State for the Environment, and we are expecting the pre-consultation approach at the beginning of next year.

Linked to that, the British Airports Authority has asked the Department of Transport for permission to contribute towards the widening of the M4 in my constituency. It is amazing that the Department of Transport can have consultations about the widening of the M4, as it relates to terminal 5, before there has been a planning inquiry and an acceptance of the need for terminal 5 and the proposal to build it.

A working party looked at runway capacity requirement for the south-east into the next century. The working party sat for many months and came up with the wonderful recommendation that it would keep all the options open and make no recommendations. I do not know what it cost the public purse, but it was a joke.

The Department of Transport has said that it will require from August of this year until May of next year to consult on all the options, about which the working party could not come to a conclusion.

One of the options is a third runway at Heathrow. That is one of the most nonsensical ideas that I have ever come across, since I have been a Member of Parliament or before. Even the air traffic control people have said that if there were a third runway at Heathrow it would never be more than 30 per cent. utilised because the congestion is not on the ground but in the sky.

I do not know why that was an option, especially as Stansted has capacity for approximately 8 million passengers, and only approximately 2 million use it. If ever there was a case for Stansted to use its vacant runway and terminal capacities, it is this.

The Secretary of State for Transport has said that he must keep the consultations open. He said, "Unofficially, Terry, I can tell you that in my view there will be no third runway at Heathrow." His spokesman for aviation has said much the same. The Department of the Environment has said that it would never agree to pulling down thousands of homes in three villages in my constituency in order to put a third runway at Heathrow.

While all this behind the back, nudge nudge, wink wink attitude is taken, the issue is driving people crazy. My constituents want a definite assurance that there will be no third runway at Heathrow. People are concerned that their homes are blighted, that, having lived there for many years, they will have to move away. They are concerned that they will not get the right compensation if they have to move, which they do not want to do. I cannot understand why this situation should be allowed to go on.

The Labour party has earned no great credit in this matter. Its candidate at the last election has been winding up people there. Old people have been worried sick because he told them, prior to the 1992 election, that within six weeks of the Tories getting back into power there would be a Cabinet announcement that a third runway would be built at Heathrow. All this time later, there has still not been such an announcement. There will not be such an announcement, but he is trying to get people in my constituency worked up. He has linked the opposition to the runway with the opposition to the fifth terminal, and he has united people in the battle.

Another issue is that we still have night flights. Anybody who was in London overnight will know that the first flight coming in from east to west, across central London and above the M4, was at 5.25 am. I am told, "Don't worry, Mr. MP, people do not usually stay awake after they have been woken up by an aeroplane; they go back to sleep." That is another nonsensical report that has been produced by idiots who have nothing better to do with their time.

There should be a move towards the complete abolition of night flights. We should say to the aviation industry —to the airlines and the British Airports Authority in particular—that Heathrow is situated within a community and that that community should not be manipulated for the benefit of airline passengers, airlines and airport owners. They should adjust to the needs of the community.

Many of those people were there long before the airport. Others came later, and obtain good-value properties under the flight path. However, the airlines tend to believe that because the economic benefits come from Heathrow, that is the overriding factor and nothing else should be considered.

I have a simple answer to solve much of the problem. There are 77,000 domestic flights a year in and out of the world's busiest international airport. There is no reason not to halve that number by telling people flying from airports such as Manchester, Liverpool and Plymouth that they cannnot come to the world's busiest airport, but must go to other airports such as London City, Luton or Stansted. We cannot continue to have 77,000 movements a year, plus general aviation movements at Heathrow, when there is a demand for international airlines to use it. If we halved the

number of domestic flights to Heathrow, we could use some of the space created for international flight use. We could also cap the level of movements.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House must tell his colleague, the Secretary of State for Transport, that I want an answer to the problem before Christmas. I want an announcement before Christmas that there will be no third runway at Heathrow—it is unnecessary and impractical. I want the fears of my constituents, especially old age pensioners, who do not understand what is going on, allayed immediately. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, does not allay their fears, he will face the biggest row and fight that he has ever experienced over transport.

12.6 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I wish to raise three issues. They do not, on this occasion, include Pitsea post office, as I am prepared to let the guilty parties, the post office and Tesco superstore, wrestle with their consciences.

I pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) for his magnificent effort in yesterday securing more than £300,000 in Konver from the European Community. I also pay tribute to the excellent European Member of Parliament, Miss Patricia Rawlings, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. My constituents and the rest of Essex will benefit greatly from that extra money.

First, I have been the unpaid spokesman for hospital radio broadcasting for as long as I have been a Member of Parliament. I am beginning to think that I have not done a fat lot of good, as, each year, I have made the same speech, but have been unable to deliver the goods to interest the House in that important issue.

All Members of Parliament receive letters from constituents about hospital radio broadcasting. They make the right noises, but there has not been the will in the House to deliver to hospital radio broadcasting what it wants. At first, we tried to obtain zero-rated VAT for hospital radio broadcasting. We then tried to get hospital radio broadcasting its own frequency. We have now reduced our expectations and merely want to replace the present induction loop system with a generalised frequency.

There are 640 hospitals with more than 260,000 beds. The organisation employs more than 12,000 volunteers, and is the largest voluntary organisation in the country. It broadcasts more than 10,000 hours of programmes every week to 8.2 million people. I hope to goodness that the House will take the subject seriously. We all have constituents who work as volunteers in hospital broadcasting. Let us give them what they want—the Christmas present of their own frequency.

My second topic for discussion is China. I was appalled that, by just one vote, Beijing failed to win the Olympic games. What is the world thinking of? Have we forgotten Tiananmen square and the disgraceful events that took place there? It is outrageous that we seem to have forgotten the atrocities that took place in China a short time ago.

Basildon constituents are interested in matters in China. I wish to bring to the attention of the House the position of Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang. He is a Catholic bishop who is loyal to the Vatican, which puts him at odds with the Chinese communist authorities that require Catholics to be submitted to the Government-controlled Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. I suppose that he is in an old folks' home. In reality, he is in detention. I hope that, before Christmas, the Government will do everything they possibly can to secure the release of that bishop.

Thirdly, in 1991, I introduced a ten-minute Bill to amend the Pet Animals Act 1951. I appeal to the House to explain to our constituents that purchasing pets before Christmas is a serious matter. It is a disgrace that that Act, which is more than 40 years old, enables children under 16 years of age to go to pet shops and purchase kittens, dogs, alligators and other amphibians without proper parental consent and information on how to look after them.

I hope that the House will have a happy Christmas recess. I hope that the nation will enjoy the Christmas break. From one Essex man to another, I have great expectations of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I hope that he will give a Christmas present to hospital radio broadcasting, to the Chinese bishop and to pets throughout the country.

12.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): It seems like only a few weeks ago that we last held a debate of this kind; indeed, it was only a few weeks ago. My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) was right to draw our attention to the way in which people view what must seem to them—they even seem to me—to be protracted breaks. They are longer than the electorate expect the House to have.

The Leader of the House seems anxious to pack us off for the Christmas recess as soon as he can, so much so that the debate is held on a Friday, and many of my hon. Friends anticipate the wishes of the Leader of the House on those matters. It is not hard to see why. The debate today has focused on deprivation and hardship. It has been demonstrated from the Conservative Benches that deprivation and hardship can be found in parts of the country where Labour Members, perhaps, do not look for it closely enough.

The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), who opened the debate, spoke movingly of affordable housing, of the importance of objective 2 status and of economic deprivation. I thought that he might talk about Jarrow, where he used to be a teacher, or Hebburn, where he served on the urban district council, as it then was. I thought that he might talk about Consett, in the north of England, which was his first parliamentary battle.

But no; instead, he told us of the economic deprivation in his constituency. I thought of Prestbury and Alderly Edge and the communities that seem to be having a rough time. I thought of the industrial decline, to which he referred, since the end of the war—I assume that he meant the Falklands war—his cry that something must be done and his hope that the Department of Trade and Industry would do something before he went upstairs. I took that to be a reference to the Committee Corridor and the 1922 Committee.

The theme of deprivation and neglect by Government departments was taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who referred to British Coal's responsibility, or its attempt to avoid it, for subsidence and housing damage in the high street and New Station road part of his constituency.

The theme found an echo on Conservative Benches. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) also spoke

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

about tunnelling undermining property and property values. Although one appeal was directed at the Department of Trade and Industry and British Coal, the other was directed at British Rail.

The theme, however, is the same. If those great engineering works are to be undertaken, responsibility must be accepted for the homes of those who will be affected by them. The rapid abandonment of Britain's coal mining industry by the Government leaves environmental problems behind. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover is quite right to draw the attention of the House to that and to demand an adequate response from the Government.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) spoke of a turning point in the economic fortunes of the nation and drew our attention to crime, divorce, badly behaved children and the undermining of the institution of the family, perhaps pointing to the direction in which he thought that our economic fortunes had turned. I agree with the emphasis that he gave to poor parenting. He chose a French study as evidence, but there is also evidence to be drawn from a study by Professor Colvin, based on samples drawn from Newcastle, which makes much the same point. At the heart of the problems is poor parenting, rather than single parenting, so it is on that that we should concentrate, but the study also drew attention to economic deprivation.

The hon. Member for Sutton drew attention to the duty of the tax system to underpin the family. I take that to suggest that he will oppose the Chancellor's pinning of the married couple's allowance to the new 15 per cent. rate and that he does not fully support the way in which the Child Support Agency works. That theme was taken up later by others.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) hoped that the Government would reward his constituents for voting Liberal by building them a new bypass, which suggests that he does not quite have the measure of the present Administration.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) gave us a reprise of "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists" by telling us that average wages in Hastings were only a third of the national average. Presumably, she will have something to say to her constituents when their disposable income is hit by the 4 per cent. extra tax burden resulting from the Budget, when those in the public sector have to get by with their wages frozen and when the council tax for Hastings and Rye, like that of every other council, goes up well ahead of the rate of inflation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) rightly drew our attention in this pre-Christmas debate to the plight of the disabled and, in particular, to the inflexibility of the regulations governing the orange badge scheme.

I was pleased to see the hon. Member for Gravesham making common cause with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover about the effects of underground works on property values and the right to a compensation scheme. If he focused his complaints on Kent county council rather than on the Government generally, we can understand the political reasoning behind that. I hope that I do him no harm by identifying him with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover. My hon. Friend is as well known in his constituency as the hon. Gentleman is in his. That unique partnership might carry a certain bipartisan value in Kent. I understand that that is the way in which public administration is now conducted in that county.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) spoke for both sides of the House when he drew attention again to the shortcomings of the Child Support Agency. Hon. Members are complaining not aboout the principle of the agency but about the way in which it operates in practice. People who made agreements that they thought were lawful and reasonable, and that were accepted by both parties, are being hunted down for more money and those whom we assumed that the legislation and the agency were directed at are getting away with not making payments.

The sums of money involved can be high, as I know from my constituency case load. In one case, which is not unique, a constituent is having to pay £60 a week from a £200 income. Not only is that a substantial amount of money, but it is not the sort of money that he would be able to pay, or be expected to pay, were the child still within his household.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) spoke with authority about counterfeit credit cards and credit card fraud and rightly drew to the attention of the House the spectacular rise in crime under the present administration. My hon. Friend the Member for Warley, West drew our attention to another aspect of crime: the way in which the wheel clamping industry is operated by cowboys against the interests of citizens who do not deserve to be punished or penalised in such a vigorous manner.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) drew our attention to unemployment and to what I hope is an unrelated matter, the standards of journalism, and suggested that regular corrections columns should be carried in newspapers. He especially referred to *The Guardian*. The idea that a newspaper should have a corrections column as a regular feature says something about standards of accuracy that are now expected. It is probably right that there should be some facility for putting right yesterday's errors. Perhaps that suggestion should also be recommended to the Editor of *Hansard* so that such a facility was available to us as well as to our friends in the press.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Disgraceful—an attack on *Hansard*.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman shouts disgraceful as if Labour Members would want to make exclusive use of such a facility. Of course not; it would be available to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) spoke of the defence industry in Essex, of the Konver programme and of defence diversification. It is a policy that Conservative Members seem to oppose in general but are happy to have specifically applied to the areas that they represent.

I should like to comment on the area that I represent, which the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale knows well. It is, of course, the area that contains the Swan Hunter yard. It is a yard in receivership, which some six months ago directly employed 3,000 people and now employs fewer than 1,000 people who can expect to lose their jobs if no action is taken in the next six months. I accept that there is a case for defence diversification in Essex, but I

expect that, if the Government still pretend to represent the whole country, they should accept that areas that once relied on defence industry employment, such as Tyneside, Merseyside and Barrow in Furness, deserve and need assistance, and they need it now. The work force at Swan Hunter have served the country well in peace and war and deserve better from the Government than neglect, the rundown yard, the redundancies and long-term unemployment that will be their fate if something is not done and done shortly.

12.23 pm

The Leader of the House (Mr. Tony Newton): I shall mildly correct the wrong impression given by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) in saying that it had only been a few weeks since we debated such a motion. He may have misremembered or misthought that we had such a debate before prorogation. In fact, the previous recess motion debate was some considerable time ago—in July, when large numbers of hon. Members were complaining that it had not come earlier.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I was referring to parliamentary weeks. We were not sitting throughout the summer.

Mr. Cryer: Very good: what a mistake to make.

Mr. Newton: I missed that, but I am sure that it was entertaining.

The other thing that struck me was that nobody referred to the other amendment on the Order Paper or whether it is the official policy of the Opposition not to have a recess. I see from the Order Paper that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) wants the House to sit until 24 December, and among others, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin), assiduous as are all Essex Members of Parliament, wishes the House to resume on Sunday 26 December. *[Interruption.]* If every motion before the House today were passed, hon. Members from the northern parts of the country would not even get home for Christmas lunch before they would have to turn round and come back.

I am not sure whether that point applies to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, but I know that it applies to a number of hon. Members. I find some of the complaints a little ironic in view of the constant pressure —not, I accept, from the hon. Members for Bradford, South and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—for me to seek to advance the Jopling report to ease the burden of work in the House so that hon. Members can spend more time on their other work in their constituencies.

I shall not be able to comment in full on every speech. However, in view of the friendly references to the county to whose representation we both contribute, I shall make some quick reference to what my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) said, not least because he was kind enough to pay tribute to our hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who has just appeared in the Chamber, and to myself as the right hon. Member for Braintree. At this moment, we also have here my hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris). Indeed, we have one third of the parliamentary representation of the county of Essex in the Chamber. No other part of the country can make that claim.

Mr. Dicks: Only for the past five minutes. It is a plot.

Mr. Newton: I am prepared to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) publicly that there is no conspiracy in this. I did not know that any of my hon. Friends from the county would be here today. The quality of their representation has been revealed.

I shall not be able to satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon on every point, but I have one important point to put to him. According to press reports in Hong Kong and in the European Catholic press, Bishops Shi Enxiang and Chen Jianzhang—fortunately there is an aid to pronunciation in the notes in front of me—were released on or around 20 November. Both names were on the list of cases of concern prepared by Amnesty International and they have been the subject of western representations. I am not sure whether there has been absolute confirmation of their release, but I know that the reports have appeared. Both my hon. Friend and I will welcome the bishops' release if it proves to be the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) made a number of points about housing matters, about the social security system and about the position on objective 2 assisted area status for his constituency. I will, of course, draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. I know that my right hon. Friend regretted that it was not possible to propose Altrincham and Sale for objective 2 status. The straightforward reason was that the unemployment rate in the relevant period was well below the national and Community averages.

I hope that, in considering what he said to us about housing matters, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale will acknowledge that the Housing Corporation's programme will provide for 53,000 new homes next year, producing a total output of around 173,000 over the three years 1992-93 to 1994-95. That is 20,000 more homes than we promised in 1992. It is important that I should put that point on the record.

One other contribution to which I especially wish to refer is the speech by the hon. Member for Bolsover, because it was different from the contributions that he sometimes makes in proceedings in which I am involved. I much respected the way in which he put the case on behalf of his constituents, who clearly have an extremely difficult problem. I will ensure that his comments this morning are looked at thoroughly by the Ministers concerned. He will know that the Government, with the support of both sides of the House, have approved the subsidence regime under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991, which provides extensively for the repair of or compensation for properties damaged by coal mining subsidence.

I realise that the question whether coal mining has caused the subsidence is one of the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman. I will ensure that the specific issues raised by him are brought to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My right hon. Friend will consult local authorities until 10 January on his proposals for the revenue support grant in 1994-95.

I understand that no approach has been made on the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but my right hon. Friend stands ready to meet any right hon. or hon. Member or authority to discuss proposals during that period. That responds to some of the hon. Gentleman's

[Mr. Newton]

requests. I cannot promise a successful outcome, but I can guarantee that the hon. Gentleman's representations will be carefully considered.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) made a lengthy and thoughtful contribution to the debate on family matters, which I am sure will be studied by Ministers in the Home Office, Department of Health and Department of Social Security. My hon. Friend will accept that it is not possible for my response to be as wide-ranging as his speech.

My hon. Friend recognised the importance that people generally attach to the traditional family and that many lone parents are doing a magnificent job in difficult circumstances. I am sure that he much welcomed the proposal in the Budget speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, amplified in a statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, to help towards the child care costs of those who seek to maintain or to regain their independence by making use of family credit. They will include many lone parents, but not only them.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) remarked extensively on the importance of road schemes in their localities. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the statutory orders for the scheme with which he is concerned have been made. Construction is not due to commence in the current financial year, but is a priority in the programme, and it is being considered in the review announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in August. At this stage, I cannot pre-empt the results of that review, which are due to be announced early in the new year.

Progress on a number of schemes in the Hastings area—where there are currently five schemes in the national road programme for improving various stretches of the A21—will greatly depend on the time needed for the statutory procedures. My right hon. Friend recently announced a package of measures to cut the time that it takes to progress new roads, and it is hoped that the A21 and A259 schemes mentioned by my hon. Friend will benefit from those proposals.

The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) commented on the tightening up of the orange badge scheme, and I will draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) raised a large number of matters relating to his constituency—in particular, those arising from the channel tunnel rail link, which he also raised in an Adjournment debate a month or so ago. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has promised that the Government will take full account of the comments of my hon. Friend and those of Gravesham council in reaching decisions. I have no doubt that they will carefully consider the points that my hon. Friend made today.

The Government share his view that it is unacceptable for local authorities to seek to obstruct or to undermine the case for grant-maintained status through the dissemination of inaccurate or partisan information. I urge my hon. Friend to draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State the information that he revealed today.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I have done so.

Mr. Newton: I am glad to learn that.

I am about to run out of time, so I will not add much to the comments of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security in last night's Adjournment debate on the Child Support Agency, when he acknowledged genuine concerns and the need to investigate them, as Ministers are doing—which the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) might have acknowledged.

I assure all those right hon. and hon. Members to whose speeches I have not been able to respond that their messages will be faithfully transmitted, and I hope that they will receive an appropriate response——

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 22 (Periodic Adjournments).*

The House divided: Ayes 99, Noes 5.

Division No. 8] **[12.34 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evennett, David
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
French, Douglas
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hague, William
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pickles, Eric
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Macdonald, Calum
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Spearing, Nigel
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising on Friday 17th December, do adjourn until Tuesday 11th January.

Transport (South-east London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

12.44 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Naturally, I am pleased to be able to raise the subject of transport in south-east London this afternoon. It is a matter of great importance for my constituents, and I know from discussions with my colleagues in south-east London and north-west Kent that it is one which features heavily in their constituency correspondence.

One of the most vocal critics of our poor transport service has been my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn)—my good friend and neighbour. Unfortunately, he is unable to be with us for this debate as he has a long-standing and pressing constituency engagement. Nevertheless, I am sure that he will read the proceedings closely and with great interest. His constituents and mine share many of the same problems. However, I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) in his place—he will participate in the debate as well. Similarly, the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) shares the same transport problems as we all do in south-east London.

I have raised the issue on many occasions in debates, questions and meetings with various Ministers at the Department. But I regret to advise that to date there has been relatively little improvement in transport provision in our area. Today, I do not want merely to highlight the inadequacy of transport in south-east London, nor to speak only on behalf of the hard-pressed local commuters, although I intend to speak on those matters. I want to range widely over both road and rail transport problems in our area. There are major concerns.

At the outset, I must say that I share the concerns of my constituents and experience the same problems as I journey from my home in Crayford to Westminster either by road or rail. At the start, I shall be positive and thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his recent visit to my constituency to see at first hand both the local problems and the considerable potential in our area. The visit was much appreciated by all involved.

Regrettably, as we told the Minister during his visit, many people in my area feel that the Government do not have a coherent strategy for transport in south-east London. While applauding in general terms the Government's aims to increase road building and to improve railway services through increased expenditure and a coherent strategy nationally, we feel somewhat neglected in our area. There appears to be no real rail strategy, and no road strategy either.

I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), who is in his place, in discussions that we had with the Department. When one looks at the increased number of new Networker trains now starting to operate on Network SouthEast in north Kent and south-east London, I am sure that all hon. Members will be encouraged and delighted. However, if one is travelling every day from Crayford station, Erith station, Barnehurst or Bexleyheath, and is subject to delays, cancellations and overcrowding on a regular basis, the individual traveller sees little benefit and questions the strategy of British Rail. Similarly, if one is travelling to London to shop, to a film, to the theatre, travelling to visit friends or relatives, going on holiday or whatever, the service provided on the British Rail lines through my constituency and the borough of Bexley in general is extremely bad.

My postbag regularly contains horror stories from my constituents about late, poor or non-existent services. To add insult to injury, already hard-pressed travellers and commuters in my constituency face a large increase of 8 per cent. on the cost of their fares from 1 January.

Commuters from Bexley are justifiably angry at having to pay for an increase far above the inflation rate. They commend the Government on keeping inflation so low but criticise British Rail for putting up fares so much. They are irritated at having to pay so much more for an inadequate and appalling service. People are late for work, appointments and social engagements simply because of British Rail's failure to deliver a first-class service.

In the mornings I listen to the radio—either Capital FM or my local community station, RTM Radio on 103·8 FM —which regularly lists cancellations on local services. RTM gives an excellent report each morning, highlighting both good and bad news for commuters and travellers. Regrettably, the news is too often bad.

British Rail may apologise, and sometimes does. Occasionally it even informs the public. But in general its attitude is wrong and it appears unconcerned. New timetables have made the position worse and the decision to close Charing Cross station for rebuilding work for several weeks during the summer angered the travelling public even more and made the service even worse in August.

I have often raised the issue of British Rail in the House, even in Adjournment debates. I have met British Rail executives and taken up the issue of the poor value for money provided by British Rail with the Government and British Rail. Unfortunately, there has been little improvement. The fact that people travelling on commuter lines from south-east London and north-west Kent are still experiencing one of the worst services in the country is unacceptable. I hope that when British Rail is privatised and lines are franchised, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London will look for more effective operators of our local railway service, because improvement is essential. We are putting our trust and hopes for the future in my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State.

Three railway lines serve my constituency. One runs along the river, through Abbey Wood, Belvedere, Erith and Slade Green en route to Dartford. The second goes through Bexleyheath and Barnehurst, located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath. Those stations are well used by residents in my wards of Bostall and Crayford, and Northumberland Heath, as well as by my hon. Friend's constituents. The third line goes through

[Mr. David Evennett]

Sidcup and Bexley and serves Crayford—the town where I have a home. I regularly use Crayford station and know about the problems suffered by Crayford line travellers.

In theory, one would think that my constituents were well served by such a network of railway lines and collection of stations, yet in practice nothing could be further from the truth. At my regular surgery at Erith town hall on Friday evenings, my constituents tell me of the poor service and my postbag contains even more complaints. The existence of the hardware—trains, stations and tracks—does not make a good service by itself. British Rail should adopt a different approach to its customers. It needs a commitment to service, concern, and value for money for travellers. The citizens charter has had some effect and publicity clearly brings some results. This Adjournment debate has resulted in many groups contacting me and trying to put a gloss on their operations.

A letter from the divisional director of Nework SouthEast, Mr. Fearn, is indicative of some of the problems that we have been suffering. Mr. Fearn says that British Rail is providing 15 new Networker trains in daily service in our area and that customers have commented favourably on those trains. That is only natural when one compares them with the old cattle trucks that are used for the rest of the time. Anything would be an improvement on those. However, I admit that those trains are super and very good news.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): When they work.

Mr. Evennett: I endorse the comment by the hon. Member for Greenwich.

However, in our area we have no competition. Competition, publicity and private enterprise bring choice and better services for consumers.

Mr. Fearn's letter shows that the passengers charter has highlighted poor results in our area. It says:

"we fell short of the demanding train service punctuality standard set under the Passenger's Charter on Kent Link for the 12 months to 5 November. This has triggered a 5 per cent. discount payment on renewal of customers' season tickets."

The fact that BR failed to meet its requirements is well known to my constituents and those of other hon. Members.

One example of how Network SouthEast does not look after passengers is that it stopped the half-hourly Sunday service and substituted an hourly service on the Bexleyheath line and other lines in my area. Mr. Fearn's letter states:

"In terms of the timetable, we reinstated the Sunday half-hourly service on the North Kent and Bexleyheath lines to Dartford in October this year."

Those services should not have been cancelled in the first place. It is fine to say that those of us who campaigned to have the half-hourly service reinstated have had some success, but the half-hourly Sunday service should never have been cancelled. However, we welcome a sinner repenting.

On the issue of fares, Mr. Fearn's letter states that the number of fraudulent passengers has been reduced to less than 1 per cent. compared with 4 to 5 per cent. in the past. That is also good news. I learned from Mr. Fearn's letter that Erith and Slade Green stations are to receive major facelifts by next spring, subject, of course, to the contract being granted to private contractors. That is good news because Erith station has been in desperate need of restoration and refurbishment for many years, and the platform buildings at Slade Green need refurbishment.

South-east London suffers from the great disadvantage of the lack of choice. It has no underground network and in that respect it is the most underprivileged part of the metropolis.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): My hon. Friend puts his case superbly. Is he aware of the campaign that I and others have been running against the British Rail tactic of having no staff on stations in the evenings? For a public service that is disgraceful and downright dangerous.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend and endorse his comments. I am aware of his campaign and have supported it. He is right to demand a first-class service that passengers must at all times feel safe in using. In the absence of staff, severe problems could arise.

As I say, we in south-east London do not have an underground network and have to rely exclusively on British Rail. Not for us the choice and competition that exists, for example, in north-east London where there is real choice between various BR lines and a substantial underground network.

Many people in Erith and Crayford and in neighbouring areas in the south-east of London look with considerable interest to the extension of the Jubilee line to south-east London. The 12-month delay in the go-ahead for this essential addition to our local transport network caused great local disappointment. I have followed the history of the proposal and I understand the difficulties that have been encountered, but, to say the least, the delay has been unfortunate.

My area needs the Jubilee line extension much more than the crossrail link is needed across northern London. Whatever our political persuasion, we all eagerly look forward to its completion and operation. It is the first step towards giving more choice to south-east London travellers. The Jubilee line extension is welcome and positive news.

Yesterday, I took part in the debate on the Budget, with which I was delighted. In his Budget speech my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor gave the go-ahead to the extension of the docklands light railway which will go south of the Thames to Lewisham. There is some movement, I am delighted to see, not only on the Jubilee line but with the extension to the docklands railway into south-east London. For that I must congratulate my hon. Friend The Minister for Transport in London and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on the work that they have done in getting the finance and the go-ahead.

I am always disappointed that some Labour Members do not welcome such developments. They should, because we can always debate station locations or whatever once we have the principle and once the projects are up and running. I think that that is important.

I am grateful for the money that has been invested in London transport. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury mentioned a figure of £1·75 billion yesterday. That sum includes the cost of work on the Jubilee line and on the docklands extension. That is big money, and we are extremely grateful in south-east London for that development. It is something for which we have worked

hard. My hon. Friends the Members for Eltham and for Bexleyheath have campaigned behind the scenes on the issue.

We want an improved and extended tube network. That is not a subject for debate today, and I will not go into the details of the enlarging of financing for the tube across London. I want to talk about subjects that relate to south-east London and are most important to my constituents.

I will say, however, that tube financing has again hit the headlines of *The Evening Standard* in today's lunchtime edition. The paper reports on capital expenditure and whether it should come from private or public funding, or from a mixture of both. I have to say that it is of no concern to my constituents whether the funding or ownership is public or private. They want a first-class service to which they have greater access and on which they can rely. I am disappointed with the headlines in *The Evening Standard*, because it is a first-class evening newspaper for the whole of London. I was rather disappointed that it should have taken that view. The funding is of no consequence to the travelling public in my constituency who want a first-class service.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): It is probably fair to *The Evening Standard* to say that the editorial is rather more thoughtful. We should make the point that journalists respond in the same way as hon. Members. They should be patted on the back, and then one should pass over the headline.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his witty intervention, and I believe that my hon. Friend is a former journalist. I endorse what he said. The paper's editorials are read with great interest by a vast number of my constituents. The editorials are always well thought out, and I enjoy them. The headlines in today's paper are disappointing. I will leave the issue of the tube by saying that we want it in south-east London, we like it, but, at the moment, we ain't got it.

I wish to speak now about roads, a subject in which my hon. Friend the Minister is even more involved. One desperately needed improvement in our transport network in south-east London which was proposed was the building of the east London river crossing. As my hon. Friend knows following his recent visit, my constituents in Crayford and Erith are suffering the daily nuisance and disturbance of hundreds of heavy goods vehicles using suburban roads and the high streets.

Those roads are wholly inadequate to deal with the heavy burden of traffic, especially the large lorries which cause delays to traffic trying to negotiate town centres. It has also proved to be dangerous to other road users and to pedestrians. In particular, I am concerned about young children and the elderly who are put at the greatest risk by the juggernauts which go through, for example, the centre of Crayford and try to negotiate the one-way system there.

The lorries use residential roads to cut through from the industrial estates to make their way to the Dartford tunnel or the Blackwall tunnel. The latter, of course, is not large enough to cope with the volume of traffic that is travelling from south-east London across to east London, to Essex or to the M11 and destinations in East Anglia or the north.

The Queen Elizabeth bridge has made the traffic flow on the M25 much better. We all welcome that excellent addition to our road network in the area. But using the crossing point at Dartford puts many miles on the clock for those wishing to travel from south-east London up to the M11—and for those who wish to travel to the north circular and north London, who have to travel east before they can go north and west—and takes much longer because the number of such journeys adds to the traffic congestion.

I warmly welcome the recent statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham to the effect that the approach road to the proposed east London river crossing would not destroy any of Oxleas wood. Many people in my area campaigned vigorously to save that historic woodland. We all share the view that it is important to keep such woodlands and open spaces. It is excellent news that the woods are to be saved from destruction and that the motorway approach will not plough through that attractive area. Yet we in south-east London are left rather in limbo as a result of the decision.

I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Minister to reappraise the situation and examine alternative solutions to the problem. My constituents in Erith and Crayford would welcome an announcement from the Government about what they propose to do to deal with the traffic problems in our area. Is the east London river crossing to proceed, and if so, when? If not, what do the Government propose to do to improve traffic flow and alleviate traffic problems in south-east London?

Is my hon. Friend aware of the tremendous traffic pressure on the Blackwall tunnel and the A2, especially during the rush hour? I am sure he is. When the tunnel is closed for repairs or when an accident happens, the snarling up is tremendous. There are too many cars trying to gain access to too few river crossing points in our area. We need answers from my hon. Friend, and I urge him to review the position and perhaps suggest that some of his colleagues and officials in the Department try the commute from Crayford, using the A2 and the Blackwall tunnel, at around 8.15 in the morning, when they will see the snarl-up developing.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will also enlighten me about suggestions that we have read in the paper about the possibility of a new bridge at Blackwall to relieve some of the congestion. The existing tunnels are inadequate for the traffic that they serve. Moreover, they bend, and that slows down the flow of traffic.

As I said earlier, we were absolutely delighted when my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London visited my constituency and met Bexley council leader, Councillor Len Newton and his officials at the new Erith leisure centre. The centre, provided by the council, is an excellent amenity for the north of the Bexley borough. My hon. Friend came to discuss the problems of traffic and road transport in our locality. Having known him for many years, and being a friend of his, I am particularly grateful for the time and interest that he took, despite the inclement weather. Standing on the waterfront at Erith, my hon. Friend received a frosty welcome—not from the residents or council officials but from the weather. I am glad that he has had the opportunity to see at first hand the problems created by juggernauts using inadequate roads. My hon. Friend is now well briefed on Bexley's proposals and hopes and we await his decisions and actions in that respect.

Councillor Newton and I emphasised to my hon. Friend the concerns of the councillors and residents of Bexley

[Mr. Evennett]

about the ridiculous suggestion that the east London river crossing should go ahead and be built and that traffic should be allowed to flow along the Thamesmead spine road—the A2016. That would increase local congestion and add to the chaos and anger not only in Erith but in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath. Such a scheme would be a disaster for traffic management in our area. In addition, it would fail the basic test, which is that the east London crossing should be part of a strategic road network for south-east London. The Thamesmead spine road solution would increase problems rather than reducing them and is therefore a non-starter.

My hon. Friend also saw the problems caused by the traffic flow in Crayford town, and how that historic and residential town is being destroyed by the juggernauts, lorries, vans and cars which constantly thunder through the town centre, causing considerable congestion and potential hazard. When he was standing outside Crayford town hall in the bitterly cold weather, chatting to people at the local bus stop, my hon. Friend received first-hand experience of the problem.

We in south-east London know that there are great plans for the east Thames corridor. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is keen to develop the potential of the area and we are keen for the corridor to go ahead. We are looking for more investment, factories, homes and jobs, and the regeneration of the riverside. In my constituency, both Thamesmead and Erith are ripe for such development.

The prospect of the corridor is exciting and challenging and offers much scope and potential. To realise that potential and to encourage industrialists, house builders and new residents to come into the area, we need a better transport network. That transport network must include substantial road and rail improvements, and an improvement in services is essential.

What is the key question for my hon. Friend the Minister? My constituents are growing impatient and I urge my hon. Friend to take action. All is not gloom and doom, because there have been positive signs on the underground, the docklands light railway, the Jubilee line and even British Rail, as described in the letter from the director that I highlighted earlier.

Another encouraging sign is that we have seen a considerable rise in bus service in the past few years. The Hoppa bus has been a tremendous success, and I praise the Kentish Bus Company. That company's depot is in my constituency, and I visited it recently. The service to local people has improved beyond belief. There are better buses, a more reliable service, cheerful and polite drivers—which is important for passengers—and better routes have been provided. I congratulate the Kentish Bus Company for the improved service.

Bus services are far better than they were, and many local people—particularly the elderly—are very grateful for the improved service which, together with their bus passes, is a real lifeline for many pensioners.

When I was a newly elected to the House 10 years ago, I received many letters from disgruntled passengers, whose buses never turned up or were always delayed and many of the staff were not as polite as they should have been. That has changed dramatically. The use of the Hoppa, which picks up people where they need to be picked up and ensures that they do not have to walk considerable distances to a main road bus stop, has been a great improvement for local residents. We have a large elderly population in Erith and Belvedere that is very grateful for the improved service that enables elderly people to get to the Bexleyheath shopping centre and elsewhere.

I thank my hon. Friend for the attention that he has given to that part of London. We can be proud to have such an effective Minister to deal with the problems of London, particularly problems of transport. I am sure that my hon. Friend's in-tray is full of suggestions from hon. Members who represent London constituencies and that he knows that there is still much to be done.

We need to improve the road and rail network across the south-east of London. I know that my hon. Friend understands the frustrations of travellers, the annoyance of local people and the concerns of hon. Members. I urge him to look at the problems of our part of London and to come forward with a strategy and proposals to solve them. I know that he will do it, we believe that he will do it, and I hope that he will do it very soon.

1.14 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I congratulate my hon. Friend on not only arranging the Adjournment debate but on persuading the business managers to allow it to continue for longer than the usual half-hour. The issue of transport in south-east London deserves a lot of attention in Parliament and action on the ground.

I want to mention the most visible, frequent and popular form of transport—walking. We must remember that, whatever our interests as rail passengers, most of us get to railway stations on foot. Whatever our interests may be as car drivers or passengers or bus passengers, we normally walk to bus stops and make many journeys by foot. We must think of the journeys made by those who have no choice as they have no car in the garage or street and are forced to be pedestrians.

There was a remarkably sensible editorial in *The Evening Standard*. I rang up that newspaper this morning to congratulate it on a good editorial and article featured on Monday—I wrote the feature, but it was improved by another writer. The editorial in today's *Evening Standard* gets even more clearly to the heart of the issue of London Underground than we have to the issue of British Rail surface lines. If we had sustained capital investment in London Underground, it could run without subsidy after a few years, with the potential of increasing its capacity; the Government are providing help with crossrail, the Jubilee line and docklands light railway extensions.

As London becomes more prosperous—a world city building on financial expertise, flexibility, the fact that English is a common world language and the fact that it houses many universities—there will be less long-term unemployment, more people sharing in prosperity and more people with a choice in life. The key to achieving that aim is London Underground.

I wish to mention the centre of London before returning to the subject of south-east London. The most recent large line built in London is the Victoria line, which has been up to capacity between Victoria and Green Park. Most people do not want to change trains at Victoria or Green Park, but want to travel across London. That is where crossrail can help. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) talked of crossings over the Thames.

There are fewer rail crossings over the Thames in east London than road crossings, which is why I want to redirect attention towards a proposal from the south-east London branch of Friends of the Earth for a rail tunnel at Woolwich. That tunnel would make it possible for people to make connections to Network SouthEast lines as well as to underground lines—a major improvement.

It will be interesting to listen to my hon. Friend the Minister's words on progress on the possible east London river crossing bridge and, in addition, to hear whether he will say who will consider the economic prospects, and the social and environmental benefits, of having a rail tunnel under the Thames at Woolwich.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford for his words on Oxleas wood, which is currently not in my constituency. The independent impartial boundary commissioners propose to bring the ward which contains it into Eltham constituency. Shrewsbury ward is currently in the constituency of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker), and I do not think that I am being controversial when I say that the greatest fuss is about the impact of the southern approach road. The issue of the bridge has successfully cleared two inquiries, but the proposal to wreck Oxleas wood did not clear either of them.

Where the route should go is a matter for discussion and debate. If one considers the route south of the M11, across the Thames where the proposed bridge might be, the road as previously proposed would have turned south-west towards Brighton. However, we all know that most traffic is trying to get to the channel ports which are to the south-east. Even if the Thamesmead spine route is not used, we should recognise that the economic reasons for the road going south-east are the same as the environmental ones. Although it will be difficult for Members of Parliament and residents of the Bexley area to accept, the road should go through Bexley rather than Eltham.

On the subject of pedestrians and buses, I echo what has been said about the flexibility of the development of London bus services, which I welcome. I also welcome the non-appearance of the total deregulation of London's buses, which marks a wise decision. The Select Committee on Transport considered the matter and made suggestions to the House and the Government. We need to make bus services more flexible. London Buses has much to contribute, but I do not believe that it will run many buses directly. It is the advantages of tendering and flexibility that matter.

I shall now give an illustrative example of local people's interests. In Middle Park avenue, on the Middle Park estate, which is in my constituency, there is what could be described as a rat run. If it is not a rat run, it is a tempting run, through which people drive their vehicles too fast. It is a prime candidate for traffic calming. I am sad that London Buses objects to bringing in some traffic-calming measures on the ground that if they were made, it would not run its buses through the estate. In other parts of England, I have seen bus operators perfectly content to negotiate traffic-calming features of one kind or another. I would ask the people in London Buses, and the emergency services, to stop being so stupid in saying a flat no to suggestions on behalf of local residents. Too many of London's casualties are pedestrians and local people who are hit by vehicles driven by local people and outsiders.

Slowing the speed of traffic has contributed to bringing the present total number of road deaths to below half the peak level, even though traffic has increased and will continue to increase. I ask bus operators and the emergency services to do all they can to find a way forward, rather than digging out the historic negative that one cannot do something in a new way, because it has never been done in that way before.

I echo what has been said about the benefits to London of having my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) as the Minister of Transport in London. It is good to have a Minister for Transport in London, but it is even better that it is my hon. Friend, who has a constituency interest in London and a background in the transport industries.

One reason why road traffic flows in London is the helpful work of the police. Most of their work is in keeping traffic flowing, but there is a problem and I hope that the Select Committee on Transport will make inquiries, both of the Home Office and of the Department of Transport.

In general, traffic policy is settled by the Department of Transport. Some of the budgets are held by the Home Office. The police, on their performance indicators, will normally be judged on crime, and traffic will not get much of a look-in. That applies also to capital investment in virtually automatic technology, such as speed cameras and cameras to detect red light jumping, and to a variety of ways in which technology can be of value.

It is important to try to get rid of the rumour that the people in the traffic branches of the Metropolitan police are called black rats, because they are down a sewer and never seen. They should be out in the open, getting respect for their professional expertise and being honoured for the dangerous work that they do. Stopping vehicles or attending scenes of car crashes on busy roads is a dangerous business; it can be as dangerous as it is on the motorways. I hope that that matter will get attention at New Scotland Yard, the Home Office and the Department of Transport.

We are in the same situation we were in seven years ago, when I was at the Department of Transport, on the question whether local authorities can be trusted to use new technology, or even old technology, to enforce rules on parking on yellow lines. I am not asking my hon. Friend for a detailed response on that matter, but wish to flag it as a matter of significant concern.

Rail investment matters both above and below ground, Denis Tunnicliffe at London Underground was very open in praising Ministers before the last election on their commitment to getting a level of investment that would allow a decent, modern metro to be maintained and extended. I am sure that hon. Members will want to recognise the efforts made by Transport Ministers in the collegiate discussions with the Treasury over the budget level in a difficult financial year.

We are not spending enough. I do not believe that we should draw too many lessons from the Central line power failure, because that was unusual, and the Central line has had £700 million of capital investment in addition, that line does not come into south-east London, as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford. If we can get tube links into south-east London, which will require some capital investment, that will be good.

On the surface, when will aproval be given for the doubling up of the rail tracks at Borough Market junction? Anyone who looks towards Westminster from the 29th

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

floor of Guy's hospital will see the bottleneck that stops Thameslink services going through London Bridge. Four times as many people want the service to go through London Bridge as want it to go through the Elephant and Castle. That is the key to all the Kent line services. I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to come up today with a detailed policy statement, but I want him to say to those to whom he talks that there will be constant, persistent, consistent pressure, because that is the key to getting the best value for other investments in the Kent services.

Let me return to the subject of the rail lines going through the south-east constituencies. The main channels of communication go along the railway line. They unite Greenwich and Woolwich, as I was saying to the Local Government Boundary Commission inquiry in my constituency recently. They unite Kidbrooke and Eltham. No doubt my colleague, the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) will say something on that subject as well. The roads performs the same function. Watling street, the A2, or the Old Dover road—part of it, by the Royal Standard, is still called the Old Dover road—is a natural way of uniting constituencies, at least in the borough of Greenwich.

I hope that, when the House considers those proposals, it will look at the transport links and decide that if Shooters hill and Shooters Hill road are used as the division, that will make it possible for hon. Members to represent their constituents' transport interests in the House. I look forward to doing that for some years to come, representing Eltham and making sure that my hon. Friend keeps his ministerial job going well.

If we get better safety provisions for pedestrians, cyclists and motor cyclists, some access to allow those using cars to commute to central London—although not too many—and improved rail services and choices, we will be able to make sure that London transport contributes to the quality of life in London rather than detracting from it.

1.26 pm

Mr. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on achieving an Adjournment debate on a subject that must be dear to everyone—not just those who represent south-east London—who has to find his or her way from it by road or rail. We do not yet have the sophistication of the tube line, as the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) pointed out.

It is important that we accept the principle of a high-quality public transport system, for two good reasons —one economic and one social. The economic reason is that if we are to get the people of south-east London to the centre of London or elsewhere so that they can participate in the prosperity that we hope that a capital city such as London will achieve, we need a good transport network. If we want the tourism of a capital city such as London to develop and enhance the city, we need excellent transport services. If we want serious reductions in unemployment —if we are beginning to see some reduction in unemployment, it is only by 0·5 per cent. in my consitituency—we need to ensure that people can move about the city.

The vast majority of people who use the buses are women who are tied to their homes through having young families or who have part-time jobs, the elderly, people with disabilities and children of school age, particularly those of secondary school age. For that social reason, it is important that we have a proper and systematic system working throughout the capital but particularly in the south-east, which has been cut off from the rest of London because of defects in the transport system.

I shall now spend some time bemoaning the state of British Rail and Network SouthEast. I know that other hon. Members will join me in that, because those of us who have to travel on those trains know that they are dirty and overcrowded, with trains being cancelled and delayed. The Kent link and the Kent coast line have the worst punctuality record of all the London lines. We have already accepted that we have a poorer transport system than elsewhere, but we also have the worst service. One in five trains is routinely late and delays and cancellations have exasperated and frustrated commuters for as many years as I can remember. When I travelled in this morning, I did not leave as normal from Hither Green, but left from Catford Bridge and, of course, once again the train was late. Although it was not at peak hour, the train was still quite crowded.

It is illogical that Ministers or British Rail believes that the reduction in the number of people travelling into the centre of London because of the rise in unemployment during the recession is an excuse for removing huge numbers of trains. Will the Minister tell us, now that, according to the Government, we are coming out of recession, whether there will be more trains on the timetable rather than fewer trains? I doubt it.

No doubt the Minister will talk about the Networker trains and how wonderful they are. They are much cleaner, brighter and smoother than the old, rickety trains to which we are used. However, they too have had problems. Doors have malfunctioned and elderly people in my constituency have had difficulties boarding them. I hope that that will be considered and that some redesign is possible to remedy that fault.

The hon. Member for Eltham mentioned the problems that we face in south-east London over the lack of decision on the channel tunnel, which has been going on for many years. Houses down that line are blighted. I am deeply concerned that, in my constituency, two of the major areas, Grove Park and Hither Green, will be affected as long as Waterloo remains the terminal. I know that residents in streets such as Millborough crescent and Springbank road are already under siege because they feel that their properties have been devalued. When we heard that the line was to be changed to run along the east London corridor, there was great relief. Unfortunately, the issue has been thrown back into the pot and it appears that, for several years to come, those constituents will suffer because there will be fewer trains to take them into central London and much heavier use of the track by channel tunnel trains. I should like to be able to reassure my constituents that the Minister thinks that is not likely to happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) and I were probably the only hon. Members who gave a small cheer during the Budget debate when the Chancellor said that the docklands light railway was to come to Lewisham. The rest of the House was relatively quiet at the time and it may have sounded rather odd that the Chancellor's only support for that announcement came from the Opposition Benches. However, I am glad that it

was only a small cheer, because I received a letter yesterday from the Department of the Environment. It states:

"The approval we have given remains subject to the condition that no Government grant will be made available."

That leaves so much uncertainty that we are concerned about whether the whole proposal will eventually go through. I know that the Minister is visiting Lewisham on Monday to look at the plans. I hope that he can confirm that a target date will be set and that the DLR will go ahead. I know that controversy surrounds the scheme, because, for that to happen, other stations on the line may have to be closed, which may not please people elsewhere.

We conducted a survey on British Rail in my constituency during July and August this year. It was not a straightforward survey which we carried out by standing on the platforms while people waited for cancelled and delayed trains. We did not ask them merely to say yes or no to a series of questions. We handed the questionnaire to people and then let them get on to their trains, once they had arrived. People had to post the completed questionnaires to me, which, as hon. Members know, was asking a lot of them. They had to make an extra effort to respond to the survey.

The results of the survey were horrifying. I received well over 300 replies in a couple of weeks. Three out of four people, in the past six months of travelling on British Rail trains through Lewisham, had experienced having to stand in the guard's van because the train was so overcrowded. Some 98 per cent. of those replying felt that their trains were overcrowded. Some 84 per cent. said that they could not get a seat and two out of three feared travelling at night. One of the main reasons for that fear is that there are no staff on the stations. Another aspect of that is that people have an opportunity to dodge fares. I pass through stations regularly and I come home with pockets full of tickets that I have not handed in to a member of staff. I may decorate a room with them one day as a way to use them up. Two thirds of those who replied feared travelling at night and two thirds felt that there should be more staff on duty.

Some Lewisham commuters went further and wrote letters to me explaining some of their more serious worries about the state of British Rail. One described the overall service as appalling, chaotic and perhaps even dangerous. We should all be worried if people travelling in the rush hour fear for their lives or fear injury because of the dangers caused by overcrowded trains.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: On the point about there being no staff on stations, the hon. Lady will be only too well aware that some ghastly sexual crimes have been committed on local railway lines. One of the risks of having no staff on stations is that if there is an incident on a train, there is no one to whom to report it. When I raised that matter with the authorities, I was told that people could ring stations in London and that there were cameras monitoring people. That is wholly unsatisfactory and puts at risk many of the travelling public. That should be unacceptable in this day and age.

Mrs. Prentice: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that intervention; he is right. The lack of staff especially affects women, although not only women. A number of people wrote to me saying that they did not fear travelling at night because they simply did not travel at night any more. They will not travel by train in the evening because of their fears, so they travel by taxi or by minicab instead. It is nonsense for people to be turned away from a public transport system because they fear for their safety. Having staff on stations is crucial for that reason, and is also important in terms of giving people information.

With the changes in the timetable in the past year, there are stations in south-east London and in Kent where there are no staff on duty. If a passenger misses a train by one or two minutes, he or she may wait on his own for almost an hour because a station is unstaffed. Unfortunately, even in the middle of the day, that is not a pleasant experience in this day and age. I hope that British Rail will heed the needs of passengers in south-east London.

Some respondents have been travelling on British Rail for 40 years. They say that the service has never been so insultingly bad as it is at present.

One wrote:

"I cannot remember when I last had a seat on a rush-hour train out of Lewisham . . . Cancellation and late running are not the main problem, though the situation is far from ideal. The main problem is that with each new timetable a few more services have disappeared and that the remaining trains are shorter."

British Rail is suffering from inadequate investment in south-east London. People wanting to travel to work in a positive frame of mind arrive at their offices, factories or shops feeling frustrated, stressed and under considerable tension as a result of travelling into central London.

I welcome the news that there is to be no deregulation of London's buses, but I am extremely concerned that the Government are still going headlong into privatisation, which is causing considerable anxiety to members of the public who rely on bus services to get around.

I have written many letters to the Minister on behalf of constituents about the travelcard. I know that he said that its future is safe, but we cannot be convinced of that. I hope that the Minister will reiterate today that the travelcard will remain in existence, come hell or high water.

I remember the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) speaking some time ago about motorway coning and saying all that would be stopped when he became Prime Minister. Has the Minister ever thought of holding a national no roadworks day, on which motorists could use the roads without having to skirt cones, barriers and other obstacles? Will he at least suggest to the utilities—British Gas, British Telecommunications and London Electricity —that they consult so that, if they must dig up a particular road, they all do so the same day, instead of digging it up separately week after week? I am sure that central London's car users would greatly appreciate such an arrangement. Perhaps there could be at least a London no roadworks day, later extended to other parts of the country.

I would normally say that one could drive a bus through Government transport policies, but I fear that the bus would be snarled up in the jam on the south circular. This debate has provided a useful opportunity to inform the Minister of problems encountered by rail commuters and others in south-east London. I know that the phrase "an integrated transport policy" sends civil servants into paroxysms, but perhaps the Minister will ensure not only that British Rail is the subject of proper investment and considers the passenger to be of paramount importance but that roads and bus services are considered as part of an overall strategic plan for south-east London travel. The Government should also get their act together in respect of the channel tunnel, so that my constituents using the line

[Mrs. Prentice]

from Hither Green down to Kent stations will not suffer from its heavier use by channel tunnel trains on which they will not be able to commute.

1.48 pm

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I also congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on his good fortune in being called for today's debate, particularly since it has allowed relatively full discussion compared with the normally short Adjournment debate. I congratulate him also on his good choice of subject. He selected a topic of real concern to all right hon. and hon. Members who represent south-east London constituencies. It is noticeable that in today's debate we have heard a unanimous expression of concern from both sides of the House about the serious problems that exist and the way in which people in south-east London are badly served by current transport arrangements.

Network SouthEast traditionally has been the main transport service for south-east London. It has, I am afraid, an unenviable record which has been mentioned by every speaker who has contributed to the debate. Its punctuality record for the past year, is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) pointed out, the worst of all the Network SouthEast regions, with the possible exception of Thames, which just about matches the failure of Network SouthEast on punctuality.

The written answer that I received a couple of weeks ago, giving the latest figures, shows that in the most recent period, up to 5 November this year, only 79·9 per cent. of services arrived reasonably punctually on the Kent coast line and only 78·2 per cent. on the Kent link line. On both the Kent coast line and Kent link services, fewer than one in five trains routinely arrive on time, against targets—which are not especially ambitious—of 82 per cent. for the Kent coast line and 88 per cent. for the Kent link. That record of unpunctuality is a daily experience for my constituents and those of every other hon. Member who represents south-east London.

I shall now quote from a letter that was sent to me on 26 November by a constituent who also happens to work for ITN. I hope that he will have some influence on coverage of the issue.

"In the past three weeks literally not a single train that I have tried to take has been on time. Many have been delayed by more than 15 minutes, others are cancelled altogether.

I have written so often to the Network Customer Service Manager that my letters are now ignored—I have not had a reply to the last four anyway."

No trains and no replies to his letters—what an appalling record.

In the past, those problems have been attributed to the poor condition of the old, out-dated rolling stock that people have to travel in on the Kent link and Kent coast services. Now the new Networkers are being introduced. We were promised that their introduction would be the solution; they would be modern, comfortable and reliable and we would all have a more attractive and pleasant rail service to and from London.

I agree with the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford that the Networkers are fine when they work, but unfortunately they do not work all that often. For a brand new supply of rolling stock, it is astonishing how many of my constituents—and, I expect, constituents of other hon. Members—have had to write with descriptions of lengthy delays that occur while the doors are made to work. The doors jam, apparently, if passengers lean against them. It seems extraordinary, in 1993, after getting on for two centuries of experience of building rolling stock, that it is impossible to design and build trains whose doors do not jam if passengers lean against them.

I hope that the Minister can give us some sort of answer as to when we can expect those problems to be sorted out and when Network South-East will run trains whose doors open reliably and do not cause the type of problems and delays that we have come across. I must also ask him for an indication of when Network SouthEast will achieve a reasonable target performance, given the abject failure to which I have referred. It is reasonable for us to expect that at least 90 per cent. of trains arrive punctually as a matter of course. When can we expect even that rather modest target performance to be achieved?

Investment in the rail service is crucial. There is an urgent need for increased investment, not just in new rolling stock, but in improved signalling and track. The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) rightly referred to the bottleneck on the approach to London bridge. That has been a serious problem and it has to be tackled. I ask the Minister, when can we expect that problem to be resolved? Secondly, can we expect any progress on the other rail investment issue that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Eltham—the rail crossing at Woolwich, which would serve a very useful purpose, linking the Kent services with north London and, in the course of so doing, making it possible to run an orbital service around the whole of London? We hear about the problems and the appalling congestion on the M25, but the link at Woolwich offers the opportunity of an orbital rail service around London. When can we expect any news about the possibility of progress on that issue?

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East asked about the channel tunnel. When will the uncertainty end, and when can we expect the high-speed link to be operational? That is one of the most disgracefully delayed features of investment in British Rail's infrastructure in the last decade. It may not appear to be directly relevant to south-east London, but, in the absence of a dedicated high-speed rail link, the rail network between London and the Kent ports has to be used to accommodate passenger and freight traffic to and from the channel tunnel.

It is clear that Network SouthEast is having to change the programming of local services to accommodate additional traffic that will come from the channel tunnel. That was brought to my attention by the Blackheath Society, which is concerned about changes to the timetabling of trains at Blackheath and about the fact that the two trains an hour that run through Blackheath at off-peak times are leaving the station in close proximity to each other. It has reasonably asked that the times should be spaced out at a more reasonable interval, but it was told by Network SouthEast that it was not possible because of the channel tunnel.

I did not believe that, so I took the matter up with Network SouthEast. It replied:

"I can understand your frustration at the current situation affecting users of Blackheath Station, the spacing of services is clearly not ideal.

The current timetable has pathways built into it for Channel Tunnel services. The decision to introduce this in advance of the tunnel opening was taken to enable us to iron out any problems before the new trains take up their pathways."

Network SouthEast obviously requires a great deal of time to iron out problems as the current timetable has already been operational for some months.

"At the time this decision was taken and the timetable process activitated the Channel Tunnel was due to open in May 1993, this date has now of course been postponed. The inclusion of these pathways entailed a complete rewrite of the timetable with both Network SouthEast, European Passenger Services and Railfreight Distributions aspirations to be catered for. British Rail's main commitment was that there would be no curtailment of Network SouthEast services but clearly there would have to be timing changes with considerably more services than in previous years approaching and leaving the London area."

There we have it—our services will be squeezed even more because of the need to accommodate channel tunnel traffic. Given the likelihood of yet further delay in the construction of the dedicated high-speed link to the channel tunnel, that is likely to be a continuing frustration and problem. As the hon. Member for Eltham said, with the congestion at the approach to London bridge and the difficulty in accommodating the existing volume of traffic, heaven knows what the consequences of a substantial additional volume of traffic from the channel ports will be. Therefore, when can we expect the high-speed link to be operational?

The London underground has not been available to south-east London. It has been south-east London's traditional complaint that the underground has passed it by. I suppose that we should raise half a cheer for the news that the Jubilee line and docklands light railway extensions may be coming to south-east London. It is only half a cheer because important questions remain unanswered about both.

There is the important question whether there will be a station on the south-east London part of the Jubilee line. It is extraordinary that there is no commitment as yet—the Minister may be able to assure me that I am wrong—to build a station at north Greenwich, the one point on the Jubilee line that is in south-east London. It would be astonishing if there were a hole in the ground with a concrete box in it and underground trains passed through south-east London for the first time without stopping there. Will this be the fate of south-east London—the tube, at last, but it does not stop for us? Or will we get the worst scenario, which now appears to be under consideration —a park-and-ride facility for 1,000 cars on the north Greenwich site to fund the construction of the station?

The delay is for the same reason that delayed the Jubilee line for 18 months—the Government's insistence that there had to be a contribution from the private sector towards its construction.

We all know about the nonsense of the Olympia and York contributions. Supposedly, it was £400 million but that has gradually reduced. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) revealed in the House yesterday, it is probably worth no more than £200 million now because of the phasing negotiated with the Government by the bankers acting for Olympia and York. At least that problem is supposedly resolved.

In the case of North Greenwich station, there is no resolution. I understand that British Gas is reluctant to meet the Government's request for £25 million for the station. That is not surprising, given that the same Department of Transport is proposing to cut a significant part of the development site with its bridge across the Thames at Blackwall. While the negotiations continue, there is uncertainty about the station. The latest proposal I have heard is that there might be a park-and-ride facility for 1,000 cars to provide the money that British Gas will not produce. If that were so, it would be an outrage.

The area is already grossly overcongested with traffic. To attract a substantial additional volume of commuter traffic into the area simply to pay for the rail link will be a gross disservice. It will not only adversely affect the environment of everyone living in that part of south-east London but ultimately blight the future development of the peninsula. It will be a case of infrastructure investment not assisting development, as most of us believe it should be doing, but distorting future development and creating a pattern that is incompatible with the sort of development that most of us want to enhance and improve our local environment.

If the Jubilee line station is a problem, the docklands light railway station is an even greater one. We have the supposed announcement of the extension of the docklands light railway accompanied by some interesting figures. The Budget statement announced that a project that was supposed to cost £140 million will now cost £100 million. I grant that the Minister is not responsible for that. It is extraordinary that he is not responsible. It is an amazing comment on transport policy under this Government that the Department of the Environment is now responsible for the docklands light railway. What a way to run a transport system.

The Government are now saying that the scheme will cost only £100 million, rather than £140 million previously estimated. Like many other hon. Members who have been troubled by the failure of the original section of the docklands light railway to provide a reliable and dependable service, I am naturally concerned about the reduction in cost. Is this another example of cheeseparing leading possibly to malfunction and breakdown of the service? So there is a big question there.

It seems likely that the real saving, so far as one can identify it, is from a decision to drop two stations from the docklands light railway extension, respectively at Island Gardens and Greenwich Cutty Sark. I am still waiting for answers to the questions that I put to the Department on this matter. But the only explanation appears to be that the cost is such that the two stations must be dropped. What a way to plan a rail system. Stations that were to provide an important access point to people using the facility must be dropped, supposedly because they cannot be financed.

It is not a question of the scheme not having extremely favourable cost benefit implications. All the financial analysis suggests that it will be one of the most profitable rail investment projects that is feasible. We notice that the Secretary of State for the Environment, in his press release, talked about the great benefits of the scheme. He said that it would help attract tourists to Greenwich. It is astonishing that in the same breath he should be praising the merits of the scheme for bringing tourists to Greenwich when he is proposing to drop the station that would serve tourists who want access to Greenwich town centre. It is nonsense. I am only sorry that the Minister will not be in a position to answer my questions, as the matter is not within his responsibilities.

The people of Greenwich are feeling sore. They will get a glimpse of two quasi-underground services—the Jubilee line and the docklands light railway—apparently without any new stations. What an extraordinary fate and what a way to plan rail infrastructure investment. It has been planned to serve not the public but merely the whims of the

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

market on the basis that, if a private developer does not stump up the money, we cannot have our station. Such thinking is symptomatic of everything that is wrong with transport planning.

This morning, we learnt that the Government plan to sell London's underground. It is typical of the Government that such a decision is announced not in an election manifesto or a ministerial statement to the House but simply in a newspaper report that says that the Government have now decided to sell London Transport. It is a wonderful sense of timing, just after two weeks that must have done everything possible to encourage potential buyers that it is an attractive prospect. In the past two weeks, we have seen the worst chaos of London Transport in memory, with a massive power failure that halted the entire Central line for five days. Apparently, the cable concerned is 70 years old. Yesterday, we were told of the extraordinary experiments being run by London Underground on driverless trains.

The news raises the question about whether the sale is designed to save money rather than improve the quality of the service. But this blinkered vision—I hesitate to say "tunnel vision" because it would be an inappropriate pun —puts all the emphasis on a commercial approach and is typical of the Government. Their policy is sell, sell, sell and, if the thing cannot be made to work, sell it to someone else. It is a deplorable surrender of responsibility. The Government are washing their hands of their responsibility to deliver a proper service to Londoners. It is the product of political dogma seized on by a desperate Government, who have failed lamentably to look after Londoners' transport interests. Incidentally, they have reneged disgracefully on their election pledges to provide desperately needed increased investment in London Underground, a point which the Opposition will continue to make in the months ahead.

We also notice that the Government have abandoned their manifesto pledges on London's buses. The manifesto pledged to deregulate London's buses and I admit that we welcome the abandonment of that pledge. However, it has only a limited advantage because the Government are proceeding with their other ideological predilection—privatisation. We shall therefore see a privatisation exercise involving net cost tendering, which raises questions about the continuation of services in areas where they may not be commercially viable.

We all knew about the problems that would be caused by deregulation—chaos in central areas, excessive interest in profitable routes and, consequently, a great deal of traffic congestion and problems. But one of the problems associated with net cost tendering is the disappearance of many less profitable services in areas where whoever seeks to take on the routes simply cannot run them viably.

The subsidy provision for London Buses in the current year is some 50 per cent. less than it was last year—some £52 million as against £100 million in 1992-93. We do not yet have figures for the revenue support grant for next year. If that downward trend in subsidy continues, a question hangs over whether those unprofitable services can be run in a framework in which the Government are going for net cost tendering. What will happen if a contractor takes on an unviable service, says "We shall try it", and then finds that it cannot make money. If the line does not provide adequate returns, will they say, "We are sorry but we cannot run that service any more"? How will those services be sustained under a privatised framework? I hope that the Minister will answer because we are worried that, following privatisation, the number of services in some parts of London, particularly the south-east where routes are far from profitable, will be seriously reduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East asked about the travelcard. I simply endorse her concern that the travelcard must remain available. It is all very well for Ministers to say that they will continue with the travelcard, but can they guarantee that it will continue to be available on the same terms and at the same real cost, without a huge increase in price?

Many of us are concerned that even if a token travelcard continues to be available, a rapid and considerable increase in cost will take away a great deal of its value.

I have spoken mainly about public transport and I shall now turn to vehicular traffic in south-east London, which is causing serious problems. Traffic congestion in south-east London must be among the worst in any part of the capital, as those of us who travel through the hopelessly congested main routes into London and some of the smaller routes which are extensively used as rat runs, know all too well. The consequences of such congestion in terms of atmospheric pollution and the health hazards that flow from it are serious.

It is no coincidence that there is an above-average incidence of asthma, especially among children in south-east London. That together with the figures for the increased emissions of NOx and carbon monoxide and the atmospheric pollution from industrial sources that south-east London unfortunately suffers, constitutes a real health hazard for people there. Against that background, it is worrying that the Government still seem preoccupied with road building and investment in new road infrastructure rather than in improving and extending the public transport network.

Some hon. Members have spoken about the decision to abandon a ridiculous proposal to bulldoze Oxleas wood as part of the east London river crossing scheme. I hope that the Minister will give a categorical assurance that there will be no reappearance of the ill-fated scheme to drive a road anywhere near that part of south-east London which already suffers excessive traffic volumes and atmospheric pollution. The damage that would be caused to parts of Plumstead and the areas around Oxleas wood would be just as unacceptable as the damage to the wood itself.

There is severe congestion at Blackwall, and the Department of Transport is right to look at a third crossing to relieve it. The bridge that the Minister appears to favour has certain cost and speed of construction advantages, but a high-level bridge would have serious environmental consequences. Has a low-level bridge with a facility for it to be opened for ships on the Thames been considered? Would such a bridge be feasible and would not it cause less environmental damage than the current proposal?

More parochially, in the interests of my consituency, what is the possibility of exploring a scheme to divert through traffic from the historic town centre of Greenwich? Everyone who knows the area is aware of its enormous architectural importance and of the damage being caused by the volume of heavy traffic through the area. Progress is being made on a scheme, which I hope the Department of Transport will endorse, for a heavy goods vehicle ban in the town centre. That would be a step forward but to solve

the problem we need a proper bypass to keep traffic out of the town centre. Will the Department encourage work reasonably soon at least to study that option?

We have had a wide-ranging and important debate on an issue of enormous concern to all hon. Members who represent south-east London constituencies. The situation is intolerable and the people of south-east London are ill-served by current policies and transport systems. We shall continue to highlight those failures and will press the Government to change their policy in important areas and increase investment in public transport. As concern has been expressed by hon. Members in all parts of the House, I hope that the Minister will deliver some good news and will fight to ensure improved traffic provision and arrangements in south-east London.

2.10 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): May I first apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to other hon. Members? I had intended to be here for the whole debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on getting not just the Adjournment debate but a particularly elongated version. Unfortunately, my plans this morning went awry as I am sure hon. Members will appreciate. It was nothing to do with British Rail, but I did not get here at the time I expected.

I am grateful for the few moments in which I have been permitted to speak. Obviously, I shall restrict my comments to ground that I feel has not been covered and to which perhaps the Minister could respond. South-east London is particularly prone to problems with Network SouthEast, and people think that hon. Members from that area go on at disproportionate length about it. The reason for that is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) said, that London underground is to all intents and purposes the north London underground. There are, I believe, 14 stations located south of the river out of a total of 260 stations. Apart from New Cross and New Cross Gate, there are none in south-east London at all.

Network SouthEast has been working hard recently to improve its performance, but, as has been made plain, it has had mixed results. It is also working hard on its public relations. I was present at a useful meeting at Bromley town hall with representatives from Bromley, Greenwich, Bexley, Croydon and Lewisham. The Minister's colleague, the Minister for Public Transport, was present and we found the meeting to be extremely useful.

The meeting heard a quite surprising number of relevations about cuts in services or what will, in effect, be cuts in services. Those revelations were made only through that forum, which was an entirely unofficial body. We heard of the problems that making slots available for channel tunnel traffic is likely to cause. We also heard of the details of the franchises that are ultimately to be let for services in the south-east. Will the temporary reductions, or the allegedly temporary reductions, in the normal commuter services for south-east London be made good in the years to come? Ultimately we all hope—if any of us are still alive at the time—that the dedicated link should relieve congestion through south-east London, and then we shall look to those services being returned.

Another area where the pressure for slots is having an effect is the reduction or the almost complete cancellation of the Thameslink service into south-east London. We have been told by Network SouthEast that all the slots are going to the Gatwick-Luton link. While that is perfectly reasonable in itself, I do not see why we in south-east London should lose all our Thameslink services. The service is immensely useful and it is important for south-east London. Why do all the services need to be sacrificed? A reduced service is better than no service at all. I would ask Network SouthEast to reconsider that.

My final points relate to the A205, which is part of the south circular road, for which the Minister's Department took responsibility some years ago. Its performance in charge of that route has been problematic, to put it at its mildest. It is a major route, although that part is little more than a disjointed series of highways and byways. The idea that it can be compared with the north circular road is erroneous. The north circular road has the characteristic of being a route in a way that the south circular does not.

Recent repairs, particularly those at Dulwich common, caused chaos throughout south-east London and not just in the immediate vicinity. People started to re-route their journeys into central London from a long way back. Will the Minister give any assurances on the stewardship of the A205? The red routing of the A205 is under public consultation at the moment and, regardless of people's attitudes, all local authorities are determined to co-operate with the traffic director to ensure that that is as beneficial as possible.

In conclusion, I will raise with the Minister a subject that I have raised before. Perhaps he will be able to say something about it again. It concerns where the Catford town centre relief road stands in the current order of events. There have been at least five different start dates for the scheme. I wonder whether we are still working to the same one that we were the last time the subject was raised. I believe that the start date was in the latter part of this year or the early part of next year. Those are just a few points, and I am grateful to hon. Members for allowing me to make them.

2.14 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I have been in this place on and off for about 10 years and I still have not a clue how it works. I came here briefed that my excellent hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennet) and I might have to speak for two and a half hours between us. I now find, after an extraordinarily interesting debate, that I have to make about two and a half hours' worth of replies in about six minutes. I trust that the House will indulge me, therefore. I shall try to cover the major areas and if there are others that I leave untouched, I shall be happy to write to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford for initiating this important debate. He spoke extremely well. It was typical of him that when I went to Bexley recently to look at the problems, at his invitation —I am grateful to Councillor Len Newton and his colleagues for their hospitality to me and my colleagues —my hon. Friend was there with us the entire time. He is absolutely right that it was extremely cold and also that the visit was very useful. I am grateful to him for drawing my attention to the problems of his constituency. I try to get out and about in the city as much as I can. I know it pretty well, as do most hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, but there are always aspects that one needs to know better.

[Mr. Steve Norris]

I acknowledge the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend): I will say a word or two later about staffing at stations. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), a former transport Minister of great distinction, spoke with authority. The hon. Members for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd) also spoke.

Let me just say to the hon. Member for Greenwich that I know that his hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) regards having to speak on transport as something of a demotion, and I know that there is a lot of irritation in the shadow Cabinet about the fact that he, and not the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), whom Conservative Members all desperately miss, is no longer in charge of transport, but I hope that the hon. Member for Greenwich will not feel that he has been dealt too poor a hand by his colleagues. The way in which the Labour party works is pretty labyrinthine and impenetrable, and I do not know what kind of signals it is sending by having him demoted to shadowing me, but it is a personal pleasure to see him. I trust that he will stay on the Opposition Benches shadowing me for many years to come.

Mr. Raynsford: That is an old line.

Mr. Norris: It is a very old line, and all the better for that.

I am glad that there is real all-party agreement about our policy on buses which, I repeat is to proceed with privatisation, net cost tendering and the flexibility of routes. It is all extremely good stuff. Just to reassure Opposition Members, I should say that the prospect of deregulation remains firmly on track, although it may not be until the next Parliament that we engage upon the process.

To the hon. Member for Lewisham, East, let me say that I realise that it is all good knockabout political stuff for Opposition Members to question whether the travelcard will survive. I suppose that if I were in their shoes, I would do the same. It is good irresponsible stuff. There is not the slightest foundation in fact for the Opposition's allegations and there never has been. None the less, this is politics and most of us are over 21—embarrassingly so in my case—and I for one do not object to what is, after all, the stuff of politics.

Let me be serious, though, and say that there never was, and there is not, any threat whatever to the continuation, not just in name but in form and in substance—

Mr. Raynsford: And price?

Mr. Norris: And, indeed, as the hon. Gentleman says, in terms of price.

Mr. Raynsford: In real terms?

Mr. Norris: And in real terms. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me have a copy of the speech that he would like me to make. I said on one occasion in the Chamber that if it did not have such unfortunate antecedents I would ask the House to read my lips. I shall not proceed down that road.

Mr. Raynsford: Dangerous.

Mr. Norris: It is a fairly dangerous statement, as the hon. Gentleman says. None the less, this is a serious point.

Frankly, I have rather resented the fact that many people in London have been genuinely troubled by the rather irresponsible nonsense that has emanated from far too many Opposition Members, who have sought to question every aspect just to unsettle all those elderly people who really care about such issues—who have got quite worried because they have heard a Member of Parliament, no less, say, "Perhaps there will not be concessionary fares or a travelcard." Those people may not have the intelligence to read through the pretty obvious political signals. Opposition Members bear a heavy responsibility for taking that sort of approach. Let me make it clear once and for all, beyond peradventure, that there is no threat whatever to the travelcard or concessionary fare arrangements.

As to London Underground, I shall have to skirt over a great deal of what has been said today. The article in the *Evening Standard* is not so much a statement of policy as a statement of the fact that my dear old friend Dick Murray, transport correspondent of the *Evening Standard*, was faced with a blank page on a damp Friday morning and had to write something. It is all good stuff, but it is very wide of the mark.

I take this opportunity to make it quite clear that we have no plans, in the short or medium term, for the privatisation of the underground. What we do have is the breadth of vision to recognise that there are three sources that could help to finance the underground—passenger fares, grants from the hard-pressed taxpayer and the involvement of the private sector.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham I welcome the leader in the *Evening Standard* which—aside from the hyperbole, which sometimes went over the top—said that we ought to ask ourselves questions of this sort. It said, in a characteristically fair way, that the last thing one should do is to deride that approach or attack it on ideological grounds. It is a sensible proposition, so let us look at it.

The important thing that the leader in the *Evening Standard* said, and which I endorse, is that this is all about improving services to passengers. Passengers are all-important, and we must do nothing unless we are sure that it will deliver benefits to passengers—whether it is moving down the road to more private capital, or more taxpayers capital or doing something on fares.

I have looked at all the industries that have benefited from the introduction of private capital over the past 14 years, and a pretty clear case is made that we should introduce as many of those opportunities as possible. The form of introduction is still very much to be determined. It is too early to speculate on the idea of privatising the underground.

I am sure that all hon. Members are pleased that the Jubilee line extension has been given the go-ahead. As to the question about the North Greenwich station, I understand the point that the hon. Member for Greenwich has made. I think that the hon. Gentleman knows the political background to this—and I use the word "political" with a small "p". British Gas, as the major property holder in the area, is thinking very hard about how to develop the facility there. The Jubilee line scheme will proceed on the basis that the station is constructed—that is to say, the box will be built—and an arrangement will be arrived at with the developer to provide the station facility in due course.

It is in everyone's interest that that should be the case. I do not want the hon. Member for Greenwich further to denigrate the economic prospects of his own constituency and to cast further doubt on its economic viability. It is an extraordinary form of community politics to commit suicide on behalf of one's own constituents, as Opposition Members seem to do on many occasions. I will tell the constituents of Greenwich, if the hon. Member for Greenwich will not say it, that they will have a station that will serve them not for five years but for 150 years.

I am glad that the extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham has been welcomed. It is right that the Department of the Environment is in the lead on this. As any sensible person would expect, I have been kept closely involved with its impact in transport terms. I am not the Minister in charge of the financing arrangements—which is not difficult for me to come to terms with—but I will continue to exercise considerable interest in the transport implications of the project, which is a very exciting one. I am always sad if a good development such as that which brings Lewisham into the city is not welcomed. Thank goodness that at least the hon. Members for Lewisham, West and for Lewisham, East, who should perhaps be able to say a word on the subject, appreciate the scheme.

I am delighted that the Chancellor was able to give the go-ahead to that project, which will be delivered in due course. The eventual mix of stations will be a matter for the private sector to decide in the sensible way expected of it. It is an obvious proposition to put stations where people are likely to board the trains. If one is in the business of selling a service, that seems to be a rather shrewd idea, which is good for passengers and revenue. We have had enough doom and gloom. Both the Jubilee line and the docklands light railway extensions are good news.

I want to talk about the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford and the Kent link line. It is my hon. Friend's debate, and I apologise to him that so much of the debate has involved broader issues. London is receiving a large share of the rail investment—£800 million is being spent on the Kent link modernisation. We should like to spend even more, but we should not forget that in October British Rail announced its intention to operate 41 four-car units on operating leases from ABB, which will mean accelerated replacement of the Kent coast service trains.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, there is currently a problem with the rail service quality in his district. In view of the amount of money being spent, that is genuinely disappointing. I am sorry about that, as I am a great admirer of both British Rail managers and London transport managers who do a hard job, often in difficult circumstances.

I think that the issue raised by the hon. Member for Greenwich on the possibility of building trains with doors that open and shut as required is not a bad one. I am told that the fault has been identified and the staff are working 24 hours a day to correct it. I am sure that people are working seriously to do so, and that the hon. Gentleman would not want to be churlish, but would want to welcome those people's efforts. I am told that all the units should have been adjusted by Christmas. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford mentioned the closure of Charing Cross station during the summer. I think that he will understand that Network SouthEast tried hard to avoid any inconvenience, but it was difficult in the circumstances.

I am glad that there has been a general recognition that the decision on the specific route of the east London river crossing was correct. In answer to a specific question, I wish to make it clear that I remain committed to the concept of improved east London river crossings, and my Department is currently engaged in an extensive study on that subject.

It is exciting and interesting that travelling from Tower bridge towards the east a range of opportunities have arisen for various reasons including the augmentation of the Tower bridge capacity, the tunnel between Tower bridge and Rotherhide, the east London line extension crossing the river, the docklands light railway extension, the third Blackwall crossing, the Woolwich metro possibility and other ways of taking forward the Woolwich crossing. There is also a possibility of a full east London river crossing to the A2, and a truncated east London river crossing. I understand my hon. Friend's reservations about that. There is the possibility of a lower Thames crossing.

The key factor is that all propositions should be put together and evaluated so that we have a clear idea—I am sure that it will be an all-party agreement—about which suggestion should have top priority, and those on which money should not be spent as a priority. I hope that I have shown the complexity of the subject. I took the point raised by the hon. Member for Greenwich about the prospect of a low bridge at Blackwall and the possibility of its opening for occasional river traffic. It was a good point and I will ensure that my staff are aware of it and that they explore the possibility. At the moment, as the hon. Gentlmean knows, the bridge is our preferred option on the basis of cost.

I am sorry not to have a chance to say a great deal about issues such as the Thamesmead spine road in my hon. Friend's constituency——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I must explain to the Minister that the debate can go on until three o'clock so long as the Adjournment is moved at half-past two. The hon. Gentleman therefore has more time than he probably thinks that he has.

Mr. Norris: It was when you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whispered in my ear that you were keen to get up to the north that I thought that I might never be called again in a debate if I did not let you off at half-past Two, but I thank you very much for your kindness.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Transport (South-east London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

Mr. Norris: What I will do is prevent you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from getting the train that you have no doubt planned to get for a long time: I have 20 pages here.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. There are some people who, by their office, are unable to speak, and we all take guidance from Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I should like to speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway), who has attended the debate with great interest. I suspect that he would like to get away also, so I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not go through all 20 pages.

Mr. Norris: I am clearly torn, but when one is being torn by a Whip of Her Majesty's Government, one knows which way to tear, so I shall not intrude on his good will for much longer.

As I have a few seconds, I shall tell my hon. Friend who has the Adjournment debate that during my visit I was pleased to see the progress made on the Thamesmead spine road and confirm that the main works can commence on phase 4 of the project with the announcment of the Secretary of State's decision on the orders public inquiry.

I saw some of the traffic problems in Crayford town centre and was interested to learn of the long-term plans for the new industrial access road. I understand that transport supplemenary grant support is being sought for that scheme. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that I do not therefore want to say a great deal more about it at this stage because of the Secretary of State's forthcoming announcement on the 1994-95 settlement. He did a good job in explaining the issue to me.

We need to make the best use of existing road space. One way of doing that is to introduce red routes. By the end of next year, we expect the A2 Rochester way and the A20 Sidcup bypass to be red routes. The benefits that we have seen from the red route pilot schemes are impressive, one of the important factors being that they do not suck additional traffic on to the system, but merely regulate the flow of traffic that is there far better. That benefits business, local residents and public transport particularly. I hope that all those benefits can be brought to south-east London as the programme of implementation, in which the traffic director is engaged, unfolds.

There are two ways of approaching the debate: one is to go through absolutely every issue that has been identified by my hon. Friends and others; the other is to accept that there may be some issues that I have not fully dealt with. I shall write to hon. Members about points that they have made for which I should give an answer.

Finally, I shall say to my hon. Friend that these debates have been useful. The true function of an Adjournment debate is for a Member to raise a matter of genuine local interest. My hon. Friend is tremendously assiduous in these matters and has served his constituency well for the past 10 years. I hope that he will continue to do so for many more. I hope that what I have said will give reassurance on some of the issues that my hon. Friend has raised. I will, of course, extend the same civility to him. If there are any other issues, I will write to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 November 1993

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for housing revenue account subsidy guideline rents and management and maintenance allowance for 1994-95.

Sir George Young: I have today placed in the Library copies of my right hon. Friend's proposals for housing revenue account subsidy rent guidelines and management and maintenance allowances for 1994-95.

I propose to increase the national allowance for management and maintenance by 4 per cent.—£132 million—taking the total to £3·4 billion, and that the increase should go to the 183 authorities whose allowances are below the Government's estimate of their relative need to spend. This will guarantee all authorities 95 per cent. of that estimate.

On guideline rents, I propose an average increase in next year's local authority guideline rents of £2·20 a week which would take the average guideline rent from £29·40 to £31·60 with increases at the individual authority level ranging from £1·50 in low-value areas to £2·90 a week in high-value areas.

EDUCATION

Student Loans Company

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when the Student Loans Company will publish its annual report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The Student Loans Company has published today its annual report for the academic year 1992-93, which includes the company's accounts for the financial year 1992-93. I have placed a copy in the Library.

The report attests to a highly successful year for the company and is a tribute to its board and staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police National Network

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has yet chosen a supplier for the police national network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have decided to award the contract for the supply of the police national network to Mercury Communications plc. This should reduce by about 40 per cent. the costs of those telephone calls which will be handled by the new network.

Welsh Constituencies

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Boundary Commission for Wales has decided when to start the next general review of constituencies in Wales.

Mr. Howard: The commission has given notice of its intention to commence, forthwith, a general review of constituencies in Wales. It is required to report before 31 December 1994.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 16 and 17 November; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This meeting of the Council, at which I represented the United Kingdom, continued its discussion of proposals from the Commission for changes in the arrangements for arable area payments, including set-aside; for adjustments to the agri-monetary system; and for implementing the agreement on oilseeds concluded between the Community and the United States. No decisions were reached.

On arable area payments, I pressed for changes in the existing system going beyond those proposed by the Commission. In particular, I want to ensure that farmers who entered arable land into the old set-aside scheme, which started in 1988, have a continuing incentive not to return it to production when their obligations under that scheme come to an end.

I made it clear that I could accept the modest change in the agri-monetary system proposed by the Commission but not the more far-reaching, and expensive, change urged by Germany. I argued that the suspension of the automatic adjustment of green rates, which the Commission has imposed under its own powers since September, should not be further extended.

The Council discussed the present state of play in the Uruguay round negotiations. It also had an initial discussion of a Commission proposal which would extend the existing sugar arrangements for a year, while at the same time introducing quota controls on production of inulin syrup, a sugar substitute.

WALES

NHS Trusts

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the development of the NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are currently 14 operational NHS trusts in Wales. I have received 12 applications from hospitals, community units and the ambulance service to become NHS trusts from April 1994. Public consultation on 10 of the applications ended on 20 September.

In the light of the representations received, and taking account the individual merits of each application, I have decided to establish a further eight NHS trusts to become operational from next April. The details are:

Gwynedd Health Authority
Gwynedd Acute Unit (Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor)
Gwynedd Community Unit

Gwent Health Authority
North Gwent Unit (Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny)

Mid Glamorgan Health Authority
Rhondda Health Unit (Llwynypia Hospital)

South Glamorgan Health Authority
Velindre Hospital

East Dyfed Health Authority
Mental Health Unit (St. David's Hospital, Carmarthen)

Ambulance Service
North Wales Ambulance Service (Clwyd and Gwynedd)
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance Service

The orders giving effect to my decisions have been signed today. The trusts will be formally established on 1 December, with an operational date of 1 April 1994. I will announce shortly the details on the chairmen and non-executive directors of the new NHS trusts.

I have deferred a decision on the joint proposal from the East Dyfed and West Glamorgan ambulance services, pending a revised submission next year for trust status from April 1995. In the meantime, the host health authorities have been invited to integrate the two services. This further year should enable the merged service to demonstrate more clearly how the main criteria for trust status will be met.

The application from the Rhymney valley unit, Mid Glamorgan, has been rejected. I am not convinced that the proposals fully meet the criteria and, in particular, that patients would benefit from the move to trust status. In the light of my decision, it will be for the unit, in conjunction with the health authority, to consider how best to meet the health needs of local communities in the Rhymney valley.

Morriston hospital north unit in West Glamorgan and Taff Ely unit, Mid Glamorgan, have also applied for NHS trust status from April 1994. Both applications are currently subject to three months' public consultation. I expect to announce the outcome early in 1994.

This announcement today means that, from April 1994, some 85 per cent. of acute services and 80 per cent. of community services in Wales will be delivered by NHS trusts.

Elsewhere in Wales, I have invited the University hospital of Wales, the dental hospital and the community services unit, all from South Glamorgan, to prepare formal applications to become NHS trusts from April 1995. However, the invitations are without prejudice to decisions which I may be called upon to take on the authority's strategic plan on the future pattern of health services in South Glamorgan. The plan remains the subject of separate consultation by the authority at this stage.

The community services unit will focus on the Greater Cardiff area and the Llandough hospital NHS trust will be encouraged to extend its current range of patient care to include community and mental health services in the vale of Glamorgan.

Applications for 1995 trust status will need to be submitted in the early summer of 1994. No decisions will be reached until the consultative process has been completed. An invitation to prepare an application carries no commitment that an application will be approved and the decision whether to apply is entirely a matter for the hospital, community unit or ambulance service concerned.

EMPLOYMENT

Remploy

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what targets Remploy has been set in its 1993-94 annual performance agreement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my noble Friend Lord Henley has written to the chairman of Remploy approving the 1993-94 annual performance agreement between the Department and the company. This agreement covers the year from 1 April 1993. It has been negotiated by the chief executive of the Employment Service, on behalf of my right hon. Friend.

On behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my noble Friend Lord Henley has agreed targets which are realistic but stretching. These are:

the average number of disabled people employed by Remploy Ltd. will be at least 8,550;

of which no more than 7,700, on average must be employed in factories;

at least 115 disabled employees will move from Remploy factories to opportunities under the Interwork scheme or to open employment, or from Interwork to open employment;

the unit cost of Interwork should be no more than the sheltered employment voluntary body deficiency grant £4,310;

Remploy Ltd. will keep within an operating deficit of £83·2 million—including £0·5 million reorganisation costs—which on average numbers of 8,550 will give a cost per disabled worker of £9,731;

Remploy Ltd. will prepare and agree a charter for its employees by March 1994.

I have today arranged for the text of the annual performance agreement to be placed in the Library.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Budget Council

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent meeting of European Ministers at the Budget Council.

Sir John Cope: The Budget Council met in Brussels on 15 November. I represented the United Kingdom.

The Council considered the European Parliament's proposed changes to the draft budget which the Council established in July, *Official Report,* 26 July 1993, columns *596-97,* and established a second reading draft budget for 1994. The Council reduced the total for commitments proposed by the European Parliament by 337 million ecu. As a result, the Council's second reading draft budget totals 73,112 million ecu—£56,089 million—in commitment appropriations. The own resources which would be required to finance the draft budget amount to 1·19 per cent. of Community GNP, compared with the own resources ceiling for 1994 of 1·20 per cent.

The Council also formally agreed the revised expenditure ceilings for 1994 which had been determined in the context of the new inter-institutional agreement—*Official Report,* 2 November 1993, column *113.* The second reading draft budget is 374 million ecu in commitments, and 626 million ecu in payments, below the overall financial perspective ceilings. The following table summarises the second reading draft budget, with reference to the financial perspective:

	Financial Perspective		Draft Budget[1]	
	mecu	£ million[2]	mecu	£ million
Commitment appropriations				
1. Common Agricultural Policy	36,465	27,975	36,465	27,975
2. Structural operations	23,176	17,780	23,176	17,780
3. Internal policies	4,370	3,353	4,193	3,217
4. External action	4,311	3,307	4,139	3,175
5. Administrative expenditure	3,634	2,788	3,610	2,769
6. Reserves	1,530	1,174	1,530	1,174
Total commitments	73,486	56,376	73,112	56,089
Total payment appropriations	70,352	53,972	69,727	53,492

[1] Council's second reading draft budget established on 15 November.
[2] Throughout this reply the rate of £1=1·3035 ecu has been used—the rate notified in the *Official Journal* as prevailing on the last working day of last month, 29 October.

The European Parliament will consider the draft budget for 1994 at its plenary session in December. The 1994 Community budget is expected to be adopted by the Parliament on 16 December, to take effect from 1 January.

The Council did not take a formal vote on the draft budget, the presidency concluding that there was the necessary majority to establish the second reading draft budget for 1994.

The Budget Council also established a letter of amendment to its draft supplementary and amending budget for 1993. The main elements of the letter of amendment were a reduction in the total of customs duties in the 1993 budget, in keeping with the Commission's latest estimates; and a corresponding increase in member states' GNP contributions, so as to maintain the overall level of revenue.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 November 1993

EDUCATION

EC Education Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Education Council on 8 November.

Mr. Boswell: The Ministers first heard a presentation by the Russian Minister of Education, Mr. Tkachenko, on the reform of his country's education system. The Council then discussed issues relating to student mobility and access by students to higher education in the Community, and the Commission's recent Green Paper on the European dimension of education. No formal conclusions were reached in either case.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Budget Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Budget Council on 15 November.

Sir John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 19 November at columns *4-6*.

PRIME MINISTER

Quotations

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the sources for his quotations from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) contained in his speech to the House on 18 November, *Official Report*, column 34.

The Prime Minister: The quotation from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott),
"do you obey the law or not obey the law? We"—
that is, the Labour party—
"don't have any kind of firm principles in the Party of how we might deal with this problem"
is from the *New Socialist*, November 1985; and the quotation that Labour is
"going to repeal"—
that is, the Government's trade union legislation—
"all of it, there's no little bits you can keep . . . It all has to go"
is from *The Independent*, 27 December 1989.

Efficiency Unit

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the results of the study on civil service career management and succession planning carried out by the efficiency unit; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I am placing in the Library today a copy of the efficiency unit's report on career management and succession planning in the civil service. I am pleased to welcome its findings.

The civil service is being restructured with departmental headquarters concentrating on policy making and the purchasing of services which increasingly are provided by agencies in government or on contract from the private sector. The systems for recruitment, appointment and career management of civil servants need to be matched to these changing tasks and responsibilities and the skills and qualities needed in the civil service in the future. At the same time, the Government agree with the need to preserve an impartial, non-political civil service recruited and promoted on merit.

Within this framework, the Government accept that the systems for career management and succession planning should be made more open. The report finds that the evidence from the private sector is that most senior posts are filled from within. But new arrangements are needed to address in each case the question whether the post should be open to competition from outside.

The report contains detailed recommendations about career management systems in individual departments on which there will now be consultation with those concerned. The report's proposals on how posts are filled and on the possibility of introducing more specific contract terms raise important issues which need further consideration. The Government will also be receiving early next year a report from the senior salaries review body on developing the existing performance pay arrangements which it will wish to take into account in reaching conclusions.

In the light of this further work, the Government intend to announce in the spring their decisions on the recommendations in the report and to publish an implementation plan.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Procedures Committee

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has appointed a chairman of the Animal Procedures Committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have appointed Professor Margaret Brazier, who is Professor of Law and Director of the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy at Manchester University, as chairman of the committee in succession to Lord Nathan.

I should like to place on record my appreciation of the service that Lord Nathan has performed as chairman of the committee since 1990 and I am grateful to Professor Brazier for agreeing to take on the duties.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Review

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the details of the accelerated programme of reviews of local government structure in England.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State today directed the Local Government Commission to begin reviews of the remaining shire counties on 13 December and to submit all reports on or before 31 December 1994.

He also directed the commission to have regard to the revised policy guidance published on 2 November, and the revised procedure guidance, published today, in conducting these reviews. A copy of the procedure guidance has been placed in the Library of the House and additional copies are available in the Vote Office.

We are giving the commission the flexibility it needs to achieve the demanding programme of work which we have set for it. We are not changing the nature of the process, which is enshrined in the legislation. But we are no longer setting prescriptive time limits for every stage of a review, so that the commission can proceed in each area on a time scale that meets local circumstances. We are, however, quite clear that the length of time allowed for public consultation must not be reduced below two months, as my right hon. Friend announced at the end of September.

We are keen for the commissio n to submit a steady flow of reports from mid-1994. This will mean that within the wider timetable, individual county reviews will be phased. The commission has discussed a programme with the local authority associations, and today announced its intended sequence of county reviews. We endorse this programme. The table shows the dates by which initial proposals from groups of authorities or others should be submitted to the commission, and the dates when the Secretary of State expects to receive the final reports.

Those areas in the first phase include the old second tranche reviews which had been suspended pending publication of revised guidance. They will now be restarted to allow local authorities and interested parties to look again at their initial submissions.

The direction and the procedure guidance have been framed so as to allow solutions across shire county boundaries to be examined where these are the most sensible way forward. Some proposals of this kind have already been made, and others may follow. But we expect that in most cases it will not be necessary to look outside county areas to find structures on which local agreement can be reached.

My right hon. Friend has already announced that he intends to direct the commission to look at the boundaries of metropolitan areas after it has completed the shire reviews. We anticipate that any boundary issues between the shire counties and the metropolitan areas will be examined as part of the wider metropolitan review. This will allow the commission to proceed swiftly with its current work programme.

The announcement today means that the commission, local authorities and others can get on with the business of developing structural options which would deliver convenient and effective local government.

Most hon. Members have already shown much interest in the review and will no doubt wish to work with the local authorities to help them reach agreement on the best structure for their area. We expect a local consensus on structure to be a promising starting point for the commission.

Proposed phasing for initial stage of review

County	*Date initial representations due*	*Target Date for final report*
Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire Cumbria Lancashire Leicestershire	end February	end July
Berkshire Cheshire Devon Hampshire Kent Nottinghamshire Oxfordshire Staffordshire Suffolk	end February	end August
Buckinghamshire Dorset Hereford and Worcester Norfolk Northamptonshire Surrey Wiltshire	end March	end September
Essex Northumberland Warwickshire East Sussex West Sussex	end April	end October
Cornwall Hertfordshire Shropshire	end May	end November

Waste Disposal

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the research commissioned by its Department earlier this year on the external costs and benefits of landfill and incineration of waste.

Mr. Yeo: We will be publishing a report tomorrow on "Externalities from Landfill and Incineration" by the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment (CSERGE) and Warren Spring Laboratory. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library. The report will be available from HMSO.

Environmental Guidance

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further guidance he intends to provide on the role of economic instruments to achieve environmental goals.

Mr. Yeo: We will be publishing tomorrow a booklet called "Making Markets Work for the Environment", which was produced by my Department. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library. The report will be available from HMSO.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lebanon

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy regarding arms exports to Lebanon.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Applications for the exports of arms to Lebanon are considered on their merits in the light of prevailing circumstances. During the Lebanese civil war it was not our practice to licence the export of lethal equipment to Lebanon. The Government would at present be prepared to consider, on a case-by-case basis, applications for the sale of arms to the Lebanese Government to help them re-establish their legitimate authority—provided that we were satisfied that the equipment supplied would not affect the regional military balance.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 23 November 1993

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government plan to take to work for the effective implementation of the chemical weapons convention.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We signed the chemical weapons convention in January 1993 and play an active part in the work of the preparatory commission which is charged with setting up the future Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the Hague. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is working closely with the Department of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Defence and other Departments to make the preparations for the implementation of the convention in the United Kingdom. The necessary implementing legislation will be introduced when parliamentary time permits.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 8 and 9 November.

Mr. Hurd: I attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 8 and 9 November. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office also attended.

The Council agreed to rename the "Council of the European Communities" as the "Council of the European Union" to reflect its involvement in both EC affairs and the intergovernmental pillars; and that political declarations made in the context of common foreign and security policy would now be made in the name of the European Union. The Council also agreed on a minutes statement to the effect that these decisions did not alter the current legal position that the European Union does not enjoy international legal personality and that the designation of the parties to any international instruments having legal effects would be a matter to be decided case by case.

Sir Leon Brittan reported to the Council on his recent discussions with the United States Administration and on the state of the GATT Uruguay round negotiations in Geneva. The Council reaffirmed the need to make every effort to reach a global, durable and balanced agreement by the 15 December deadline. The Council expressed its concern over the slow progress of the negotiations and launched an urgent appeal to its main trading partners to engage more actively in the negotiations. The Council also considered a written report by the Commission on outstanding problems in the negotiations and noted that the Commission would shortly produce a further report on the audio-visual sector. The presidency decided to arrange a further discussion at a special Council in early December.

The Council agreed that new Commission proposals on anti-dumping procedures should be considered by the Permanent Representatives Committee with a view to a decision at the 6 December Foreign Affairs Council.

Greece raised the possible appointment of an EC observer for Cyprus. The Council agreed to defer discussion until a further Council.

Ministers had their first collective meeting with the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Mr. Arafat gave his analysis of the latest developments in the peace process, and stressed the importance of international, including EC assistance. The Council recalled that the EC is already the Palestinians' largest donor, and underlined the need for transparent, effective and accountable Palestinian aid structures in the occupied territories.

The Council agreed proposals to amend the negotiating directives for an EC/Russia partnership and co-operation agreement.

The Council adopted a joint action providing for the monitoring of the 12 December Russian elections.

The Council discussed recent developments in the former Yugoslavia relating to the search for a negotiated and durable solution to the conflict, a contribution to the implementation of a peace plan and support for humanitarian action. On the basis of guidelines from the 29 October Brussels European Council, the Council adopted a joint action on the delivery of humanitarian aid in Bosnia and agreed to meeting further on 22 November to discuss both political and aid-related aspects of the crisis.

The Council discussed the Commission's draft negotiating mandate for a new partnership agreement with Morocco and concluded that further work on the dossier was needed.

In a brief discussion of relations with Tunisia, the Commission said that it expected to present a draft negotiating mandate for a partnership agreement to the next Foreign Affairs Council.

The Council held further discussions on access to information. No decision was reached and the negotiations will continue.

The Council agreed to take forward discussion with the European Parliament over detailed rules for the operation of the Parliament's temporary committees of inquiry.

The Council agreed to lift two further sanctions measures, on civil nuclear co-operation and sales of sensitive equipment to the South African police and military, as soon as the Transitional Executive Council is established.

The Council agreed to open negotiations on various bilateral agreements with Switzerland including transport and research.

The Council discussed conclusion of the EC/Bulgaria interim agreement. No agreement was reached.

The Council authorised the Commission to negotiate agreements covering trade in aluminium with Russia, Ukraine, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan.

An Association Council with Turkey was held in the margins which recalled both sides' commitment to achieving customs union in 1995.

Ministerial sessions of the accession negotiations with Finland, Norway, Sweden and Austria also took place in the margins.

No formal votes were taken during the Council.

Embassies and High Commissions

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many embassies and high commissions are maintained around the world; and what was the total cost involved under all expenditure headings in the last financial year for which figures are available.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1992-93, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office maintained 235 embassies, high commissions and subordinate posts at a total overseas, recurrent and capital, cost of £383·5 million.

ENVIRONMENT

South-East London Combined Heat and Power Ltd.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether Lewisham's South-East London Combined Heat and Power Ltd. will be affected by the Government's planned reassessment of business rates; if SELCHP will still be subject to fixed business rates under any review; and what plans he has to safeguard the future of waste management facilities under any review of business rates.

Mr. Baldry: We have no plans to change the rateability of combined heat and power stations or other waste management facilities in the 1995 revaluation of non-domestic property. We are currently considering whether combined heat and power stations should continue to have a prescribed assessment, instead of having rateable values set by local valuation officers. Whatever the result of that consideration, it is not possible to predict the outcome of the revaluation at this stage.

Neighbour Notification

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent advice his Department has given to local planning authorities on neighbour notification.

Mr. Baldry: Advice on publicity for planning applications, including neighbour notification, is given in my Department's circular 15/92, "Publicity for Planning Applications", issued in July of last year.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a breakdown of the Local Government Commission's time and duties; and what was the total cost of the commission to the Exchequer up to 28 October.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission has a duty to undertake reviews of the structure, boundaries, and electoral arrangements of local government in areas of England, in accordance with directions from, and having regard to any guidance issued by, my right hon. Friend. The commission also has a statutory duty to undertake periodic reviews of local government electoral arrangements in all areas. In carrying out these reviews the specific responsibilities of individual members and staff of the Local Government Commission are a matter for the commission itself. Payments of grant in aid totalling £2,130,000 were made to the commission in 1992-93 and a further £2,107,515 has been advanced to it in 1993-94 —up to 28 October 1993.

Housing Corporation

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes were provided through the Housing Corporation in 1992-93; and how many he expects will be provided in 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Sir George Young: The total number of completions by the Housing Corporation of housing for rent or sale in 1992-93, and the latest forecast for 1993-94 are as follows. The figures include completions under city challenge.

	Actual 1992-93	*Forecast 1993-94*
Completions	[1]62,137	57,600

[1] Including 18,430 completions under the Housing Market Package.

The figures for 1994-95 will depend on the autumn Budget statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Local Authority Capital Asset Sales

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much local authorities have already raised from sales of capital assets since the announcement in the 1992 autumn statement that they would be permitted to spend all of their receipts up to the end of December; how much he now estimates will be raised in total by the end of December; how much of these receipts he estimates has already been spent by local authorities; and how much of these receipts will be spent by the end of the financial year 1993-94 and during 1994-95.

Mr. Baldry: The temporary relaxation in the capital receipts rules announced in the 1992 autumn statement allows local authorities to spend 100 per cent. of virtually all the receipts they receive during the period 13 November 1992 to 31 December 1993. Recent information provided by local authorities in England indicates that a total of around £1·3 billion of usable receipts were obtained during the period 13 November 1992 to 31 July 1993. This information also suggests that local authorities currently expect to obtain around £2·3 billion of usable receipts in total during the whole period of the relaxation, of which some £1·3 billion is estimated to arise as a result of the relaxation. On the basis of their latest returns, local authorities plan to finance £1·8 billion of their capital expenditure in 1993-94 from usable capital receipts received in that year or brought forward from earlier years. No equivalent information is yet available for 1994-95.

Council Tax

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against liability for the council tax have been made this year in each region in England; what is the length of time taken to hear these appeals; and what proportion of these appeals was successful.

Mr. Baldry: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. The available information is as follows:

Numbers of Appeals against Liability for the Council Tax By Region in England: Period ending September 1993

Region	Received	Resolved	Outstanding
Northern	21	4	17
Yorkshire and Humberside	27	4	23
North West	43	1	42
East Midlands	17	1	16
West Midlands	24	8	16
East Anglia	9	1	8
London	36	1	35
South East[1]	95	15	80
South West	360	34	326
Total	632	69	563

[1] Excluding London.

County Hall, London

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will disclose the sale price of London's county hall and the proposed distribution of the proceeds.

Mr. Baldry: The London residuary body has sold the riverside building of county hall to the Shirayama Corporation of Japan. The amount of the consideration is a matter of commercial confidentiality. My right hon. Friend is about to lay before Parliament an order authorising the residuary body to distribute to the London boroughs and to the City of London certain moneys which will include the proceeds of the sale of the riverside building.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will call for a public inquiry over the opening of THORP to allow for an examination of the alternative to reprocessing nuclear waste and to provide for an environmental impact assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Responses to the consultation are still being assessed. When they have all been carefully considered, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will decide whether to afford a hearing or inquiry and, if they decide not to do so, will take final decisions on the authorisations.

Mineral Planning Guidance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the revision of mineral planning guidance note 3.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 25 March, *Official Report*, columns *714-15*, that we intended to proceed to consultation on revised planning guidelines as soon as possible. This is still our intention.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to curb sulphur dioxide emissions.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have in place a range of measures to control and progressively reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide, which were set out in the 1990 environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and subsequent annual reports. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

North Cornwall (Planning)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the results of the inquiry into the operation of the planning system in North Cornwall district will be available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Miss Audrey Lees was appointed in August last year to carry out an inquiry into the operation of the planning system in North Cornwall. She submitted her very thorough report to my right hon. Friend at the end of August.

Miss Lees concludes that many of the complaints about the district council were justified. North Cornwall has granted planning permission for sporadic developments in the open countryside, on an inconsistent basis, contrary to national planning guidance and the structure plan. Some councillors seem to have favoured certain applicants, often local people, because of their personal circumstances.

Miss Lees suggests that the practices and procedures of the council in publicising, assessing and deciding planning applications should be improved. She recommends that priorities given to completing the local plan to provide the basis for consistent decisions in future.

I am seeing North Cornwall district councillors today to emphasise the Government's concern to seek a positive commitment from the Council. I know that some improvements have been made already, but I will be seeking a full response to Miss Lee's recommendations when the council have considered her report.

The report also provides a valuable reminder of the need for all local planning authorities to follow proper procedures when dealing with applications for planning permission. I have arranged for each authority to receive a copy.

I note that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has recently written to all the local planning authorities in the Principality to emphasise the importance of taking full account of Government planning guidance and the development plan in making decisions. He also warned that the personal circumstances of applicants should not normally influence such decisions.

Copies of the report are being placed in the Library of the House today and copies will be on sale from Her Majesty's Stationery Office tomorrow.

Local Government Staffing

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to issue further guidance to the Local Government Staff Commission (England) about the staffing implications of the continuation of district or county councils as unitary authorities.

Mr. Baldry: I am placing in the Library a copy of the further guidance which we are issuing to the Local Government Staff Commission for England.

The guidance, which has been drawn up in consultation with the local authority associations and the staff commission itself, is designed to clarify the original policy guidance in cases where district or county councils continue as unitary authorities.

A continuing authority with new functions will need to take a completely fresh look at its existing organisational structures and staffing in planning for unitary status.

Within the constraints of employment legislation, the additional guidance provides as level a playing field as can be achieved for staff of outgoing authorities compared with those of the continuing authorities. It gives a framework within which the commission can provide continuing authorities with some practical examples of ways to help maximise their freedom to choose a new head of paid service and other senior managers, and to review the organisational structures and staffing of existing support services.

We expect the staff commission to look carefully at all the implications of the additional guidance.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Trial Delays

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in reducing delays in coming to trial in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: We remain determined to address with sustained and vigourous measures the problem of delays on remand. I believe that our efforts to do so in the past year have brought encouraging progress.

I announced to the House on 10 June last year a scheme designed to reduce the time defendants spent in custody before trial on indictment for schedule offences—the type of case where delays had been longest. This scheme was a joint initiative, involving agencies answering to the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General as well as the police and my own officials. It introduced targets for the progress of cases: 38 weeks from remand to committal and 14 weeks from committal to arraignment, a culmultative target of 12 months.

It began on 1 July last year. The agencies involved set up new machinery for close co-operation between them, in order to track the progress of cases, and to signal the need for attention to those whose targets risked being exceeded.

I am now able to announce the results of the first year's operation of the scheme. Fifty-seven cases with their first remand on or after 1 July 1992 had reached arraignment by 30 June 1993. All met the 12-month cumulative targets; all also met the 14-week committal to arraignment taget. Six cases, however, failed to reach committal within the target of 38 weeks from first remand. The average time taken to process cases also fell. In 1991, the last full year before the introduction of the scheme, the average time from remand to committal for such cases was 33 weeks; in 1992 case covered by the scheme reached committal in an average of 24 weeks, an improvement by 27 per cent. The statistics for a single year must obviously be read with caution, but I believe that the improvements indicated are most impressive and reflect great credit on all the agencies concerned.

We wish to see these improvements sustained. We have accordingly decided to continue the scheme until at least 30 June 1994; to extend its oversight to non-scheduled cases tried on indictment; and to tighten targets under the scheme by reducing cumulative target to 11 months. The latter will be achieved by making the committal to arraignment target 10 weeks instead of 14.

We will continue to take a close interest in the operation of the scheme, and in the whole period up to the start of the trial, in order to identify any further ways in which avoidable delay can be reduced.

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations the Minister for Public Transport has had from the North West Channel Tunnel Group about the high speed rail link from London to the channel tunnel; what reply he is sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The chairman of the North West Channel Tunnel Group wrote to me on 4 November. I am placing a copy of my reply in the Library.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost of providing 4,400 DVLA staff with *(a)* charter mark coasters, *(b)* charter mark book marks and *(c)* charter mark vehicle disc holders; what has been the total cost of the provision of these items; what has been the cost of consultancy advisers for DVLA's market-testing programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The DVLA is proud to have been awarded a charter mark on 27 October. The items mentioned were issued to agency staff to mark the occasion and to remind them of the charter principles. The total cost was £3,970, or £0·90 per head. The agency has contractually committed some £300,000 to the end of October to consultancy support for its current market-testing programme. This includes support for in-house teams such as the recent successful bid for the security guard work at the agency's Swansea headquarters.

Highways Agency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff are currently employed at each location of the Highways Agency; and what are the projected site costs for the current year of each location *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a figure per whole time equivalent staff.

Mr. Key: The Highways Agency will not be in existence until April 1994; the following figures relate to the highways safety and traffic command of the Department of Transport. These figures therefore cover both staff who will become part of the agency and others who will remain in the central part of the Department.

The current staff numbers and pay budgets are:

	Staff numbers	*£ million*
Construction Programme Division Operating Units		
South Eastern, Dorking	157	
Eastern, Bedford	123·5	
North Western, Manchester	84	
West Midlands, Birmingham	105	
Yorkshire and Humberside, Leeds	91·6	
South Western, Bristol	66	
East Midlands, Nottingham	30·1	
Motorway Widening Unit, Coventry	143·5	

	Staff numbers	£ million
Total staff numbers	800·7	
Total pay budget		18·255
Network Management and Maintenance Operating Units		
South Eastern, Dorking	97	
Eastern, Bedford	125	
North Western, Manchester	94·5	
West Midlands, Birmingham	107·5	
Yorks and Humberside, Leeds	86	
South Western, Bristol	108	
East Midlands, Nottingham	112	
Northern, Newcastle	57	
Total staff numbers	787	
Total pay budget		16·588
London Regional Office	251	
Total pay budget		6·756
Traffic Area Offices	449·5	
Total pay budget		6·943
Headquarters Directorates	872·3	
Total pay budget		23·492

Staff numbers are recorded as either full time or percentages of full time; the pay budgets are, therefore, based on whole-time equivalent staff, and are set to cover expected requirements for the year as a whole.

HEALTH

Specialised Services

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are being made to improve contracting arrangements for specialised services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have been reviewing arrangements for the contracting of specialised services and last week issued guidance to the service under cover of EL(93)98—"Contracting for Specialised Services"—copies of which are available in the Library.

The guidance emphasises the need for purchasers, working closely with providers, to identify appropriate contracts covering needs, costs, quality and developmental issues to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to patients.

NATIONAL FINANCE

ECOFIN Meeting

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes the ECOFIN meeting of 15 November made to the proposed amendments submitted to the Council by the European Parliament on the 1994 budget for the European Communities; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ECOFIN meeting.

John Cope: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 19 November, *Official Report*, columns 4-6.

WALES

Mr. W. J. Ravenscroft

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how long Mr. W. J. Ravenscroft, the executive director of Clwyd health authority, and his assistant have been working for three days per week with the health service in Pembrokeshire; and when he expects their work to be concluded;

(2) who is responsible for the salaries and expenses of Mr. W. J. Ravenscroft, the executive director—corporate management—of Clwyd health authority and his assistant during the period they have been working on the health service in Pembrokeshire;

(3) what are the terms of reference issued to Mr. W. J. Ravenscroft, the executive director—corporate management—of Clwyd health authority and his assistant in their work within the health service in Pembrokeshire.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Mr. W. J. Ravenscroft is not associated with the service review which has been commissioned jointly by Pembrokeshire health authority and the Pembrokeshire NHS trust for completion by the end of the year. Questions about the review should be addressed to the commissioning bodies. All costs of the review are being contained within existing management budgets without detriment to patient care.

Council Tax

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appeals against liability for the council tax have been made this year in Wales; what is the average length of time taken to hear these appeals; and what proportion of appeals was successful.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To mid-November, the eight valuation tribunals in Wales had received 36 liability appeals. Tribunals expect to deal with appeals within an average time of eight weeks from receipt. Appellants have been successful in four of the eight appeals dealt with to date.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce his proposals for housing revenue account subsidy for 1994-95; and what proposals he will be making.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office is consulting local authorities and other bodies on proposals for the rent guidelines and management and maintenance allowances to be used in calculating next year's entitlement to housing revenue account subsidy. I shall be placing a copy of the consultation papers in the Library of the House with a list of the estimated guidelines and allowances for each authority. The proposals are for an average guideline rent increase of £2·20 per week with a range of increases for individual authorities from £1·50 to £2·90 per week. The new average weekly guideline rent would be £31·30. For management and maintenance, it is proposed to increase allowances by an average of £31 per annum per dwelling over the 1993-94 level.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Banking

Mr. Congdon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes are proposed to the banking provisions of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A consultative letter was issued on 17 November seeking comments on draft regulations to change some of the banking accounting provisions of the Companies Act 1985.

The draft regulations would delete the definitions of the terms "banking activities" and "banking transactions" from schedule 9 to the Act. Banks would then, as they have sought, interpret the terms in the context of EC directive 86/635/EEC on the annual and consolidated accounts of banks and other financial institutions.

The draft regulations would also ensure that the UK holding companies on non-UK banking subsidiaries disclose details of transactions such as loans or mortgages from the subsidiaries to staff in the same way as UK holding companies of UK banking subsidiaries.

Comments should be made by 17 December.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the hon. Member for Birkenhead may expect a reply from the Newcastle upon Tyne Insolvency Service office to his letters of 29 October and 10 November about Mr. A. Hemmings.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The official receiver at Newcastle replied to the hon. Member on 19 November 1993.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Register of Sports Sites

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage where the register of sports sites may be inspected; and which organisations have been given copies.

Mr. Brooke: Copies of the register of recreational land's database will be made available free of charge to the Sports Council, the Central Council of Physical Recreation, the National Playing Fields Association, local authority associations, local authorities, relevant professional organisations and relevant national governing bodies of sport.

The Sports Council is establishing with these organisations whether they require the information on diskette or on paper. Until the database has been circulated, all inquiries concerning the register are directed through the Sports Council.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the cost to his Department of the register of sports sites.

Mr. Brooke: The Government's grant in aid to the Sports Council in 1991-92 included £500,000 to establish the register of recreational land.

EDUCATION

English

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of respondents to the National Curriculum Council consultation on his proposals for the revision of attainment targets and programmes of study for English circled the strongly disagree option in each of the questions G1, G2, G3, G4 and G5.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department does not have that level of detail because the consultation on the proposals for revisions to the English order was carried out by the National Curriculum Council. However, section 2 of NCC's consultation report, recently published by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, does summarise the views expressed by respondents in general terms.

Fitzherbert School, Brighton

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether the former Fitzherbert school site in Brighton has been sold.

Mr. Robin Squire: I understand from the City Technology Colleges Trust, which is the beneficial owner of this site, that a sale to Nuffield Nursing Homes Trust has been agreed. The price is commercially confidential.

Primary Schools

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans he has to improve the teaching of basic skills in primary schools.

Mr. Patten: I have today published, following wide consultation, a circular—DFE circular 14/93—which sets new standards for all courses of training for primary teachers. It requires students to spend more time on learning to teach the core subjects of the national curriculum, in particular the basic skills of reading and arithmetic. It also requires students to spend more time in schools, with serving teachers playing a full part in their training.

The circular announces new plans to fund courses for classroom assistants, so that they can support the teaching and learning of basic skills in the primary classroom; such courses will be developed over the coming months and funded from September 1994.

The circular, which has been sent to all primary schools, those offering primary teacher training, and other interested bodies, includes comprehensive criteria which all primary training courses must meet. The criteria cover the subject knowledge and teaching skills new teachers require to be effective in the classroom; the amount of time to be spent in schools, and on the study of core subjects and basic skills; and the need for serving teachers to be able to play a full part in planning and delivering training.

The circular sets the new criteria in the context of the government's policies for primary education and teacher training. It supports the use of new course models to offer a variety of routes into teaching; including a six-subject, three-year BEd to prepare primary teachers for work across the curriculum. It encourages the use of the accreditation of prior learning to widen access to teaching for mature people without conventional qualifications.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Council

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 22 November; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I represented the United Kingdom at the Council of EC Fisheries Ministers held in Brussels on 22 November.

The Council voted unanimously to agree the fish support prices for 1994. This was the only vote at this Council. The prices set reflect developments on the market, and the United Kingdom secured some adjustments to the Commission's proposals to reflect particular concerns of our industry. The United Kingdom also secured the continuance of the dual guide price system for herring, which is designed to enable the United Kingdom industry to take best advantage of EC market support mechanisms.

The Council held a further discussion on the Commission's proposal for changes to the rules governing fishing by Spain and Portugal. The Commission's proposal was unsatisfactory to a majority of delegations including the United Kingdom. As a result, the Belgian presidency will be looking for an alternative way foward. I repeated my insistence that the eventual decision must respect member states' existing shares of available quotas—"relative stability"—and must not allow any increase in fishing effort. I also stressed my determination to find satisfactory arrangements to apply in the Irish box. Discussions will be taken up in the December Council at which time decisions may be reached on these matters.

At the United Kingdom's request, the Council had a further discussion on industrial fishing. We received strong support from a number of member states to our request that the Commission should press ahead quickly with a thorough study of the subject including its possible effects on the marine ecosystem and marine mammals and birds. Pilot projects will be set up to study control and management problems on industrial fisheries. The Commission was asked to report back to the Council, if possible before 31 March 1994.

The Council reached unanimous agreement in principle to adopt measures this year on standards for the minimum information to appear in all member states' fishing licences. More detailed aspects of the Commission's proposal on fishing licences and permits will be considered further during 1994.

Agricultural Commodities, Trade and Food Production Directorate

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were *(a)* capital expenditure and *(b)* running costs paid by her Department in 1992-93 in respect of the work of the agricultural commodities, trade and food production directorate on (i) the European Community, (ii) arable crops and alcoholic drinks, (iii) horticulture, plant protection and agricultural resources, *(d)* food, milk and marketing policy and *(e)* the meat group.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is as follows:

£ thousands

	Running costs	*Capital*
European Community	1,123	5
Arable crops and alcoholic drinks	1,494	40
Horticulture, plant protection and agricultural resources	7,930	64
Food, milk and marketing policy	2,689	21
Livestock products	1,791	22
Deputy Secretary and staff	130	0

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the responsibilities of the agricultural commodities, trade and food production directorate in respect of *(a)* the European Community, *(b)* arable crops and alcoholic drinks, *(c)* horticulture, plant protection and agricultural resources, *(d)* food, milk and marketing policy and *(e)* the meat group.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The responsibilities are set out in columns 42 to 46 of the civil service year book 1993. However, since that was published, the plant health division, plant variety and seeds division and agricultural resource policy division have ceased to be part of this directorate.

Set-aside

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in her discussions on the extension of the EC set-aside programme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: At the meeting of Agriculture Ministers on 16 and 17 November, my right hon. Friend the Minister continued to press for a number of changes to the rules on set-aside under the arable area payments scheme, in particular to enable those who have set land aside for five years under the old five-year scheme to keep all that land in set-aside, to reduce the percentage requirement for mixtures of rotational and non-rotational set-aside below the 20 per cent. proposed and to allow arable land taken out of production under forestry and agri-environment schemes to count against a producer's set-aside requirement. It was not possible to reach decisions at the meeting though a compromise was discussed that would allow farmers finishing a five-year set-aside agreement to keep all that land in set-aside for a further five years. Discussion will resume at the December Council when I hope that agreement can be reached.

Statistics

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to rationalise the collection of statistics by her Department.

Mr. Jack: The statistical needs of the Department are kept under constant review. A thorough review of each statistical survey is reported to Ministers every five years. These reviews, which examine the need for the information and whether it could be collected more efficiently, lead to continuing rationalisation of collection of statistics.

Sediment Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what contribution her Department made to the recent European Commission study on sediment pollution in the EC.

Mr. Jack: I am not aware of any recent European Commission study on sediment pollution in the EC. My scientists are making a significant contribution to a study of sediment which is being undertaken on behalf of the Oslow-Paris convention.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ethnic Monitoring

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police forces operate ethnic monitoring procedures in respect of cautioning; and if he will list those police forces.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Forces are not required to collect data on the ethnic origin of those cautioned. We understand that around one third of police forces in England and Wales do so. The forces are;

Bedfordshire
Cleveland
Derbyshire
Devon and Cornwall
Durham
Gloucestershire
Gwent
Hampshire
Kent
Leicestershire
Northamptonshire
Nottinghamshire
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Surrey
West Mercia
West Yorkshire

Secure Training Centres

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he plans to take to ensure that children who will be held in secure training centres do not deliberately harm themselves.

Mr. Maclean: I fully recognise the importance of this issue. Providers of facilities for juveniles serving the custodial part of a secure training order will be required to develop and implement a suicide and self-harm awareness and prevention policy. This will be monitored by the Home Office.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much of the 25 hours per week lesson time which children at secure training centres will receive will be spent on education; and how much on vocational training.

Mr. Maclean: The figure of 25 hours per week lesson time was a suggested minimum in the outline draft specification for the delivery of the regime in a secure training centre. A number of comments were received on this and other aspects of the proposed regime. The minimum number of hours lesson time per week and the breakdown between education and vocational training are matters which are still under consideration. Our present intention is to retain flexibility so as to enable each trainee to follow a programme based on his or her individual needs.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what police and medical checks will be required of staff appointed to work in secure training centres.

Mr. Maclean: The Government intend to ensure that a wide range of checks are made on staff who work in secure training centres. Staff who have a specific responsibility for the custody of detained juveniles will require a certificate issued by the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that there is not an inappropriately high ratio of boys and girls in secure training centres.

Mr. Maclean: The secure training order will be a sentence available to the youth court for persistent juvenile offenders who meet statutory criteria. It will be the decision of the court as to who will be made the subject of an order. Facilities for both boys and girls will be available in each secure training centre.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he plans to announce a complaints and representation procedure for children who will be held in secure training centres;

(2) if he will make it his policy that arrangements for representation of children held in secure training centres should be the same as those provided in the Children Act 1989 for children in secure accommodation.

Mr. Maclean: I am still considering with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health what provision should be made for a complaints and representation procedure for children held in the new centres.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a mandatory key worker scheme into secure training centres.

Mr. Maclean: We are currently considering whether it will be necessary to require agencies or organisation providers secure training centres to provide a key worker scheme.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy that secure training centres should not be sited an impractical distance away from hospital accident and emergency departments.

Mr. Maclean: No decision has been made on sites for secure training centres. A number of factors will be taken into consideration. These will include proximity to main centres of population.

Persistent Offenders

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the research commissioned by his Department from the Policy Studies Institute into persistent offenders to be completed.

Mr. Maclean: The Policy Studies Institute has completed fieldwork for the research commissioned by the Home Office into persistent juvenile offending, but on current information I do not expect to receive a final report before the new year.

Deportation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which drugs are used to sedate people who are being forcibly deported.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Drugs are not used to sedate people who are being deported. Any medication required by the deportee would be administered by a medically qualified person with the deportee's consent.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department hopes to introduce specialist training for staff working with juveniles in youth offender institutions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about specialist training at Young Offender Institutions.

Some specialist training for staff working with young offenders has already taken place at Lancaster Farms Young Offender Institution, under the guidance of the Trust for the Study of Adolescence. Pilot training based on this, to develop a distance learning pack for use in other YOIs is to take place in January. We plan to have the distance learning pack available for general use later in the year.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects that 16 and 17-year-olds who are sentenced to adult penalties will no longer be held with adults serving similar penalties.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The custodial penalties available for 16 and 17-year-olds are detention in a young offender institution—YOI—and detention under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. Boys of this age sentenced to YOI are taken directly to a YOI with a juvenile unit, unless exceptionally they have to be held overnight at a remand centre or local prison because of travelling difficulties. Boys sentenced under section 53 may be held for a few weeks in a remand centre or local prison while a decision is taken as to where they should be allocated to serve their sentences. Girls of 16 and 17 may be held with other female young offenders in establishments which also hold adult women prisoners. This is considered to be the best option for holding them, in their own interests. There are no plans to alter these arrangements.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to end remands of 15 and 16-year-olds to Prison Service establishments.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have enacted the necessary legislation to end the remand of 15 and 16-year-olds to Prison Service establishments and we have made additional capital provision available to local authorities so that they can provide an effective alternative. We will bring the new law into effect as soon as we are satisfied that local authorities have provided sufficient additional secure accommodation to meet the expected need.

Criminal Justice Study

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects his Department's study of entry into the criminal justice system to report.

Mr. Maclean: A first report on this study is expected in July 1994. This report will cover decisions made by the police about whether to charge or caution suspects arrested and held at police stations. The report will also contain information about the ethnic origin and gender of those arrested, the proportion dealt with as mentally disordered or handicapped offenders, and the extent of offending on bail.

A further report on the study is expected to be available towards the middle of 1995. This will contain details of decisions made by the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to termination or continuance of proceedings and information about court outcomes and sentences.

Siemion Serafinowicz

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to remove United Kingdom nationality from Siemion Serafinowicz; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There is no record of Mr. Serafinowicz having acquired British citizenship.

British National Party

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan police Commissioner over an assault by a British National party councillor against an *Evening Standard* reporter; and if he will refer the case for prosecution.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the Commissioner that the complainant in this case does not wish any further action to be taken and has declined to give evidence.

Mr. Amanullah Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when in May 1990 the United Kingdom National Central Bureau of Interpol received notification that the arrest of Amanullah Khan was requested by the Indian National Central Bureau of Interpol; and what description was given of Mr. Khan's nationality.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The notification was received on 25 May 1990. Mr. Khan's nationality was described by the Indian National Central Bureau of Interpol as

"Indian and Citizen of Pakistan (not confirmed)".

Plutonium Smuggling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information or assistance his German counterpart sought from United Kingdom authorities in regard to the trial in Flensburg of British citizen Albert Derbyshire for smuggling and alleged attempt to sell stolen Russian plutonium.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom Central Authority in the Home Office received a letter of request from the German authorities under the 1959 European convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters asking that witness summonses be served on five named people in this country for the purposes of the trial. This request was executed earlier this month.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what representations were made to him at his meeting on 20 October with the Royal National Institute for the Blind, Mencap, the Spinal Injuries Association, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and Deaf Accord to discuss his proposal to oblige employers to contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of providing services such as personal readers and special aids to employment for disabled people working with them for six months or longer; what reply he has made; what action he will be taking to revise the proposal; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he is having with the Employers' Forum on Disability and the CBI on his proposal to oblige employers to contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of providing services such as personal readers and special aids to employment for disabled people working with them for six months or longer.

Miss Widdecombe: The meeting on 20 October was called to discuss the new scheme "access to work" about which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement to the House on 22 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *102*. It will replace and extend four of the Department's current special schemes and enable us to help more disabled people and meet a much wider range of their employment related needs. To help fund the extra costs we will expect employers to contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of help, up to a ceiling, to employees who enter the scheme after working for them six months or more.

Members of the delegation welcomed the increased flexibility of access to work. They expressed concern about the willingness of employers to pay a contribution and the effects this would have on the employment of disabled people. My right hon. Friend sought to reassure them. Both current and previous research suggests that employers would be willing to make a reasonable contribution: my right hon. Friend pointed out that the limit on the employer contribution, and on individuals' entitlement, about which they also expressed concern, had yet to be set.

My noble Friend Lord Henley met representatives from the Employers' Forum on Disability on 2 November to discuss access to work; my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be meeting them on 9 December. The Department is currently in correspondence with the CBI on a number of issues including access to work. The Department has offered to meet the CBI at a suitable date.

There are a number of issues on access to work on which my right hon. Friend has still to make decisions. In addition to the limits on individual entitlement and employer contributions, these include transitional arrangements for existing beneficiaries of the current special schemes, for how long those helped as new recruits will remain exempt from the employer contributions and whether there will be special arrangements for certain types of firm.

Once my right hon. Friend has taken a decision on these areas, an announcement will be made to the House.

PRIME MINISTER

War Veterans

Ms Walley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will take steps to assist British war veterans attending the D-day commemorations in Brittany to stay in the hotels in which their bookings have been made.

The Prime Minister: I am aware that some of the hotel reservations made by British veterans wishing to attend the D-Day commemorations in France in 1994 have been cancelled by French hoteliers. I am pleased to say that, following an approach by the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, the French authorities have established an office in Caen to deal with all queries concerning accommodation in Normandy. The address of the office is:

Comite Departmental du Tourism du Calvados
Place du Canada
1400 CAEN
France
(Telephone: 010-33-31-86-53-30)
(Fax: 010-33-31-79-39-41)

Weapons Proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the policies Her Majesty's Government intend to implement to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The Prime Minister: We will continue to oppose the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by strongly supporting the unconditional and indefinite extension of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and by working towards the effective implementation of the chemical weapons convention and the strengthening of the biological weapons convention. We will continue to press for universal membership of these agreements and to give vigorous support to the related export control regimes.

Housing Associations

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Prime Minister if he will initiate an inter-departmental review of the relationship between housing association grant rates and benefit entitlements to identify the impact of varying marginal rates of tax and benefit on both housing associations and their tenants, to reduce numbers dependant on benefit and the poverty trap.

The Prime Minister: Ministers and officials in the Departments of the Environment and of Social Security already work closely together in those areas to ensure that the interaction between the different subsidy systems is fully understood and appreciated. A formal working group has now been established to discuss this and other issues relating to housing and benefits policy on a regular basis.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Cyprus.

The Prime Minister: The Government continue to support the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative, which we believe offers the best hope for a just and lasting solution to the Cyprus dispute. We hope that the two sides will be able to resume negotiations in New York soon after elections in northern Cyprus on 12 December.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister how many documents his office has provided to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry into arms sales to Iraq since 23 November 1992; what has been the cost of document provision; how many civil servants in his office have been involved in assisting Lord Justice Scott with documents; how many have attended the inquiry; and which documents requested have been withheld.

The Prime Minister: My office has provided 184 documents to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry, doing so, for administrative reasons, via the Cabinet Office. No documents have been withheld. Up to six officials were involved in the compilation of the documents, and the costs incurred by both Departments has been approximately £800 in total. One Cabinet Office official has attended each hearing of the inquiry.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister which ministers are currently members of the ministerial group on crime prevention.

The Prime Minister: The current membership of the ministerial group on crime prevention is as follows:

Chairman, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Charles Wardle MP, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security (The noble Lord Astor)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment (Tony Baldry MP, the hon. Member for Banbury)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health (John Bowis MP, the hon. Member for Battersea)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education (Eric Forth MP, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire)

Minister of State, Scottish Office (The noble Lord Fraser of Carmyllie)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office (Gwilym Jones MP, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Transport (Robert Key MP, the hon. Member for Salisbury)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Patrick McLoughlin MP, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, West)

Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Anthony Nelson MP, the hon. Member for Chichester)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of National Heritage (Iain Sproat MP, the hon. Member for Harwich)

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler MP, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North)

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Employment Department (Ann Widdecombe MP, the hon. Member for Maidstone)

Baroness Thatcher

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister whether the additional security costs arising from Baroness Thatcher's book-signing tour were borne by the police forces or by Government.

The Prime Minister: Any such costs will be met in the usual way from the police fund. Specific grant at the rate of 51 per cent. is paid by the Home Office on police expenditure.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 23 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chamber Carpet

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what was the cost and place of manufacture of the recent replacement of carpet in the Chamber of the House; how long it had been there; in what way it was disposed of and for what price; what plans exist for replacing the carpet in the remainder of the Chamber; and how much this is expected to cost.

Mr. Ray Powell: This is a matter for the Director of Works and I shall ask him to write to the hon. Member.

All-party Groups

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee which all-party groups receive funds or are serviced by outside organisations; and if he will list the organisation in each case.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I refer the hon. Member to the Register of All-Party and Parliamentary Groups which is maintained by the Registry of Members' Interests in accordance with the resolution of the House of 17 December 1985. The Register is available for inspection by Members in the Registry and the Library.

Parliamentary Broadcasting

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will discuss with Westminster Cable the possibilities for cabling hon. Members' offices with the parliamentary channel at the same time as they cable the SW1 area, outside the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Waller: I have been asked to reply as Chairman of the Information Committee. Any provision of such services would need to await decisions on the proposed parliamentary data and video network, on which the Committee hopes to report early next year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Official Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on official hospitality in his Department in the first six months of financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Hague: The provisional figure for the first six months of the financial year 1993-94 is £97,000.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the main headings of the money spent by his Department on official hospitality in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Hague: The main headings were: ministerial hospitality; Minister of State's reception in honour of organisations representing disabled people; official hospitality.

Parking Fines

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on parking fines by his Department in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available. Responsibility for parking fines rests with the driver; however, when fines are unavoidably incurred during the undertaking of official duties, management may, exceptionally, consider reimbursement.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on decorating and furnishing Ministers' offices in his Department in each of the last three financial years.

Mr. Hague: There has been no such expenditure on Ministers' personal accommodation in any of the last three financial years.

France (Official Visits)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the purpose and place of each of the visits to France by officials of his Department in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Hague: Information for the Department as a whole is not available in the form requested. Details of departmental headquarters official visits to France in 1992-93 are in the table.

Reason/host	*Place*	*Number of visits*
Council of Europe	Paris	1
Council of Europe	Strasbourg	7
Training	Paris	3
Liaison with French officials	Paris	3
OECD	Paris	4
Beveridge conference	Strasbourg	1

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent by his Department on officials travelling to France in the first six months of the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. From 1 April 1993, the company that arranges travel for departmental officials keeps records by mode of travel rather than by destination.

SCOTLAND

Norwegian Salmon

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further representations to the European Commission he has made following his meeting with industry representatives, in respect of the entry of Norwegian salmon into the Union; what response he has received; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland wrote to the European Commission on 16 November expressing concern about the current market situation, welcoming discussions which were taking place between the Commission and the Norwegian Government, and asking the Commission to take appropriate action.

The Commission has now introduced minimum import prices with effect from 20 November 1993 until the end of January 1994. This will provide a temporary floor to the market while the longer-term problems facing the industry are addressed.

The Commission has also invited the industry to update the information they have submitted in support of allegations of dumping by Norwegian exporters. I would encourage the industry to provide this information as soon as possible so that the Commission is in a position to proceed with an investigation.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to announce what action the United Kingdom Government are taking in response to complaints from Scottish salmon farmers about the dumping of Norwegian salmon on United Kingdom and EC markets;

(2) what action he is taking to safeguard United Kingdom salmon producers from the effects of Norwegian salmon being dumped on United Kingdom and EC markets.

Sir Hector Monro: I have been asked to reply.

Allegations of dumping of farmed salmon on the European market by Norwegian importers are a matter for the European salmon farming industry to take up with the European Commission. The Scottish industry made such allegations in 1991 and the Commission has recently asked the industry to update the information provided on that occasion. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has encouraged the industry to provide this information to the Commission as soon as possible so that the Commission is in a position to proceed with an investigation.

DEFENCE

Departmental Land

14. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total land area in the United Kingdom currently under MOD control.

Mr. Hanley: The defence estate in the United Kingdom is approximately 243,000 hectares—600,000 acres—of freehold and leasehold land.

Hercules

15. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he proposes to take to ensure that the Royal Air Force shall be equipped with a new aircraft to replace the Hercules; and when he expects the first of such aircraft to enter squadron service.

Mr. Aitken: We are currently evaluating options for both refurbishment of the existing aircraft and purchase of new aircraft. A final decision will be taken on the basis of the option which offers best value for money.

25. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when invitations to tender for the Hercules replacement programme are to be provided to contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: We are currently studying the alternatives of extending the life of our existing Hercules fleet or replacing them with new aircraft. We will come to a decision on the way ahead when we have evaluated the results of these studies.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what date he proposes to issue invitations to submit tenders for the Hercules replacement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: We are currently evaluating options for both refurbishment of the existing aircraft and purchase of new aircraft. A final decision will be taken on the basis of which option offers best value for money.

Civilian Career Opportunities

16. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice his Department is giving to service men and women who will be leaving as part of the "Options for Change" policy concerning alternative career opportunities in civilian life.

Mr. Hanley: The Ministry of Defence provides a comprehensive resettlement service for all service leavers including redundees. These include a range of briefings on specific careers and job search workshops which have been designed particularly with redundees in mind. Practical help with job finding is provided by the services employment network.

Trident

17. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings will accrue from reducing the number of warheads on the Trident missile programme; and what proportion of this may be reinvested in armed services numbers and duties.

Mr. Rifkind: Changes in the number of warheads have only modest financial implications, and do not affect the armed service's numbers and duties.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

19. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sanctions exist for breaches of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Hanley: There are no formal sanctions associated with breaches of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Alleged breaches may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the United Nations Security Council.

Eurofighter

20. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the Spanish defence Minister to discuss the progress of the Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Aitken: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) earlier today.

South China Seas

21. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, and where, provision will be made for the basing of British forces in the South China seas after the withdrawal from Hong Kong.

Mr. Hanley: We have already agreed with the government of Brunei to continue the deployment of the Gurkha battalion in Brunei until 1998. Consideration will be given to a further extension in due course. We shall continue to participate in exercises held in Malaysia and Singapore under the five-power defence arrangements and make occasional naval deployments to the region.

Spare Parts

22. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the future provision of spare parts for the armed forces.

Mr. Aitken: My Department will continue to ensure the adequate provision of spare parts for the armed forces so they can fully meet their agreed defence objectives.

Market Testing

23. **Mr. Sykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what benefits he expects to flow from his Department's market-testing programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Experience suggests that the competitive pressures of market testing will produce savings of between 20 and 25 per cent. of running costs, regardless of whether the service is contractorised or retained in-house. The process provides an oppotunity to reassess the use of resources to give better service to the customer and better value for money.

Germany (Force Withdrawals)

24. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the saving to the defence budget from withdrawing British forces from Germany.

Mr. Hanley: Over the period 1990-91 to 1995-96, the defence budget, excluding the cost of the Gulf conflict and redundancies, is expected to reduce by around 12 per cent. in real terms. While the operating cost of maintaining British forces in Germany is expected to reduce by around £500 million in real terms between 1991-92 and 1993-94, it is not possible to identify separately the savings of withdrawing British forces from Germany.

Belize

26. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he wil review Her Majesty's Government's present defence commitment to Belize.

Mr. Hanley: By agreement between the Government of Belize and Her Majesty's Government, the Belize defence force will assume responsibility for the defence of Belize on 1 January 1994. We see no reason to change these plans.

Yugoslavia

27. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British troops are now deployed in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) earlier today.

Contracts

28. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to ensure that a high proportion of defence contracts is awarded to British firms.

Mr. Aitken: In order to achieve the best value for money, wherever possible, we place contracts by means of open competition. British companies have proved highly competitive to the extent that, over the past five years, we estimate that 91 per cent. of defence equipment expenditure was spent with United Kingdom industry.

Reserve Forces

29. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the relative state of readiness for active service of the regular reserves and the Territorial Army.

Mr. Hanley: Members of both the regular reserve and the Territorial Army require a period of special-to-role training in advance of deployment on active service. The amount of training required depends on the role and nature of the units in which the reservists concerned would serve.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement regarding the timetable for withdrawal of his Department from the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwich.

Mr. Hanley: Current plans are for a withdrawal by March 1998. We are holding discussions with the NHS about the Greenwich healthcare trust progressively taking over the hospital in advance of this date.

Dockyards

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will agree to provide a contractual guarantee of work to both Rosyth and Devonport dockyards.

Mr. Aitken: The Government have not ruled out the possibility that some form of contractual commitment relating to future refitting work could be included as one of the matters for negotiation with tenderers for the dockyards.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 provisions will apply to the employees of the royal dockyards following full privatisation.

Mr. Aitken: This will depend upon the particular circumstances of the proposed sale. However, my Department will honour any obligations on it arising from the relevant employment legislation.

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Government will guarantee the pensions and redundancy entitlements of the royal dockyards' employees after full privatisation.

Mr. Aitken: Terms and conditions of employment at the royal dockyards remain a matter for negotiation between the work forces—or their representatives—and their respective employers.

Defence Diversification

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to encourage defence diversification.

Mr. Aitken: The Government's policy is that decisions on how to adapt to changing market circumstances, and what products to make, are for the commercial judgment of companies.

The Department of Trade and Industry provides advice and assistance to companies who may be considering diversification, including a recently published handbook called "Changing Tack". That Department, together with the Department of Employment, also administers the United Kingdom participation in the EC Konver programme, which is designed to assist regions affected by the decline in the armaments industry and the closure of military bases.

Shipbuilding and Refitting

Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the dialogue over an industrial policy for shipbuilding and ship refitting will commence.

Mr. Aitken: The Government believe that industry is best placed to take the decisions necessary for its own success. My Department is, however, seeking to promote greater awareness of our likely future requirements through regular and continuing dialogue with industry.

MV Belvaux

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date, for what purpose and for how many days MV Belvaux was chartered by his Department; what nature of cargo the vessel was intended to carry; for how many of the days chartered the vessel was employed on other tasks for his Department; when the charter was cancelled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The MV Belvaux was taken up on time charter on 26 January 1993 against a contingency of transporting artillery units at short notice to reinforce the troops deployed by Bosnia. The charter lasted for 117 days and was relinquished on 22 May 1993 once developments in the former republic of Yugoslavia justified its termination. During the period of the time charter it was possible to make 23 days' use of the vessel for other purposes without compromising availability for the primary contingency task.

Small Arms Nitro Compound

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the facilities available in the United Kingdom for the manufacture of small arms nitro compound; from which foreign countries it is imported; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: My Department does not purchase small arms ammunition propellant separately but procures the complete ammunition round from a prime contractor. It is for the prime contractor to decide on the source of the propellant used in his ammunition and to ensure that it meets the appropriate technical and performance standards. The capability to produce nitro-cellulose and nitro-glycerine for small arms ammunition does exist in the United Kingdom.

Channel Islands

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement over remaining documents in his Department relating to the Nazi occupation of the Channel Islands; and if such documents have now been seen by the German authorities.

Mr. Hanley: There are very few closed documents relating to the Nazi occupation of the Channel Islands. The German authorities' investigations are proceeding with MOD giving every assistance, including sight of the relevant files. The closed documents will be released on completion of the German inquiries.

Royal Tournament and Edinburgh Tattoo

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of support from the services and from civilian staff of his Department for *(a)* the royal tournament, *(b)* the Edinburgh tattoo and *(c)* other similar scale events, showing the additional attributable cost; what plans he has to reduce that level of support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The 1992 royal tournament, the most recent for which detailed figures are readily available, required support of about 19,500 man days of effort from service personnel, excluding participants. The 1993 tournament was reduced in length from 29 to 20 performances, with a consequent reduction in effort. There are no MOD civilian staff directly employed on royal tournament tasks. The additional attributable costs—that is, costs which would not otherwise have been incurred, amounted to approximately £350,000 in 1992.

The 1993 Edinburgh tattoo required support of a little over 5,000 man days of effort from service personnel, excluding participants. Some MOD civilian staff worked overtime in support of the tattoo and a number of casual cleaners were hired for its duration. The total attributable costs were some £60,000.

There are no other events comparable to the royal tournament and the Edinburgh tattoo.

There are no plans at present for further reductions in support to these events.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of nuclear warheads which have been destroyed by the Russian Government under the provisions of the START 2 treaty.

Mr. Hanley: The START 2 treaty has not yet come into effect and cannot legally do so until START 1 enters into force. Therefore, no nuclear warheads have been destroyed by the Russian Government as a result of the terms of the START 2 treaty.

Mr. David Hart

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of Mr. David Hart's visit to RAF Strike Command on 27 May; how long the visit lasted; and whom he met.

Mr. Hanley: Mr. David Hart was invited by the Chief of the Air Staff to receive a briefing on the role and organisation of RAF Strike Command in the context of an article written by Mr. Hart in *The Spectator* magazine published in February 1993. During a half-day visit, Mr. Hart met the Commander in Chief and a number of his senior staff.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the search-and-rescue services at RAF Chivenor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Wessex search-and-rescue—SAR—flight at RAF Chivenor is planned to be replaced by the Sea King SAR flight from RAF Brawdy in April 1994. This decision will be looked at again in light of the decision which I announced on 11 November, to move a battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers into temporary accommodation at RAF Brawdy from August 1994, and once the outcome of the review into the rationalisation of RAF flying training stations is known.

Market Testing

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the size of his Department's market-testing programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: We intend to market test, in the four years to March 1996, activities currently costing £1·2 billion each year to undertake in-house and employing over 40,000 people.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 24 November 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Shop Leases

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to modernise the law regarding shop leases in particular with regard to original tenant liability.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As I announced in my answer on 31 March to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), *Official Report,* column *197,* the Government have, after careful consideration, decided to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report on Landlord and Tenant Law: Privity of Contract and Estate (Law Com. No. 174), for future leases but not for existing leases. The necessary legislation, which will apply to all leases including shop leases, will be introduced as soon as there is a suitable opportunity.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Review

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the remit of the Local Government Commission includes making recommendations on changes in intervals for elections and on the creation of single-member wards; and whether such proposals could be implemented by statutory order alone.

Mr. Baldry: The policy guidance to the Local Government Commission for England, revised November 1993, invites the Commission, where it recommends structural changes, also to make recommendations about future electoral arrangements, including warding, number of councillors and electoral cycles.

Such proposals could be implemented only by statutory order.

Standard Spending Assessments

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to base local authority debt charge standard spending assessments on 1990-91 adjusted credit ceilings; and if he will make a statement on the discrepancies between the current notional debt figure and actual debt charge spending.

Mr. Baldry: We are at present considering the various representations which have been received in the course of the review of SSAs, including those for changes to the capital financing SSA, which were also discussed with the local authority associations.

The Secretary of State will announce his proposals for the distribution of revenue support grant for 1994-95 shortly. The announcement will include any proposals for the calculation of the capital financial element of SSAs for 1994-95. There will follow, as in previous years, a period of consultation.

Local Authorities (Management)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he plans to take following the publication of the report of the working party on the internal management of local authorities in England, entitled "Community Leadership and Representation: Unlocking the Potential".

Mr. Baldry: We are continuing to discuss the issues constructively with local government and will announce decisions as they are taken.

Energy Efficiency

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new initiatives he is taking to promote energy efficiency for *(a)* households and *(b)* businesses; and what is his latest estimate of the expenditure involved in each of the above.

Mr. Yeo: On 26 July, my right hon. Friend announced the Government's proposals for completing Britain's CO_2 programme. The main energy efficiency elements include strengthening the Energy Efficiency Office's programmes of advice and information aimed at business, increasing the target for combined heat and power to 5,000 MW by the year 2000, increasing the resources devoted to the provision of information and encouragement to households, and reinforcing the work of the Energy Saving Trust. The EEO's budget to run its existing programmes and take forward these proposals in 1993-94 is £69·1 million.

Empty Property Purchases

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent of the £750 million made available by the Treasury at the time of the November 1992 autumn statement to buy up empty owner-occupied properties before the end of the financial year 1992-93; how much of the total was spent by local authorities and how much by housing associations; and how much of this money has subsequently been clawed back by the Treasury through reductions in funds made available by central Government for investment in housing.

Sir George Young: On 12 November 1992 the Secretary of State announced a £627 million programme to boost the housing market. Housing associations in England spent £577·14 million to purchase new, empty and repossessed homes to use for families in housing need and £19·86 million by giving cash incentives to associations' tenants to buy homes on the open market. Local authorities in England spent a total of £29·94 million for similar cash incentives for their own tenants.

These funds were made available and fully spent in 1992-93; the resources available for future years are determined annually in the public expenditure survey discussions.

A further £123 million was divided between Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland for similar housing measures and other capital projects, for which respective Secretaries of States were responsible.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service College

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the Civil Service college.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have now completed an evaluation of the Civil Service College as a next steps executive agency and considered its future. I have today placed a copy of the evaluation report in the Libraries of both Houses.

The college has had four very successful years since becoming an agency in 1989. Agency status within central Government has helped the college to provide top quality senior management and professional training focused on the particular needs of the civil service at a time of considerable change. We have concluded that this remains the best approach for a further period.

We shall continue to seek improvements in the college's operation and will review it again in four years under the normal procedures for executive agencies. In particular, we have decided to put the college on to a fully commercial footing by phasing out the central payment of £1·8 million a year from the Office of Public Service and Science. From 1995-96 the college will be required fully to cover its costs by revenue from its operations. In addition we are mounting a study of the college's suitability for trading fund status.

We are now reviewing the framework document of the college. When this is complete, it will then be presented to Parliament in the usual way.

EDUCATION

School Admissions (Appeals)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give figures, in total and by local education authority, on the number of parental appeals on school admission for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: In the 1991-92 academic year 37,676 appeals were lodged by parents against the non-admission of their children to the maintained school of their choice. The figures requested, by LEA area, are given in the table. In many cases appeals were withdrawn or settled before being heard by an appeals committee.

Local Education Authority Area—Number of appeals lodged

	Secondary	*Primary*	*Total*
City	—	4	4
Camden	218	167	385
Greenwich	196	236	432
Hackney	152	154	306
Hammersmith	150	83	233
Islington	132	140	272
Kensington and Chelsea	19	24	43
Lambeth	155	349	504
Lewisham	364	275	639
Southwark	132	433	565
Tower Hamlets	326	219	545
Wandsworth	108	64	172
Westminster	177	7	184
Barking	151	72	223
Barnet	477	326	803
Bexley	158	258	416
Brent	104	29	133
Bromley	399	82	481
Croydon	—	—	—
Ealing	43	198	241
Enfield	739	186	925
Haringey	76	143	219
Harrow	75	418	493
Havering	369	96	465
Hilingdon	71	78	149
Hounslow	230	29	259
Kingston upon Thames	58	57	115
Merton	76	80	156
Newham	329	31	360
Redbridge	223	156	379
Richmond upon Thames	141	66	207
Sutton	237	111	348
Waltham Forest	181	32	213
Birmingham	825	1,126	1,951
Coventry	235	224	459
Dudley	274	55	329
Sandwell	1,140	149	1,289
Solihull	249	32	281
Walsall	117	17	134
Wolverhampton	65	10	75
Knowsley	0	3	3
Liverpool	584	171	755
St Helens	57	37	94
Sefton	50	54	104
Wirral	492	60	552
Bolton	70	71	141
Bury	319	318	637
Manchester	437	985	1,422
Oldham	346	60	406
Rochdale	139	120	159
Salford	6	54	60
Stockport	118	63	181
Tameside	48	48	96
Trafford	83	90	173
Wigan	161	90	251
Barnsley	4	24	28
Doncaster	27	13	40
Rotherham	75	48	123
Sheffield	152	170	322
Bradford	848	118	966
Calderdale	97	49	146
Kirklees	90	68	158
Leeds	594	1,560	2,154
Wakefield	52	47	99
Gateshead	36	42	78
Newcastle upon Tyne	26	84	110
North Tyneside	9	5	5
South Tyneside	0	5	5
Sunderland	78	50	128
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0
Avon	262	621	863
Bedfordshire	76	84	160
Berkshire	570	179	749
Buckinghamshire	344	56	400
Cambridgeshire	—	1	1
Cheshire	47	26	73
Cleveland	70	14	84
Cornwall	0	26	26
Cumbria	69	38	107
Derbyshire	368	134	502
Devon	334	45	379
Dorset	153	100	253
Durham	69	142	211
East Sussex	114	148	262
Essex	224	49	273
Gloucestershire	331	51	382
Hampshire	24	22	46
Hereford and Worcester	131	19	150
Hertfordshire	702	156	858
Humberside	197	211	408
Isle of Wight	26	1	27
Kent	1,580	42	1,622
Lancashire	705	1,353	2,058
Leicestershire	299	15	314
Lincolnshire	185	20	205
Norfolk	124	111	135

	Secondary	Primary	Total
North Yorkshire	175	70	245
Northamptonshire	66	44	110
Northumberland	8	6	14
Nottinghamshire	85	190	275
Oxfordshire	130	46	176
Shropshire	77	110	187
Somerset	75	165	240
Staffordshire	139	37	176
Suffolk	54	35	99
Surrey	185	198	383
Warwickshire	50	36	86
West Sussex	33	42	75
Wiltshire	36	24	60
Total	22,286	15,390	37,676

[1] Figures based on incomplete data.
[2] No LEA return for 1991-92 year. The figures relate to the GM sector only.

Grant-maintained Schools

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give figures for the amount of transitional grant paid to date to each grant-maintained school in each local education authority area.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each grant-maintained school which became grant maintained in September or October, the full-year value of *(a)* direct annual maintenance grant and *(b)* the central annual maintenance grant; and what is *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)* in each case.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is given in the table.

School	(a) Full year direct	(b) Full year central	Per cent. of (b) to (a)
Abbey Grange CE VA High School	2,085,428	233,568	11·2
Appleby County Primary School	325,710	48,856	15·0
Astley High School	1,356,315	127,494	9·4
Our Lady of Fatima RC High School	1,048,668	102,770	9·8
St. Paul's CE Junior School	167,698	25,154	15·0
The Bishop Challoner RC School	1,099,412	152,818	13·9
Abraham Darby School	2,189,160	192,646	8·8
Albany School	2,393,684	246,549	10·3
Alder Coppice Primary	530,300	95,454	18·0
Aldridge School	2,284,644	281,011	12·3
All Saints CE Primary School	283,699	40,853	14·4
All Saints CE Primary School	308,882	46,951	15·2
All Saints RC School	1,724,127	168,965	9·8
Allington County Primary School	276,143	45,564	16·5
Alperton High School	2,200,481	195,843	8·9
Andoversford Primary School	143,061	19,742	13·8
Anglo European School	2,260,111	205,670	9·1
Applemore Technology School	1,598,270	163,024	10·2
Ashley County Junior School	399,874	61,980	15·5
Ashmole School	2,230,959	290,025	13·0
Ashton St. Peters Lower	234,182	42,855	18·3
Barnham Broom (VC) Primary School	134,710	16,839	12·5
Barton Court Grammar School	1,047,520	114,180	10·9
Beanfield Junior School	471,819	58,034	12·3
Beverley School	1,524,617	157,036	10·3
Bexley Erith Technical Boys	1,481,498	139,261	9·4
Blessed Edward Oldcorne RC High School	1,345,022	151,987	11·3
Blessed Thomas Holford Catholic High	1,167,610	120,264	10·3
Brampton Junior School	261,608	39,241	15·0
Branston School and Community College	2,173,630	313,016	9·8
Bromsgrove CE Middle School	703,620	79,509	11·3
Broomfield GM School	2,370,832	244,196	10·3
Brushwood Middle School	276,431	46,717	16·9
Cardinal Griffin RC School	1,336,057	150,974	11·3
Cardinal Hinsley High School	1,632,572	145,299	8·9
Cartmel Priory CE School	566,799	56,114	9·9
Castlefield Combined School	736,771	124,514	16·9
Castleview Combined School	493,312	58,704	11·9
Cecil Jones High School	2,281,202	207,589	9·1
Chadwell Heath High School	2,393,551	301,587	12·6
Chapel St. Leonards County Primary School	264,050	40,136	15·2
Charlton School	1,326,665	116,746	8·8
Charville Primary School	624,501	103,042	16·5
Chasetown High School	1,471,129	166,238	11·3
Chaucer Technology School	2,557,253	280,921	10·9
Chellaston Junior School	367,563	57,707	15·7
Cheltenham Bournside School and 6th Form	2,561,407	297,123	11·6
Cheyne Middle School	1,206,923	131,555	10·9
Chingford School	1,772,433	260,548	14·7
Cirencester Deer Park School	1,584,917	183,850	11·6
Cirencester Kingshill School	1,109,923	128,751	11·6
Clacton High School	2,337,765	212,737	9·1
Colbayns High School	2,880,641	262,138	9·1
Colchester Royal Grammar School	1,540,825	140,215	9·1
Collingtree CE Primary School	100,320	12,339	12·3
Coppins Green Primary	539,422	77,677	14·4
Cranwell County Primary School	288,570	43,863	15·2
Deanery Infant School	298,524	63,286	21·2
Deanery Junior School	326,273	69,170	21·2
Ditton CE Primary School	286,742	47,312	16·5
Dollis Junior School	564,170	104,935	18·6
Downton CE VC Primary Schdol	254,906	50,726	19·9
Elmstead County Primary	200,597	28,886	14·4
Fairfield High School for Girls	1,300,768	139,182	10·7
Finchley Catholic High	1,963,430	255,246	13·0
Friesland School	1,516,150	150,099	9·9
Goffs School	2,051,393	217,448	10·6
Hassenbrook School	1,225,225	111,495	9·1
Herne Bay High School	1,346,942	146,817	10·9
Herne Bay Junior School	467,864	77,198	16·5
Hillside Infant School	285,023	47,029	16·5
Hillside Junior School	315,323	52,028	16·5
Hillview School for Girls	1,257,027	137,016	10·9
Holland Haven Primary	274,328	39,503	14·4
Holland Park Primary	475,469	68,468	14·4
Hollinsclough CE Primary School	55,615	8,787	15·8
Holly Hall School	1,084,447	139,894	12·9
Holy Cross CE Junior School	362,580	49,673	13·7
Holy Trinity CE Middle School	420,392	63,900	15·2
Holywell School	693,674	93,646	13·5
Hordle CE GM Primary School	337,141	52,257	15·5
Huttoft County Primary School	115,580	17,568	15·2
Jews Free School	3,238,315	352,977	10·9
John Bentley School	2,156,780	269,598	12·5
Killinghall First School	376,187	54,923	14·6
Kingsdown School	1,758,422	219,805	12·5
Knowles Hill School	1,814,534	166,937	9·2
La Sainte Union Convent School	2,240,494	244,214	10·9
Lady Elizabeth Hastings EC Primary School	105,304	15,164	14·4
Lady Manners School	2,737,401	271,003	9·9
Linton Primary School	289,860	45,508	15·7
Lowbourne GM Infants School	345,922	68,838	19·9
Lowbourne Junior School	290,559	57,821	19·9
Marlborough School (GM)	1,616,827	171,384	10·6
Millbrook Infant School	400,500	49,262	12·3
Millbrook Junior School	500,050	61,507	12·3
Millfields Primary School	267,664	38,544	14·4
Motram St. Andrew Primary	116,296	15,583	13·4
Newington Junior School	469,075	77,397	16·5
Nicholas Breakspear RC School	1,781,133	188,800	10·6

School	(a) Full year direct	(b) Full year central	Per cent. of (b) to (a)
Ninestiles School	2,074,119	288,303	13·9
Notre Dame High School	1,288,407	256,393	19·9
Notre Dame School	1,626,473	159,394	9·8
Oakington Manor Primary School	818,130	110,447	13·5
Oaklands RC Comprehensive School	2,033,314	207,398	10·2
Orton Longeuville	2,185,282	181,378	8·3
Osidge Primary School	591,954	110,103	18·6
Park Mead County First School	266,045	40,439	15·2
Parkview School	1,554,009	153,847	9·9
Pewley Down County First School	231,054	35,120	15·2
Pewsey Vale School (GM)	878,033	109,754	12·5
Pittville School	1,161,975	134,789	11·6
Prince Henrys GM High School	1,805,771	204,052	11·3
Purbrook Park School	1,166,797	119,013	10·2
Queen Elizabeth School, Corby	1,307,690	109,846	8·4
Queen Elizabeth's School	1,259,416	137,276	10·9
Queen Mary's Grammar School	1,184,918	145,745	12·3
Queen Mary's High School	1,143,987	140,710	12·3
Rochester Grammar School for Girls	1,181,334	128,765	10·9
Rodings Central Primary School	231,775	33,376	14·4
Sacred Heart of Mary Girls' School	1,550,752	176,786	11·4
Salvatorian College	1,071,349	132,847	12·4
Sheldon School	2,118,329	264,791	12·5
Sir Charles Lucas School	1,841,183	167,548	9·1
Soham Village College	1,808,674	150,120	8·3
South Benfleet Primary School	449,489	64,726	14·4
Southend High School for Boys	1,754,115	159,624	9·1
Southfields School	1,138,478	124,-94	10·9
Spalding County Primary School	280,220	42,593	15·2
St. Andrew's CE Primary school (Hill)	333,278	54,991	16·5
St. Andrew's CE Primary School (L[illegible])	274,950	41,792	15·2
St. [illegible]selm's RC School	1,709,390	186,324	10·9
St. Benedict's RC School	932,427	108,161	11·6
St. Botolph's CE Primary School	293,401	48,441	16·5
St. Catherines RC for Girls	1,380,420	129,759	9·4
St. Clare's RC Primary School	280,632	40,411	14·4
St. Edmunds RC Comprehensive School	1,273,522	138,814	10·9
St. Francis RC Primary School	352,697	58,195	16·5
St. George's CE High School	1,698,320	185,117	10·9
St. George's RC School	1,185,240	120,894	10·2
St. Giles CE Primary School	156,419	23,932	15·3
St. Helena School	1,645,598	149,750	9·1
St. Ignatius College	2,163,709	222,862	10·3
St. John Fisher RC (VA) Primary School	250,655	35,593	14·2
St. John Fisher RC Comprehensive	1,334,060	110,727	8·3
St. John the Evangelist Infant	205,733	24,482	11·9
St. John's School	2,670,824	333,853	12·5
St. Joseph's College	2,363,832	238,747	10·1
St. Katherine's CE VA Primary School	295,975	42,620	14·4
St. Laurence CE Junior School	309,705	51,101	16·5
St. Martin In The Field High School	1,315,154	230,151	17·5
St. Mary's CE High School	2,125,520	276,318	13·0
St. Mary's CE Primary School	242,936	34,983	14·4
St. Michael's Catholic Grammar School	1,346,080	174,990	13·0
St. Michael's RC School	1,567,839	166,191	10·6
St. Michael's School	1,237,106	246,183	19·9
St. Osyth CE Aided Primary School	324,202	46,685	14·4
St. Paul's RC Primary School	435,331	67,476	15·5
St. Peter and St. Paul RC High School	895,570	87,766	9·8
St. Peter's RC Primary School	446,694	69,238	15·5
St. Peter's RC School	2,937,264	331,911	11·3
St. Thomas More High School for Boys	1,103,345	100,404	9·1
St. Thomas More RC Primary School	255,036	36,725	14·4
St. Thomas the Apostle School	1,314,406	261,567	19·9
St. Wilfred's CE High School	2,706,391	278,758	10·3
St. Wulfram's CE High School	845,120	82,822	9·8
St. Gregory's RC High	2,216,968	197,310	8·9
St. Peter's School	2,314,888	192,136	8·3
Stropsley High School and College	1,459,162	196,987	13·5
Studley High School	882,790	89,162	10·1
Takeley Primary School	237,592	34,213	14·4
Testbourne Community School	1,155,808	117,892	10·2
The Bramston School	2,274,506	206,979	9·1
The Cottesloe School	855,240	99,208	11·6
The Fairfax School	2,242,625	311,726	13·9
The Frank Montgomery School	1,136,151	123,840	10·9
The Gilberd School	1,570,611	142,925	9·1
The High Arcal School	1,417,413	182,846	12·9
The Holy Family RC School	272,506	44,964	16·5
The John Henry Newman School	1,209,224	128,178	10·6
The Latymer School	2,538,209	261,436	10·3
The Leventhorpe School	1,917,438	203,248	10·6
The Pingle School	2,458,745	243,416	9·9
The St. Thomas Becket School	1,400,862	163,900	11·7
The Thomas Aveling School	1,805,498	196,799	10·9
Thomas More GM School	1,288,054	136,534	10·6
Thorpedene Infant School	312,638	45,020	14·4
Tonbridge Grammar School for Girls	1,873,718	204,235	10·9
Warwick Bridge Primary School	254,769	38,215	15·0
Washingborough School	390,870	59,412	15·2
West Park Community School	2,657,619	263,104	9·9
Westgate School	1,000,908	79,072	7·9
Wibsey School	645,232	74,846	11·6
William Gilbert Endowed	250,114	39,268	15·7
William Robertson School	702,370	68,832	9·8
Winchcombe Community School	644,254	74,734	11·6
Windsor High School	1,675,956	216,198	12·9
Wirral Grammar School for Boys	1,723,730	155,136	9·0
Woodville Primary School	539,523	77,691	14·4
Yattendon Middle School	414,375	62,985	15·2

Sex Education

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will arrange for his letter in answer to the questions listed in the *Official Report*, 5 November, column *493*, to be published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Forth: The text of the letter was as follows:

"I promised to write to you in response to two recent Parliamentary Questions about sex education. I am sorry that the strict timetable imposed by prorogation of Parliament meant that I was unable to answer fully at the time.

In Question No 296 you asked whether (a) abortion and (b) contraception will be considered as biological or other aspects of human sexual behaviour in our planned guidance to schools on sex education. That guidance will make clear that with effect from the beginning of the Autumn term 1994, the Order for National Curriculum science will require pupils at key stage 3 (aged 11-14) to study:

"life processes . . . growth, reproduction . . . particularly as they relate to human beings;" and

the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence".

It follows that discussion of contraception or abortion will *not* be a statutory requirement of the National Curriculum in science. These topics would be candidates for inclusion instead in the programmes of sex education which all secondary schools will be required to provide. The detailed content of those programmmes will, however, be for the schools themselves to decide, in the light of the guidance we will be offering.

Turning to Question 297, you asked what definition will be given in our planned guidance to schools to help teachers distinguish between biological and other aspects of human sexual behaviour. As I have already explained, the Circular will remind schools of the statutory requirements of National Curriculum

science. It will also offer schools advice and models of good practice to help them draw up their programmes of sex education. We will shortly be issuing a draft of the Circular for consultation.

I hope this is helpful."

Corporal Punishment

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what cases are pending before the European Court of Human Rights regarding the inflicting of corporal punishment in private schools.

Mr. Forth: None.

Refugees

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action he is taking to increase the places for refugees in English as a second language classes.

Mr. Boswell: The provision of tuition to improve the knowledge of English of refugees and others for whom English is not the language spoken at home is a matter for individual further education colleges, schools and local education authorities. The Further Education Funding Council has a duty to secure the provision of adequate facilities for the education of part-time students over compulsory school age and for full-time students aged 19 or over in respect of such courses.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Boswell: The figures are as follows:

	Female	*Male*	*Total*
Grade 1	0	1	1
Grade 2	0	3	3
Grade 3	0	11	11
Grade 4	0	3	3
Grade 5	16	34	50
Grade 6	3	14	17
Grade 7	47	108	155
SEO and Equivalent	38	73	111
HEO and Equivalent	173	182	355
EO and Equivalent	293	189	482
AO and Equivalent	460	153	613
AA and Equivalent	231	111	342
Total	1,261	882	2,143

These figures reflect the number of staff in post and include 360 staff in the Teachers Pensions Agency.

PRIME MINISTER

Queen's Speech

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister how many copies of the background note on the Queen's Speech have been sold to the press.

The Prime Minister: The background notes on the Queen's Speech are available free of charge to the press.

As part of the Government's drive to make information more available to the public, a system operated on behalf of the Central Office of Information was initiated this year to enable individuals and organisations to obtain the background notes by facsimile transmission. Over 1,000 calls were made to the system.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make available to the hon. Members the background note to the Queen's Speech which was made available to the press before the Queen's Speech.

The Prime Minister: The notes have been placed in the Library of the House.

Security Services

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to change the vote accounting arrangements for the security and intelligence agencies, following the announcement of the intention to introduce new statutory arrangements for the secret intelligence service and GCHQ.

The Prime Minister: As part of its policy towards greater openness in security and intelligence matters, the Government intend to bring on to a single published vote the aggregate expenditure of all three agencies, much of which, including all the expenditure of GCHQ, has previously been carried on MoD and FCO Votes.

The new single intelligence vote will be fully open to scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General, apart from limited restrictions to protect the identities of certain sources of information and the details of particularly sensitive operations.

The first main estimate for the new vote will cover expenditure in 1994-95, and will be presented to Parliament in March 1994.

WALES

Housing Association Rents

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning rents for housing associations in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It continues to be our policy to subsidise housing association rents by very considerable capital grants.

Farm Holdings

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farm holdings were registered with his Department in September.

Mr. Redwood: In September 1993 there were some 37,000 names and addresses on the farm holdings list maintained by the Welsh Office.

Agriculture Agencies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were employed within his Department and within agencies accountable to him dealing with agriculture in September.

Mr. Redwood: At 30 September 1993 the number of staff dealing with agriculture in my Department and agencies was 808, including ADAS staff in Wales.

Historic Buildings and Monuments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the Government's response to the second report from the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 1992-93, House of Commons paper 403, on the preservation of historic buildings and ancient monuments.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am pleased to announce that a response to the Welsh Affairs Committee report on the preservation of historic buildings and ancient monuments has been published today as Command Paper 2416. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

Valleys Programme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will publish the evaluation of the programme for the valleys.

Mr. Redwood: I have today published the report of the evaluation of the programme for the valleys 1988 to 1993 carried out by Victor Hausner and Associates, along with a statistical profile of the valleys produced by the Welsh Office. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sinn Fein

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means his Department apprises itself of the policies and views of Sinn Fein.

Mr. Ancram: The main sources of information about the policies and views of Sinn Fein are public ones such as written documents and reports of interviews. The Department will also, from time to time, receive unsolicited second-hand accounts relevant to Sinn Fein's policies and views from members of the community, some of whom may have had contact with members of that party. Constituency matters from Sinn Fein councillors are dealt with on the same basis as inquiries from other elected representatives. There have been occasions when Ministers and/or officials have met council delegations which have included a Sinn Fein councillor to discuss constituency matters.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Establishment

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the police establishment for each police force area in England and Wales for April 1992 and for each month thereafter, including details of supernumerary posts.

Mr. Wardle: The information requested is set out in the tables.

1992

Key: E = Establishment; S = Supernumerary posts.

	April		May		June		July		August		September		October		November		December	
	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S
Avon and Somerset	3,087	2	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	2	3,087	2	3,087	2	3,087	2
Bedfordshire	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0
Cambridgeshire	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38
Cheshire	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3
City of London	798	24	798	24	798	24	798	24	798	24	798	24	798	60	798	60	798	60
Cleveland	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0
Cumbria	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1
Derbyshire	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0
Devon and Cornwall	2,928	5	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	5	2,928	5	2,928	5	2,928	5
Dorset	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2
Durham	1,389	2	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1
Dyfed Powys	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1
Essex	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0
Gloucestershire	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0
Greater Manchester	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0
Gwent	1,010	0	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3
Hampshire	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1
Hertfordshire	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0
Humberside	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1
Kent	3,096	1	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28	3,096	28
Lancashire	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4
Leicestershire	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4
Lincolnshire	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0
Merseyside	4,706	6	4,706	4	4,706	4	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3
Metropolitan Police	28,276	0	28,297	0	28,304	0	28,279	0	28,279	0	28,260	0	28,260	0	28,240	0	28,240	0
Norfolk	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1
North Wales	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	1
North Yorkshire	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0
Northamptonshire	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1
Northumbria	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	1	3,613	0	3,613	0
Nottinghamshire	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	0	2,344	13
South Wales	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3
South Yorkshire	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0
Staffordshire	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2
Suffolk	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0	1,233	0
Surrey	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17
Sussex	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1
Thames Valley	3,812	14	3,812	14	3,812	14	3,812	14	3,812	15	3,812	15	3,812	15	3,812	15	3,812	70
Warwickshire	1,020	21	1,020	21	1,020	21	1,020	21	1,020	21	1,020	21	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25

	April		May		June		July		August		September		October		November		December	
	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S
West Mercia	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3
West Midlands	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	8	6,977	1	6,977	1
West Yorkshire	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3
Wiltshire	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97	1,181	97
Total	126,977	268	126,998	295	127,005	295	126,980	294	126,980	295	126,961	295	126,961	335	126,941	327	126,941	395

1993

Key: E = Establishment; S = Supernumerary posts.

	January		February		March		April		May		June		July		August	
	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S	E	S
Avon and Somerset	3,087	2	3,087	2	3,087	2	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	3	3,087	3
Bedfordshire	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0	1,178	0
Cambridgeshire	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38	1,241	38
Cheshire	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3	1,920	3
City of London	798	60	798	60	798	60	798	63	798	63	798	63	798	90	798	90
Cleveland	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0	1,502	0
Cumbria	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1	1,187	1
Derbyshire	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0	1,850	0
Devon and Cornwall	2,928	5	2,928	5	2,928	5	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	4	2,928	4
Dorset	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2	1,302	2
Durham	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1	1,389	1
Dyfed Powys	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1	969	1
Essex	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0	2,950	0
Gloucestershire	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0	1,184	0
Greater Manchester	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0	7,077	0
Gwent	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	3	1,010	2	1,010	2
Hampshire	3,269	2	3,269	2	3,269	2	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1	3,269	1
Hertfordshire	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0	1,684	0
Humberside	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	1	2,034	0	2,034	0
Kent[1]	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	28	3,136	38
Lancashire	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	4	3,229	3	3,229	3	3,229	3
Leicestershire	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	4	1,853	1	1,853	1	1,853	1	1,853	1	1,853	1
Lincolnshire	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0	1,206	0
Merseyside	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3	4,706	3
Metropolitan Police	28,225	0	28,211	0	28,118	0	27,835	0	27,851	0	27,837	0	27,839	0	27,839	0
Norfolk	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1	1,446	1
North Wales	1,369	1	1,369	1	1,369	2	1,369	2	1,369	2	1,369	2	1,369	2	1,369	2
North Yorkshire	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0	1,418	0
Northamptonshire	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1	1,190	1
Northumbria	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0	3,613	0
Nottinghamshire	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13	2,344	13
South Wales	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3	3,168	3
South Yorkshire	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0	3,031	0
Staffordshire	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2	2,215	2
Suffolk	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1	1,233	1
Surrey	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17	1,673	17
Sussex	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1	3,014	1
Thames Valley	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	70	3,812	71
Warwickshire	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25	1,020	25
West Mercia	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3	2,053	3
West Midlands	6,977	1	6,977	1	6,977	1	6,977	1	6,977	1	6,977	1	6,977	0	6,977	0
West Yorkshire	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	3	5,295	2	5,295	2	5,295	2
Wiltshire	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108	1,181	108
Total	126,966	408	126,952	408	126,859	409	126,576	408	126,592	408	126,578	406	126,580	430	126,580	441

[1] 40 reimbursable posts approved for Channel Tunnel on 1 January 1993.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 on the number of asylum seekers whose claims he considers to be bogus.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is too early to assess the effect of the Act, but we are monitoring progress carefully.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of kerb-crawling prosecutions and cautions under the Sexual Offences Act 1985, for each year since it came into operation;

(2) if he will list the number of prosecutions for street soliciting by prostitutes in each year since 1985.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the tables.

Number of males cautioned and prosecuted at magistrates' courts for kerb crawling offences[1] 1985-1992[2]

England and Wales

Year	Cautions	Prosecutions
1985	17	19
1986	46	191
1987	..	307
1988	..	574
1989	243	992
1990	227	1,360
1991	149	1,314
1992[2]	331	1,003

[1] An offence under Section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 1985 which came into force on 16 September 1985.
[2] Provisional.
.. Not available.

Number of females cautioned and prosecuted at magistrates' courts for street soliciting by prostitutes[1] 1985-1992[2]
England and Wales

Year	Cautions	Prosecutions
1985	4,191	9,401
1986	4,855	9,393
1987	..	8,474
1988	..	9,183
1989	5,014	10,484
1990	4,187	10,459
1991	3,840	10,165
1992[2]	3,653	9,449

[1] An offence under Section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959.
[2] Provisional.
.. Not available.

Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government support the proposal that the European Community should become a signatory to the European convention of human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

All member states of the European Community are parties to the European convention on human rights. We see no need for the European Community, as a legal entity, to accede separately to the convention. The European Court of Justice applies the convention in cases coming before it which raise issues of human rights.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

EC Cultural Affairs Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Cultural Affairs Council on 5 November.

Mr. Brooke: EC Ministers of Culture met on 5 November 1993 in Brussels. They designated Stockholm as European City of Culture for 1998 and Weimar for 1999. Ljubljana and Nicosia were chosen to host the European cultural month in 1995.

Ministers held an exchange of views on the economic and job-creating aspects of culture. The Belgian Presidency made an oral report of the informal meeting of Culture Ministers in Antwerp on 19-20 September, and noted that the Commission would be looking again at the issue of fixed book pricing with the aim of finding pragmatic solutions for cross-border transactions within the same linguistic zone. It also noted that the Commission intended to set up an ad hoc group of representatives of the member states to assist it in inventorying the situation of the artist. Ministers also received information from the Commission about the campaign "Reading for Pleasure".

The Council adopted a resolution concerning the first century of European cinema. It adopted conclusions noting the Commission's communication of 23 July on the subject of the evaluation report on the MEDIA programme. It also held an exchange of views on GATT as it affected the audiovisual sector, after hearing information from the Commission about the most recent state of negotiations.

Ministers agreed a communiqué expressing their concern that artists in Sarajevo continue to express themselves and take part in European cultural exchanges. They invited the Commission to make a financial contribution to the 10th Sarajevo winter festival, as well as noting with approval the intention of some member states to engage in cultural and artistic initiatives as an expression of solidarity with Sarajevo.

Broadcasting Act 1990

Mr. James Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Mr. Brooke: I have today announced that, following careful consideration of the representations that I have received, I have concluded that the present regulations on the ownership of ITV companies should be relaxed. Subject to parliamentary approval, I propose to make an order to amend the rules, so that an ITV company could hold two regional licences in areas with the largest advertising revenue, except in London. No one would be able to own more than two ITV regional licences and the limits on other holdings would continue.

The statutory provisions on regional broadcasting and the conditions on regional programmes attached to the Independent Television Commission's licences remain in force, even if there are changes in ownership. These provisions safeguard the interests of viewers and, in particular, regional programming, including news and current affairs, which will remain a valuable aspect of the ITV system.

For the longer term, we shall keep the ownership restrictions under review, and look at the wider questions of cross-media ownership.

Indemnity Undertakings

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many indemnity undertakings were given by Departments under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six-month period ended 30 September; and what was the value of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time and which remained outstanding at 30 September.

Mr. Brooke: The information my hon. Friend requests is as follows:

In the six-month period ended 30 September 1993 the following undertakings to indemnify were given by the relevant Departments for items on loan to national and non-national institutions.

	Number
Department of National Heritage	601
Scottish Office Education Department	64
Welsh Office Education Department	26
Department of Education Northern Ireland	15

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time and outstanding at 30 September 1993 are:

	£
Department of National Heritage	1,669,460,665
Scottish Office Education Department	34,314,647
Welsh Office Education Department	30,467,604
Department of Education Northern Ireland	12,487,361

TRANSPORT

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he has given to the report of the independent auditors in relation to the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: I expect to receive Hambros' report shortly on the scope for using private finance to renew the infrastructure of the west coast main line.

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the director of the west coast main line to discuss investment and infrastructure requirements; and what was the outcome of these talks.

Mr. Freeman: I last met the director at the end of October. The study by consultants on the scope for using private finance to renew the infrastructure of the west coast main line was among the subjects discussed. Any decision on the way forward will be made in the light of Hambros' report, which I expect to receive shortly.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Norris: The current total staff and the number of women in the central Department and its executive agencies is summarised in the table.

Grade equivalents	*Administration staff*		*Specialist staff*	
	Total	*Women*	*Total*	*Women*
Grade 1	1	0	0	0
Grade 2	4	0	0	0
Grade 3	20	3	5	0
Grade 4	3	0	13	0
Grade 5	78	6	42	2
Grade 6	26	0	114	6
Grade 7	292	52	495	23
Senior Executive Officer	314	63	689	22
Higher Executive Officer	866	294	519	41
Executive Officer	1,670	872	2,225	165
Administrative Officer	3,619	2,552	537	36
Administrative Assistant	3,389	2,695	201	68
Others	7	0	0	0
Total	10,289	6,537	4,840	1,363

A418

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect which the EC's Tern programme will have on his Department's proposals for the east-west route and the A418 west of Aylesbury-Wing bypass.

Mr. Key: The east-west route was accepted as part of the trans-European road network, TERN, by the Council of Ministers on 29 October. The A418 west of Aylesbury-wing bypass forms part of the route.

Inclusion in the TERN has no effect on the standards we propose for the route.

Targets

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing the targets and performance against targets in respect of *(a)* punctuality and *(b)* reliability of each of the divisions of British Rail serving the London area, and of London Underground and London Buses, in each month from January 1992.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is shown in the tables.

London Underground Limited: Service performance since January 1992[1,2]

	Trains in customer service (Percentage of scheduled trains running at peak hours[3]*)*		*Train service headways (Timed interval between trains)*		*Train delays over 20 minutes (London Underground Limited attributable and non-attributable causes)*	
Four weeks ending	*Performance Per cent.*	*Target Per cent.*	*Performance Per cent.*	*Target Per cent.*	*Performance*	*Target*
31 January 1992	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
29 February 1992	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
28 March 1992	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
25 April 1992	98·6	97·5	95·5	91·0	126	146
23 May 1992	97·3	97·5	95·4	91·0	114	146
20 June 1992	98·0	97·5	95·9	91·0	140	146
18 July 1992	98·4	97·5	95·9	91·0	131	146
18 August 1992	98·2	97·5	96·5	91·0	91	146
12 September 1992	98·4	97·5	95·9	91·0	107	146
10 October 1992	98·3	97·5	96·6	91·0	105	146
7 November 1992	97·7	97·5	95·0	91·0	128	146
5 December 1992	97·9	97·5	95·0	91·0	149	146
2 January 1993	97·8	97·5	94·4	91·0	177	146
30 January 1993	97·6	97·5	95·0	91·0	137	146
27 February 1993	97·0	97·5	93·5	91·0	162	146
31 March 1993	97·2	97·5	94·8	91·0	172	146
24 April 1993	97·7	98·0	95·2	95·0	*58	*71
22 May 1993	97·8	98·0	95·5	95·0	57	71
19 June 1993	98·0	98·0	95·4	95·0	71	71
17 July 1993	98·1	98·0	95·7	95·0	86	71

Four weeks ending	Trains in customer service (Percentage of scheduled trains running at peak hours[3]) Performance Per cent.	Target Per cent.	Train service headways (Timed interval between trains) Performance Per cent.	Target Per cent.	Train delays over 20 minutes (London Underground Limited attributable and non-attributable causes) Performance	Target
14 August 1993	98·2	98·0	95·6	95·0	63	71
11 September 1993	98·1	98·0	96·4	95·0	62	71
9 October 1993	97·9	98·0	96·3	95·0	66	71

Notes:
[1] *Source:* London Underground Performance Check.
[2] Current series of targets goes back only as far as April 1992. Direct comparison with other targets is not possible. The targets were revised in April 1993, for achievement by 31 March 1994.
[3] Peak measurement times: A.M.—08.50 and P.M.—17.30.
[4] From 24 April 1993 onwards, London Underground Limited attributable causes only.

London Transport bus service performance since January 1992[1][2]

4 weeks ending	Per cent. mileage operated (excluding miles lost due to traffic congestion)	Target (per cent.)	High frequency services (excess waiting time (minutes) a new target)	Target (mins.)	Low frequency services Per cent. on time[3]	Target	Per cent. >2 mins. early	Target
1 February 1992	98·8	98·0	n/a	n/a	68·8	65	8·0	6·0
29 February 1992	99·0	98·0	n/a	n/a	69·3	65	7·4	6·0
28 March 1992	98·1	98·0	n/a	n/a	68·0	65	7·4	6·0
25 April 1992	99·1	>98·5	n/a	n/a	69·8	>67	6·9	<5·5
23 May 1992	99·0	>98·5	n/a	n/a	68·7	>67	7·2	<5·5
20 June 1992	98·9	>98·5	n/a	n/a	69·6	>67	6·9	<5·5
18 July 1992	98·9	>98·5	1·58	<1·75	70·8	>67	7·1	<5·5
15 August 1992	98·9	>98·5	1·39	<1·75	71·0	>67	7·0	<5·5
12 September 1992	99·0	>98·5	1·43	<1·75	70·0	>67	6·9	<5·5
10 October 1992	99·1	>98·5	1·71	<1·75	67·9	>67	6·0	<5·5
7 November 1992	99·0	>98·5	1·81	<1·75	68·8	>67	5·6	<5·5
5 December 1992	99·1	>98·5	1·96	<1·75	65·6	>67	5·7	<5·5
2 January 1993	99·1	>98·5	2·08	<1·75	62·9	>67	5·4	<5·5
30 January 1993	99·1	>98·5	1·60	<1·75	68·5	>67	5·6	<5·5
27 February 1993	99·2	>98·5	1·47	<1·75	71·6	>67	5·2	<5·5
27 March 1993	[4]94·1	>98·5	1·75	<1·75	69·0	>67	5·4	<5·5
24 April 1993	[5]95·2	>98·5	1·81	<1·6	68·9	>68	5·9	<4·5
23 May 1993	93·9	>98·5	1·99	<1·6	68·3	>68	5·5	<4·5
19 June 1993	96·9	>98·5	1·94	<1·6	68·7	>68	4·7	<4·5
17 July 1993	97·1	>98·5	1·94	<1·6	68·2	>68	5·4	<4·5
14 August 1993	97·5	>98·5	1·80	<1·6	67·6	>68	5·6	<4·5
11 September 1993	97·5	>98·5	1·78	<1·6	65·4	>68	5·9	<4·5
9 October 1993	97·9	>98·5	2·12	<1·6	59·3	>68	5·7	<4·5

[1] Figures are based on London Transport's 4 weekly financial periods.
[2] Previous targets were set in December 1989 for achievement by April 1992 at the latest. All current targets were set on 29 June 1992 and are to be achieved by March 1994.
[3] Defined as no more than 2 minutes early or 5 minutes late.
[4] Mileage operated figures relate to period ending 31 March 1993.
[5] Mileage operated figures exclude four days at the beginning of this period which are included in preceding period.

British Rail—Network SouthEast: Service performance since January 1992

	Chiltern Line	Great Eastern	Great Northern	Kent Coast	Kent Link	London Tilbury Southend	North London Lines	Northampton Line	Solent and Wessex	South London Lines	South Western Lines	Sussex Coast	Thames Line	Thameslink	West Anglia
Punctuality (percentage of trains arriving within 5 minutes of scheduled times)															
Target	88·0	86·0	90·0	82·0	88·0	85·0	85·0	90·0	86·0	88·0	88·0	83·0	80·0	89·0	88·0
Four weeks ending:															
31 January 1992	88·0	85·5	93·0	65·5	78·0	88·0	80·5	90·5	82·5	84·0	86·5	84·0	82·0	93·5	89·5
29 February 1992	93·0	87·0	92·5	75·0	81·0	94·5	80·5	91·0	76·5	87·5	87·5	85·0	76·5	90·5	92·5
28 March 1992	93·0	84·5	94·0	73·5	83·5	88·0	87·5	91·5	88·5	84·0	92·0	82·5	89·5	91·0	92·5
25 April 1992	95·1	91·6	94·0	83·3	89·1	87·6	91·7	94·8	93·1	91·2	95·1	88·1	90·4	86·1	92·0
23 May 1992	90·7	89·6	94·3	79·6	86·8	91·0	95·3	86·2	92·3	84·4	92·2	82·6	85·2	86·0	89·2
20 June 1992	96·2	91·0	93·2	78·4	83·5	88·1	93·4	88·5	88·0	89·9	92·1	89·2	88·4	89·3	92·5
18 July 1992	97·9	90·1	95·1	86·5	86·4	91·6	91·1	91·0	83·9	89·5	88·3	85·3	84·4	77·7	89·0
18 August 1992	96·6	93·4	90·8	83·3	90·1	92·7	94·3	89·6	91·8	89·4	92·5	89·6	83·6	89·7	93·6
12 September 1992	98·2	93·4	94·5	88·3	92·6	91·7	98·6	94·7	97·1	92·8	96·7	92·3	86·9	90·2	95·1
10 October 1992	95·7	93·2	88·2	80·3	91·4	90·3	93·2	95·7	89·9	89·1	92·4	88·2	84·2	86·0	92·3
7 November 1992	84·7	89·3	86·7	66·4	77·8	89·4	87·5	90·3	84·3	78·3	86·2	77·7	69·1	76·4	89·2
5 December 1992	86·9	85·7	90·1	68·8	76·6	85·6	87·5	89·6	84·2	82·3	85·7	78·7	72·5	79·8	88·5
2 January 1993	94·3	84·1	89·1	81·3	85·3	93·3	89·5	82·7	85·4	87·6	91·1	78·6	84·4	87·1	89·9
30 January 1993	94·0	88·3	90·6	83·5	86·0	90·7	89·5	89·2	86·0	91·4	92·4	85·0	76·5	87·8	90·5

	Chiltern Line	Great Eastern	Great Northern	Kent Coast	Kent Link	London Tilbury Southend	North London Lines	Northampton Line	Solent and Wessex	South London Lines	South Western Lines	Sussex Coast	Thames Line	Thameslink	West Anglia
27 February 1993	93·4	91·2	93·0	76·5	78·8	94·3	91·4	91·4	90·9	94·4	95·5	89·2	85·9	90·6	93·9
31 March 1993	95·2	92·6	95·3	63·5	82·5	95·2	91·8	91·7	90·3	91·7	93·0	91·3	74·1	89·1	93·2
New target	90·0	86·0	90·0	82·0	88·0	85·0	87·0	90·0	86·0	88·0	88·0	83·0	85·0	89·0	90·0
24 April 1993	96·3	93·4	94·4	84·0	89·2	93·8	92·2	97·3	88·3	95·1	95·0	92·3	83·0	96·4	93·5
22 May 1993	97·1	91·8	93·8	86·4	88·5	89·7	91·4	93·2	88·9	92·6	93·3	88·5	84·6	93·4	93·7
19 June 1993	95·9	89·0	93·8	78·4	88·3	94·4	87·3	89·9	86·7	93·0	92·2	87·9	78·0	92·4	90·8
17 July 1993	97·8	94·7	93·8	87·3	88·8	97·9	91·7	94·7	93·1	93·2	94·0	84·6	68·6	92·0	96·0
14 August 1993	97·3	94·2	93·7	83·1	85·8	96·9	94·2	91·7	91·3	96·2	94·1	95·7	80·3	95·2	98·2
11 September 1993	96·2	90·5	96·0	85·4	86·9	94·4	94·3	93·8	92·0	96·0	97·5	92·2	84·1	92·7	99·0
9 October 1993	97·2	94·7	93·9	85·1	85·5	89·0	90·8	92·9	90·7	88·2	95·1	83·0	84·8	90·4	95·9
5 November 1993	93·3	87·1	88·8	79·9	78·2	90·4	86·0	88·9	76·2	85·8	88·1	84·5	81·9	85·1	93·6
Reliability (percentage of trains run on weekdays)															
Target	99·0	99·0	99·0	98·0	98·0	97·0	97·0	99·0	98·0	97·0	98·0	99·0	98·0	99·0	98·0
Four weeks ending:															
31 January 1992	98·2	99·4	99·2	99·0	98·6	97·2	97·4	99·6	99·7	99·2	99·7	99·9	99·1	98·7	98·7
29 February 1992	98·9	98·3	98·9	99·3	98·7	97·7	97·5	99·3	99·5	99·0	99·0	99·8	98·4	98·9	98·8
28 March 1992	99·4	98·8	99·5	98·9	98·2	97·8	97·6	99·1	99·7	98·4	99·6	99·9	98·8	98·5	98·9
25 April 1992	98·7	99·0	99·5	99·5	98·7	95·9	95·6	99·6	99·6	98·4	99·5	99·8	98·6	96·3	98·0
23 May 1992	98·7	99·1	99·4	99·3	98·9	98·0	97·8	99·4	99·5	97·4	99·6	99·5	98·8	98·5	99·1
20 June 1992	98·7	99·2	99·1	99·5	98·3	98·3	98·2	98·4	99·6	98·0	99·7	99·6	99·1	99·7	98·8
18 July 1992	99·1	99·0	99·3	99·3	98·2	95·8	96·4	99·5	99·6	97·5	99·1	99·3	98·7	98·2	98·7
18 August 1992	99·7	98·9	98·4	99·4	98·8	96·7	95·7	99·6	99·7	97·4	99·3	99·5	98·1	98·7	99·0
12 September 1992	99·5	99·3	98·7	99·4	98·6	98·2	97·9	99·9	99·5	96·1	99·7	99·4	97·6	98·8	99·2
10 October 1992	99·4	99·2	97·8	99·5	97·9	97·5	96·6	99·8	99·7	97·0	99·7	99·7	98·9	98·8	98·7
7 November 1992	97·9	98·8	99·3	99·5	98·1	98·5	96·8	99·1	99·2	96·7	99·5	99·1	95·5	99·4	99·0
5 December 1992	99·3	98·6	99·4	98·4	96·2	97·8	97·0	99·7	99·4	97·8	99·2	99·6	98·6	98·9	99·2
2 January 1993	99·7	98·5	98·7	99·4	96·5	98·2	95·7	99·3	98·6	97·6	98·3	99·8	97·9	99·4	98·7
30 January 1993	99·2	99·3	98·9	99·6	98·6	98·1	97·1	98·8	99·3	99·0	99·6	99·8	98·4	99·4	98·9
27 February 1993	99·3	99·1	99·1	99·6	96·1	98·2	96·2	99·7	99·6	98·7	99·5	99·5	98·5	98·9	98·9
31 March 1993	99·8	99·6	99·6	99·6	97·5	98·1	93·5	98·1	99·6	98·4	99·6	99·9	97·0	99·3	99·1
24 April 1993	99·5	99·6	99·4	99·7	98·4	98·4	95·6	100·0	99·5	99·0	99·7	99·9	[1]98·5	99·5	99·2
22 May 1993	99·6	99·3	99·3	99·8	97·8	97·8	96·0	99·7	99·8	98·6	99·8	99·8	98·9	99·6	99·2
19 June 1993	99·5	99·1	98·3	99·4	97·4	98·7	95·4	98·7	99·3	99·1	99·6	99·3	95·1	97·5	98·3
17 July 1993	99·5	99·6	98·9	99·7	97·4	99·3	98·8	99·3	99·8	99·2	98·0	99·7	97·8	99·4	98·7
14 August 1993	99·4	99·5	98·6	99·8	98·5	99·4	96·6	99·8	99·4	99·4	99·6	99·8	98·8	99·2	99·5
11 September 1993	99·7	99·1	99·4	99·0	97·1	99·2	98·3	99·7	99·6	99·2	99·5	99·7	98·6	99·3	99·5
9 October 1993	99·8	99·6	99·5	99·7	97·9	97·9	97·0	99·4	99·7	98·5	99·6	99·7	98·3	98·5	99·4
5 November 1993	99·2	99·1	98·7	99·5	97·8	97·6	97·4	99·6	99·4	98·3	99·5	99·7	97·8	98·7	98·5

Note:
[1] New target of 98·5 per cent. set in April 1993.

Road Contracts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to improve control and project management of road contracts.

Mr. Key: A number of initiatives is in hand ranging from training in the techniques necessary for effective project management to the wider use of design and build forms of contract.

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the seventh annual report of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

Mr. Freeman: The report has now been formally received by my right hon. Friend. Copies have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Marine Safety

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive from Lord Donaldson the report of the inquiry set up by him into aspects of marine safety.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the report of the inquiry chaired by Lord Donaldson in the early part of next year.

MV Braer

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has yet received the report from the Marine Accident Investigation Bureau on the grounding of the MV Braer off Shetland on 5 January; and when he expects the publication of the report.

Mr. Norris: The Secretary of State has not yet received the report of the chief inspector of marine accidents into the grounding of the Braer, but expects to do so before the end of the year. Publication will follow as soon as practicable thereafter.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Dips

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to be able to make a response to the Veterinary Products Committee report on organophosphorus sheep dips; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Veterinary Products Committee met on 21 October to consider the future authorisation of organophosphorus sheep dip products. A statement will be made shortly about the committee's advice and the Government's response.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list for each civil service grade in her Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Jack: The information set out as at 22 November 1993 relates to non-industrial staff in MAFF and its agencies.

	Total staff	*Total number of women*
Grade 1	1	0
Grade 2	6	1
Grade 3	27	2
Grade 4	12	0
Grade 5	119	12
Grade 6	163	16
Grade 7	927	162
SEO	983	177
HEO	1,923	575
EO	1,942	890
AO	2,798	1,796
AA	2,768	1,960
Total	11,669	5,591

The figures are given by grade equivalent and include all permanent staff, casuals and staff on temporary release. Part-time staff are counted as 1·0.

Live Animals (Transport)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions she is having to ensure a maximum eight-hour journey for the transport of live animals.

Mr. Soames: Negotiations are proceeding on Commission proposals for additional rules for the protection of animals during transport. The Commission examined the case for journey limits but concluded that they would be unenforceable.

Whales

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on progress towards a southern ocean sanctuary for whales.

Mr. Jack: At the 45th meeting of the International Whaling Commission, held in Japan in May this year, the United Kingdom made clear its support for the concept of a whale sanctuary in the Southern ocean. A number of the IWC contracting parties argued that they needed more time to study some of the detailed aspects of the sanctuary approach, such as the definition of boundaries, matters of jurisdiction and future research plans for such a sanctuary. The Commission decided to endorse the concept of the sanctuary and agreed to work to resolve outstanding issues at a special intersessional working group with a view to taking a final decision at the 46th meeting of the Commission next May. The intersessional working group is to take place in Australia in February next year. The United Kingdom will attend and will play a full and positive part in the group's deliberations.

Farms

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farm holdings were registered with her Department in September.

Mr. Jack: A total of 194,000 farms, names and addresses were on the farm holdings list maintained by the Department in 1993.

Agriculture Staff

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff were employed in her Department and within agencies accountable to her dealing with agriculture in September.

Mr. Jack: Approximately 8,000 of the staff employed by the Department and its agencies deal with agriculture-related matters. This figure excludes ADAS staff working in Wales who are covered by the Welsh Office Agricultural Department's reply.

Farm-saved Seeds

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received on liability for royalty payments for farm-saved seeds in preparation for the November meeting of the EC Council of Agriculture Ministers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* I have received a number of representations both from individual farmers and from some local branches of the National Farmers Union. The question of farm-saved seed is under current consideration as part of the draft EC proposal for a European plant variety rights scheme. The current proposals include a five-year, renewable, derogation that will enable farmers to continue saving seed of the varieties they use in this way at present without the payment of any royalty. For farm-saved seed of varieties not saved at present by individual farmers, a sensibly lower royalty will apply. Our aim in the negotiations will be to ensure that this principle is retained in the final regulation.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Welfare Benefits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the taxation of welfare benefits, with particular reference to invalidity benefit.

Mr. Dorrell: It remains the Government's intention to bring invalidity benefit into taxation at a suitable opportunity.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a teble showing for each member state of the European Economic Community the rates levied by value added tax on food in shops, household fuel,

children's clothing, books, newspapers and magazines, public transport, water and sewage services, newly constructed homes, second-hand homes and the standard of tax most recently adopted together with notes that outline the most important distinctions where different rates are charged within each category.

Sir John Cope: The information requested is shown in the table.

VAT rates on various supplies in the EC

Country	*Rate of VAT*									
	Food in shops[4]	*Household fuel*	*Children's clothing*	*Books*[18]	*Newspapers and magazines*[18]	*Public transport*	*Water and sewage supplies*	*Household purchase New*[34]	*Second-hand*	*Standard rate*
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
Belgium	6	12, [11]19·5	19·5	6	0, [20]6	6	[29]6, 19·5	6, 12, 19·5	[36]Exempt	19·5
Denmark	25	25	25	25	0, [21]25	[22]Exempt, 25	[30]Exempt, 25	25	Exempt	25
France[1]	5·5, [5]18·6	5·5, [12]18·6	18·6	5·5	2·1	[23]0, 5·5	18·6, [31]5·5	18·6	Exempt	18·6
Germany	7	15	15	7	7	[24]7, 15	7, [29]15	[36]Exempt	[36]Exempt	15
Greece[2]	8 (6)	8 [13](6), 18, (13)	18 (13)	4 (3)	4 (3)	8 (6)	18 (13), 8 (6)	18, [36](13)	[36]Exempt	18 (13)
Ireland	0, [6]12·5	12·5	0	0	12·5	Exempt	21	12·5	Exempt, [41]12·5	21
Italy	4, 9, [7]12	9, 12, [14]19	12	4	4	[25]Exempt, 9, 12, 19	19	4, [37]19	4, [37]19	19
Luxembourg	3	6, [15]12	3	3	3	15	[32]Exempt, 15	[36]Exempt	[36]Exempt	15
Netherlands	6	17·5	17·5	6	6	[26]6, 17·5	6, [29]17·5	[38]17·5	[36]Exempt	17·5
Portugal[3]	5 (4), 16 [8](12)	5 [16](4), 16 (12)	16 (12)	5 [19](4)	5 [19](4)	[27]0, 5	5 (4), 16 [29](12)	[36]Exempt, 5 [38](4)	[36]Exempt	16 (12)
Spain	3, [9]6	15	15	3	3	6	6	3, 6, [39]15	Exempt	15
United Kingdom	0, [10]17·5	0, [17]17·5	0	0	0	[28]0, 17·5	[33]0, 17·5	0, [40]17·5	Exempt, [42]0	17·5

Notes to table showing VAT rates applied to various supplies in the EC

1. The following rates apply generally in Corsica: 0·9 per cent., 2·1 per cent., 8 per cent. and 13 per cent.
2. The rate in brackets applies in the departments of Lesbos, Chios, the Dodecanese and the Cyclades, and in the island of Thasos, the Northern Sporades, Samothrace and Skyros. These special rates do not apply to goods sold from the rest of Greece to the Dodecanese, industrial-tobacco products, ready petroleum products, electricity or the supply of services.
3. The rates in brackets apply in the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores Archipelagoes.
4. Excluding luxury foods.
5. Sweets, ice-cream and margarine are subject to the standard rate of 18·6 per cent.
6. Cakes, crackers and wafers as well as biscuits and chocolate biscuits are subject to the reduced rate of 12 per cent. Alcohol and soft drinks other than fruit juices are subject to 21 per cent. VAT in all circumstances, as is all food and drink supplied through a vending machine.
7. The lowest rate applies to essential foodstuffs such as bread and pasta. 12 per cent. applies to lobsters and oysters, lobster and oyster preserve, puffed cereal, meat extracts and meat juices, sauces, condiments, soup and broth.
8. The lower rate applies to unprepared foodstuffs.
9. 3 per cent applies to ordinary bread, breadmaking flour and cereals, milk, cheese, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables.
10. Food such as ice-cream, chocolate and confectionery, alcoholic and soft drinks, potato crisps are subject to the standard rate of 17·5 per cent.
11. The reduced rate applies coal and peat.
12. The standing charge is subject to 5·5 per cent and the actual supply of heating to 18·6 per cent.
13. Wood is subject to the reduced rate.
14. The following are subject to 9 per cent.: wood; electricity and gas for domestic and some industrial uses (excluding gas for domestic heating) and oil. Coal is subject to 12 per cent.
15. The 6 per cent. rate applies to gas and electricity; wood, oil and coal are subject to 12 per cent.
16. 5 per cent. applied to electricity and oil.
17. Fuel for business use is subject to the standard rate of 17·5 per cent. Domestic fuel will be subject to a temporary rate of 8 per cent. from 1 April 1994 and then to the standard rate from 1 April 1995.
18. Obscene and pornographic material is generally standard rated except in Portugal, where the increased rate applies (30 per cent. in the mainland and 21 per cent. in the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores archipelagoes).
19. Providing they are considered in the legislation covering these items to be of a cultural, education, recreational or sporting nature.
20. Magazines and newspapers which appear at least 50 times a year and whose aim is to educate or entertain the general public are subject to the zero rate.
21. 25 per cent. applies to magazines; 0 per cent. to newspapers.
22. Transport on regular services is exempt, but on chartered buses is taxable at 25 per cent.
23 0 per cent. applies to transport in one of the French overseas departments, including Corsica, or overseas territories, by ship or plane.
24. 7 per cent. applies to transport by rail (excluding funicular railways), in overhead system electric coaches in licensed passenger road transport services and taxis, and on ferries, provided that such transport either takes place within a town or does not exceed 50 kilometres in length. The reduced rate also applies to the transport of employees between their home and work place by employers in their own name and for their own account.

25. Exemption applies to transport between towns and less than 50 kilometres apart; 9 per cent. applies to transportation in certain vehicles; 12 per cent. applies to air passenger transport.
26. 6 per cent. applies to transport by rail, tramway or trolleybus, or on ships or ferries, as well as by means of taxi, and aircraft (if the place of departure and arrival are both in the Netherlands).
27. 0 per cent. applies to transport between Madeira, the Azores and mainland Portugal.
28. 0 per cent. applies to the following passenger transport: in any vehicle, ship or aircraft designed or adapted to carry not less than twelve passengers; by the Post Office; or on any scheduled flight.
29. The reduced rate applies to the supply of water; the standard rate to sewage services.
30. Exempt applies to supplies of water in connection with the letting of a house or premises.
31. The standard rate applies to the supply of water; the reduced rate to sewage services.
32. Exemption applies if supplied to joint owners or lessees of apartment buildings by a union of joint owners for the management of property.
33. 17·5 per cent. applies to supplies made to industry.
34. In general, sales of new housing are exempt except where they are sold by a building contractor.
35. 6 per cent. applies to housing for the handicapped; 12 per cent. applies to social housing.
36. There is the option to tax under certain conditions.
37. 4 per cent. applies to certain social housing.
38. 5 per cent. applies to certain constructions of housing by housing associations or local government bodies.
39. 3 per cent. applies to certain buildings defined as having official protection status; 6 per cent. applies to the joint supply dwellings and their garages and outbuildings.
40. The zero rate applies if sold by the constructor.
41. 12·5 per cent. applies if the property was developed since 31 October 1972 and if the input tax was entitled to be reclaimed.
42. The zero rate applies providing the building is listed and has been substantially reconstructed.

Charities

Mr. Burden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what response he has made to the report of the Charities Tax Reform Group regarding the tax paid by charities in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: The hon. Member would not expect me to make a statement on taxation matters at this time.

Community Duties

Mr. Kinnock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards encouraging employers to allow employees paid time off from work to permit them to fulfil elected and non-elected public and community duties on statutory bodies.

Mr. Dorrell: Employees who serve in a public capacity as specified in section 29 of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 are generally entitled to reasonable time off work to carry out their duties. Whether they should be paid for such time off is for employers and employees to agree between themselves. However, we encourage employers who are able to assist employees to undertake these important duties by whatever means are appropriate to their circumstances.

Tax Fraud

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions were brought in each of the last five years as the result of tax fraud; and how many of these related to false accounts and income returns.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the annual report of the board of Inland Revenue for 1992-93—Appendix 1, table 6—copies of which were laid before Parliament on 29 September 1993.

Manufacturing

Dr. Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest gross domestic product figures for manufacturing in England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Nelson: Gross domestic product figures for manufacturing for England, Scotland and Wales for 1991 were published in the December 1992 issue of "Economic Trends".

More recent figures for United Kingdom manufacturing are available from the CSO database and can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

The Scottish Office and Welsh Office publish their own quarterly series for manufacturing output. The latest Welsh figures were published on 13 October in a news release "Welsh Index of Production and Construction 2nd quarter 1993". Scottish figures were published on 10 November in a news release "Index of Production and Construction for Scotland for the second quarter 1993". These are also available from the House of Commons Library.

Similar information for England is not available.

Capital Allowances

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the increase in first-year capital allowances for investment in plant and machinery which was announced in the autumn statement of 1992 to cover the period 1 November 1992 to the end of October 1993 cost in 1992-93; and how much it has cost so far in 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* Available estimates of the direct revenue effects of enhanced capital allowances announced in the 1992 autumn statement are as follows:

£ million

1992-93	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	*1995-96 (yield +ve/cost −ve)*
nil	−200	−700	+50

The effects include enhanced allowances for industrial and agricultural buildings but the majority is accounted for by allowances for plant and machinery. The estimates are provisional. Information is not yet available from tax assessments for the relevant period.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans the Government have to improve the employment prospects of disabled people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government will continue to seek improved employment prospects for disabled

people through a programme of educating and persuading employers as well as by providing wide-ranging and effective practical help. Specific plans include the introduction of "Access to Work" on 1 April 1994, which will provide more flexible employment help for a greater range of disabled people, for example, communication support for deaf people, and support workers for people with severe physical disabilities, mental illness or learning disabilities. We have also published a consultation document with proposals for improving the way in which the sheltered employment programme can help severely disabled people.

London University (Redundancies)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those colleges which are full schools of the university of London and have declined to pay redundant employees statutory redundancy pay in 1992 and 1993; and what action he proposes to take against colleges which have refused to reimburse his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: Disputes about entitlement to statutory redundancy payments are matters for the employer and employee(s) concerned, for determination by an industrial tribunal if necessary.

A statutory redundancy payment was made by the Department to a former employee of Goldsmiths' college in March 1993 following an award by an industrial tribunal. The provisions of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 enable the Department to seek recovery of the payment from the employer. The Department takes all reasonable steps to recover such debts.

ABB Transportation Ltd.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people made redundant by ABB Transportation Ltd. in York in the past three months have *(a)* claimed unemployment benefit, *(b)* been paid unemployment benefit, *(c)* had their unemployment benefit suspended and *(d)* had their unemployment benefit reinstated without loss of benefit.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 24 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about people made redundant by ABB Transportation Ltd. who had claimed unemployment benefit, been paid unemployment benefit, been suspended from payment of unemployment benefit, and whose unemployment benefit had been reinstated. This is something which falls within the responsibilities he has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Unfortunately, the information is not available. No records are kept on the number of clients claiming benefit who have been made redundant from a particular firm, or about the status of their claim. This information could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I am sorry I cannot be of help on this occasion.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Duncan-Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Social Affairs Council held on 23 November.

Mr. David Hunt: I and the Minister of State for Employment attended the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held on 23 November.

Final agreement was reached on the draft directive on working time. The agreement retains all the key changes which the United Kingdom had secured in the earlier common position. In particular:

the right for individual workers to work more than 48 hours a week if they wish;

that Sunday working should remain a matter for national law; and

provision to allow company and plant agreements to derogate from the main provisions of the directive.

In the Government's view, however, the directive represents a misuse of the health and safety provisions of the Single European Act and accordingly the Government will be challenging the legal base of the directive in the European Court of Justice.

Final agreement was also reached on the draft directive on the protection of workers on board fishing vessels, following consideration of the European Parliament's comments.

The Council also reached a common position on the draft directive on the protection of young workers on which a political agreement to meet our concerns had been reached at the last Council. The common position confirms the United Kingdom's renewable option not to implement the key parts of articles 8 and 9 of the draft directive dealing with daily and weekly hours of work and restrictions on night work for 16 and 17-year-olds and ensures that young people below school leaving age can continue, as now, to undertake light work such as newspaper deliveries from the age of 13 on the same basis as at present.

The Council also discussed the draft directives on parental leave and on the burden of proof in the area of equal pay and equal treatment for women and men. On neither was an agreement reached. A number of member states, including the United Kingdom, continue to have difficulties with the proposals.

The Council also heard presentations from the Social Affairs Commissioner on his Green Paper on European social policy and on progress with the Commission's draft White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment. He also reported that, on the draft directive on European works councils, the Commission had initiated the process of consultation under the agreement of the Eleven set out in the protocol to the Maastricht treaty. The Council was also given brief progress reports on the draft directives on non-standard employment and the posting of workers.

There was also a discussion on a proposed Community programme on social exclusion, to follow the current Poverty 3 programme. Opinions were divided on the timing of any new programme and the size of its budget.

Finally a declaration was agreed to mark the end of the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations.

SCOTLAND

Farm Holdings

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm holdings were registered with his Department in September.

Sir Hector Monro: Including common grazings, the total of farm holdings recorded with the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department on the agricultural census file on 22 November 1993 is 52,383. Since this file is continuously updated it is not possible to provide figures as at September. However, the September total is unlikely to be significantly different from the above quoted figure.

Agriculture Agencies

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many staff were employed within his Department and within agencies accountable to him dealing with agriculture in September.

Mr. Lang: At 1 October 1993 the number of staff employed within my Department and executive agencies dealing with agriculture was 1,046.

School Meals

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the results of the annual census of school meals in Scotland held in January 1993; and what were the corresponding 1992 results.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. The number of pupils taking school meals has continued to increase, despite a fall in the number of pupils present on census day. Just over half the pupils present on census day took school meals with a further estimated 17·9 per cent. bringing their own food to school. Free meals formed 31 per cent. of the total meals provided. Cafeteria style meals remain more popular than two-course fixed meals.

Education authority schools (including nursery and special schools)

	1992		1993	
	Number	*As percentage of pupils present*	*Number*	*As percentage of pupils present*
Pupils present on census day	695,201	—	687,081	—
Pupils taking school meals				
—on payment	227,740	32·8	238,493	34·7
—free	107,186	15·4	107,709	15·7
—Total	334,926	48·2	346,202	50·4
Pupils bringing their own food to school[1]	132,263	19·0	122,812	17·9

[1]A number of pupils took neither school meals nor brought food to school. These pupils would generally either have gone home for lunch or have eaten out locally.

A detailed statement of the returns from education authorities from which these national figures are derived is being placed in the Library.

The following table shows, as a percentage of pupils attending their respective sectors, those primary and secondary pupils taking meals or bringing their own food.

	Primary		Secondary	
	[1]*1992* *Per cent.*	[2]*1993* *Per cent.*	[3]*1992* *Per cent.*	[4]*1993* *Per cent.*
Pupils taking school meals	52·9	55·2	46·1	47·8
Pupils bringing own food	27·6	26·9	8·4	6·2

[1]Includes 14 special departments where data have been included in primary school figures.
[2]Includes 3 special and 3 nursery departments where data has been included in primary school figures.
[3]Includes 17 special departments where special data have been included in secondary school figures.
[4]Includes 1 primary and 9 special departments where data has been included in secondary school figures.

Sixty seven per cent. of all meals served are cafeteria style:

	1992				1993			
	Paid	*Free*	*Total*	*Percentage of pupils present*	*Paid*	*Free*	*Total*	*Percentage of pupils present*
Pupils taking fixed meals	71,824	35,260	107,084	15·4	77,690	37,047	114,737	16·7
Pupils taking cafeteria meals	155,916	71,926	227,842	32·7	160,803	70,662	231,465	33·7

Council Tax

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appeals against liability for the council tax have been made this year in Scotland; what is the average length of time taken to hear these appeals; and what proportion of appeals was successful.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* Scottish local authority finance departments have notified the Scottish Office of a total of six appeals against liability for the council tax, lodged in the period up to September 1993. All these appeals were withdrawn by the appellants.

Amkor Anam Europe Ltd.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money his Department has recovered in grant assistance from Amkor Anam Europe Ltd. following the closure of its Irvine plant in November 1992.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 5 November, c. *241.*

Maternity Benefits

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the provision of statutory maternity benefits to adoptive mothers.

Mr. Hague: I have been asked to reply.

Statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance provide a measure of earnings replacement to help working women give up work around the time of the birth in the interests of their own and their unborn baby's health. There are no plans to extend maternity benefits to mothers of adopted children.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to place on the agenda of the meeting between the European Community Foreign Affairs Council and the United States Government the proliferation consequences for global security policies of the planned expansion of reprocessing capacity at nuclear facilities in the EC.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The date and the agenda for the next meeting of the European Union Foreign Affairs Council and the United States Government have not yet been fixed.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pressure was exerted by United Kingdom representatives at the United Nations on delegates of the non-aligned movement in order to dissuade them from supporting that movement's resolution of November on the legality of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. We spoke to representatives of various countries about the proposed resolution and put to them our arguments against it.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means his Department keeps under review the prospects for entering British strategic nuclear weapons into multilateral disarmament negotiations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter primarily for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Our policy takes continually into account developments in the strategic environment, the effectiveness of measures designed to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and the need to maintain force levels sufficient to provide a credible minimum deterrent.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is his Department's position on the adoption of a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons by the United Kingdom;

(2) what consideration his Department is giving to the implications for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* NATO of the declaration of a policy of no first use of nuclear weapons by the United States of America.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said in a speech on 16 November, we are deeply sceptical about the value of any such declaration, the implication of which would be that conventional aggression could be undertaken without fear of crossing the nuclear threshold.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the prospects of the Government entering British strategic nuclear weapons into multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We see no immediate prospect of United Kingdom strategic nuclear weapons being entered into multilateral disarmament negotiations.

European Union

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to publish a consolidated version of the treaty of Rome, as amended by the treaty of European Union, either together with or separate from the remaining parts of that treaty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A consolidated text of the treaty of Rome incorporating the amendments made by the treaty on European Union was published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* (C244 Volume 35) on 31 August 1992. It has been available through HMSO outlets since that time. We have no present plans ourselves to publish a consolidated version of the treaty.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the ways in which the United Kingdom has sought to honour its obligations under article VI of the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have already announced significant reductions in our sub-strategic nuclear capability, including ending our role in deployment of Lance missile and nuclear artillery in Europe, ending our maritime tactical nuclear capability and a reduction of about 50 per cent. in the number of our nuclear free-fall bombs. In addition my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 16 November that each Trident submarine would carry no more than 96 warheads compared with the previous intention to carry no more than 128, and that the actual number might be significantly fewer. We believe that a comprehensive test ban and a convention prohibiting the production of fissile material for weapons purposes could, if widely applicable and effectively verifiable, make a valuable contribution to non-proliferation and we have made clear that we are prepared to work for the conclusion of such agreements.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards countries seeking to develop and deploy nuclear weapons for their own national self-defence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 157 countries have already committed themselves to non-nuclear weapon status by acceding to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as non-nuclear weapon states. We look to these states to honour their obligations under the treaty. We continue to urge the remaining 28 non-parties to the treaty to accede at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's attitude to the non-aligned movement's resolution on the legality of nuclear weapons submitted this month to the Disarmament Committee of the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The resolution was, in the end, not put to a vote. We believe anyway that the use of nuclear weapons would have to be judged as lawful or not in the light of the particular circumstances in which they were used and that therefore it would be wrong to burden the International Court of Justice with this hypothetical question.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means the declaration on the entry into force of the treaty on European Union made by the General Council of the European Community has been officially published and publicised in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A copy of the declaration made by the European Council on the entry into force of the treaty on European Union has been deposited in the Library of the House, as has a copy of the report of the General Affairs Council on implementation of the treaty.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Scretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he intends to implement the common foreign and security policy of the European Union in the interest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We will work with other member states to build on European political co-operation and ensure that intergovernmental co-operation under the common foreign and security policy works effectively. We will continue to press for an active common foreign and security policy in areas in which member states have important interests in common.

Argentina

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received from *(a)* overseas Governments and *(b)* commercial companies with regard to the relaxation of the embargo on the sale of military equipment to Argentina.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any discussions that take place with overseas Governments on the question of the sale of military equipment to Argentina are confidential. We are not aware of any approaches to the Department from commercial companies about a relaxation of the embargo on the sale of military equipment to Argentina.

Pakistan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further information he has received about Mr. Ghazanfer Ali in prison in Pakistan.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I wrote to the hon. Member for Bradford, West on 27 October with information on the three cases involving two murder charges and an illegal possession of firearms charge against Ghazanfer Ali. The cases have been further adjourned until 23 November, 7 and 11 December.

Government Communications Headquarters

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation at GCHQ arising from his recent meeting with civil service union leaders.

Mr. Hurd: I have had no such meeting. On 10 November, officials, including Sir Robin Butler, had a further meeting with the civil service unions. Various suggestions from both sides were discussed, but no agreement was reached.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Saudi Government to allow the same freedom of religion internally as that enjoyed by Saudi nationals in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We and our European Community partners consistently seek opportunities to discuss human rights, including freedom of worship, with the Saudi authorities, who can be in no doubt of the strength of our views on this issue. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last did so during his visit to Saudi Arabia in September this year.

India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet the Indian Foreign Minister to discuss human rights in India.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right honourable Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met the Indian Foreign Minister in New Delhi on 15 November, when he discussed bilateral issues. There are no definite plans for their next meeting. He discussed human rights during meetings with the Indian Prime Minister and Home Minister in New Delhi on 15 November.

Hong Kong

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will give their support for the establishment of an endangered species task force in Hong Kong, under the auspices of the police and customs, to enforce domestic and international bans on trade in rhinoceros products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As a result of a recent review, the Hong Kong Government have decided to establish an endangered species protection liaison group with responsibility for information gathering, planning and co-ordination of enforcement operations and co-ordinating liaison with national and international agencies including non-governmental organisations.

We fully support these efforts by the Hong Kong Government to improve the enforcement of their endangered species legislation which includes a ban in trade in rhino products.

Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to issue his five-yearly report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on British human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom is due to submit its next report to the Human Rights Committee in August 1994.

European Institutes

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give estimates for the number of jobs which will be created directly by each of the European institutes whose location was agreed at the European summit on 29 October.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Reliable estimates do not exist for staffing levels of all the institutions in question, although staff numbers will be constrained by budgetary limits. Jobs will not in all cases be fitted by new staff. We understand the position to be as follows:

European Environment Agency

The agency's first work programme will be agreed in mid-1994 and organisations will then be chosen as topic centres to carry out specific projects. Until then, it is not possible to estimate the number of jobs which could be created by the agency.

European Training Foundation

There is no information currently available about the likely staffing level of the European Training Foundation.

Office for Veterinary and Plant-health Inspection and Control

There is no information currently available about the likely staffing level of the Office for Veterinary and Plant-Health Inspection and Control.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

The Commission anticipates that the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction will create approximately 30 posts.

European Medicines Evaluation Agency

A report prepared for the Commission by independent consultants estimated that staffing levels would be up to 150 full-time staff in 1995 when the EMEA begins business, rising to some 250 by 1999.

Agency for Health and Safety at Work

There is no information currently available about the likely staffing level of the Agency for Health and Safety at Work.

European Monetary Institute/European Central Bank

It will be for the Council of the European Monetary Institute to decide on the number of staff employed in the Institute. The EMI's Council has not yet met to consider its staffing level.

Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market

In 1990 the Commission, based on a study by consultants, estimated staff numbers at about 300.

Europol (and Europol Drugs Unit)

The Europol Drugs Unit is the pre-convention phase of Europol. Staffing numbers are still only estimates and cannot be clarified until 1 April 1994 when the Europol Drugs Unit moves out of its start-up phase. Estimates are that the Unit will start with about 30 members of staff, including support staff. This will be augmented by additional analysts, liaison officers and support staff as the work demands but is not expected to go beyond 60 to 70 in the pre-convention phase.

European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

Seventy six people are currently employed in CEDEFOP's Berlin seat. At the European Council on 29 October 1993 it was decided that CEDEFOP's seat should move to Thessaloniki. No change in staffing level is envisaged as a result of the move.

Plutonium Smuggling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received from his German counterpart on the evidence held against British citizen Albert Derbyshire on trial in Flensburg for smuggling plutonium from Russia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Evidence against Mr. Derbyshire is available only to the prosecuting authorities and his defence lawyer. It is not available to foreign Governments. Mr. Derbyshire's guilt or innocence is a matter for the German courts and Mr. Derbyshire's lawyer.

COCOM

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the future of COCOM;

(2) if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the meeting of the co-ordinating committee on multilateral export controls held in The Hague on 16 November.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Representatives of the Governments participating in COCOM met in The Hague on 16 November. They agreed that COCOM should be terminated as soon as possible, but no later than 31 March 1994. There was also broad agreement that at the same time, new arrangements should be established to promote transparency and responsibility in the transfer of armaments and related dual use goods: the details of the new arrangements remain to be decided.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As at 1 April 1993, the number of persons and the number of women employed in each grade within this Department, including agencies, was:

	Total number of persons employed	*Total number of women employed*
Open structure		
Grade 1	1	—
Grade 2	2	—

	Total number of persons employed	Total number of women employed
Grade 3	14	1
Grade 4	2	—
Grade 5	84·5	5·5
Grade 6	102	9
Grade 7	373	53
Occupational groups		
Senior Executive Officer	217	26
Higher Executive Officer (D)	9	3
Higher Executive Officer	536·5	109
Executive Officer	1,105·5	322
Administrative Officer	928	554·5
Administrative Assistant	318	171·5
Senior Economic Assistant	13	—
Economic Assistant	2	1
Senior Assistant Statistician	2	1
Assistant Statistician	1	1
Senior Information Officer	14	9
Information Officer	33	21
Assistant Information Officer	12	7
Senior Librarian	4	4
Librarian	7	7
Assistant Librarian	21·5	15·5
Museum Curatorial Grade D	3	3
Museum Curatorial Grade E	1	1
Museum Curatorial Grade F	2	—
Senior P and T Officer	51	2
Higher P and T Officer	51	1
P and T Officer	22	—
Technical Grade 1	8	—
Higher Mapping and Charting Officer	1	—
Mapping and Charting Officer	1	—
Mapping and Charting Officer Technical Grade 1	1	1
Senior Research Officer (R)	10	1
Typing Manager	4·5	4·5
Senior Personal Secretary	7·5	7·5
Personal Secretary	142·5	142·5
Typist	76	75
Senior Scientific Officer	74·5	14·5
Higher Scientific Officer	53	18
Scientific Officer	33	11
Assistant Scientific Officer	18·5	9·5
Catering Manager 1	1	—
Catering Manager 2	1	—
Catering Manager 3	2	—
Higher Photographic Officer	1	—
Photographic Officer	1	—
P and GS Grade B	3	—
P and GS Grade C	5	—
P and GS Grade D	11	—
P and GS Grade E	16	—
Stores Officer Grade B	1	—
Stores Officer Grade C	3	—
Stores Officer Grade D	6	1
Support Manager 1	5	—
Support Manager 2	10	6
Support Manager 3	45	20
Support Grade Band 1	225	85
Support Grade Band 2	324	140·5
Senior TTO	21	—
Higher TTO	78	1
TTO	105	1
Assistant TTO	98	3
Trainee TTO	18	2
Communications Officer IV	1	1
Industrial grades	56	23·5
Departmental Groups		
Senior Grade	145	5
Diplomatic Service Grade 4	275	10
Diplomatic Service Grade 5	439·5	55
Diplomatic Service Grade 6	272·5	29
Diplomatic Service Grade 7M	414	94
Diplomatic Service Grade 7D	122·5	37·5
Diplomatic Service Grade 8	45	11
Diplomatic Service Grade 9	92·5	397·5
Diplomatic Service Grade 10	558	227
Legal Adviser	1	—
Second Legal Adviser	1	—
Deputy Legal Adviser	2	—
Legal Counsellor	7	3
Senior Assistant Legal Adviser	8	2
Assistant Legal Adviser	7	3
Research Counsellor	3	—
Senior Principal Research Officer	13	3
Principal Research Officer	27·5	13·5
Senior Research Officer	10·5	1·5
Research Officer	2	2
Diplomatic Service Grade 6C	1	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 8C	21	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 9C	14	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 5T	1	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 6T	1	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 7T	26	—
Diplomatic Service Grade 8T	50	1
Diplomatic Service Grade 9T	17	1
Secretary 1	120	120
Secretary 2	465·5	464·5
Secretary 3	7·5	6·5
Chief Overseas Security Officer	40	—
Overseas Security Officer	171	2
Nurse	4	4
Doctor	5	1
Senior Lecturer	10	7
Senior Field Investigating Officer	1	—
Field Investigating Officer 2	16	3
Translator 1	1	—
Translator 2	3·5	3·5
Translator 3	3	3
Chief Cypher Superintendent	3	—
Cypher Superintendent	19	—
Cypher Supervisor	45	3
Telecommunications & Cypher Officer	118	10
Operator Technician	1	—
Queen's Messenger	29	—
Queen's Messenger Escort	3	—

El Salvador

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring his Department is undertaking of the election process in El Salvador.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have appointed Dr. David Browning as the British Government's observer of the elections in El Salvador in March. He is there now, observing preparations, and will return for the elections. Our ambassador continues to monitor all aspects of the electoral process.

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is undertaking to ensure the compliance of the relevant parties to the United States resolutions on the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We will continue to urge both sides to co-operate with the UN Secretary-General in implementing the UN settlement plan.

Indonesia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Indonesia concerning human rights in East Timor.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In our contacts with the Indonesian authorities, and in the relevant international bodies, we and our European Community partners have, on numerous occasions, underlined our concern that human rights should be respected in East Timor. The matter was raised most recently on 23 November with the Indonesian Minister for Research and Technology during his visit to the United Kingdom.

Antarctica

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to bring forward legislation to repeal the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989 and to ratify the Antarctic environmental protocol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We intend that a provision to repeal the Antarctic Minerals Act 1989 should be included in a Bill to give effect to the environmental protection protocol to the Antarctic treaty. We hope that this Bill can be introduced at an early opportunity.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Fraud

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give *(a)* the number of staff engaged in his Department on fraud prevention work, *(b)* the amount of money saved as a result, *(c)* the unit cost ratio of cost to benefit and *(d)* the number of cases in which fraud was detected and the number of prosecutions which resulted in each of the last 10 years;

(2) if he will give *(a)* the number of people arrested for DSS fraud or abuse, *(b)* the number of cases where no further action was taken, *(c)* the number cautioned, *(d)* the number of people charged by the police, *(e)* the number of cases sent to the Crown prosecution service, *(f)* the number of cases discontinued by the Crown prosecution service, *(g)* the number of cases completed in the magistrates court, *(h)* the number of convictions and *(i)* the number acquitted at court, for each year since 1979;

(3) what is the target for fraud savings in his Department for 1993-94 and 1994-95; how these figures are arrived at; if he will break them down into amounts of *(a)* sector fraud and *(b)* organised fraud, and give the amounts for each of the main benefits, the multiplier used and any other relevant factors contributing to the target figure; and what percentage and amount of the figure will come from housing benefit payments;

(4) if he will give details of the various multipliers used by his Department in calculating fraud savings and the circumstances in which these are applied.

Mr. Hague: The administration of benefit fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 24 November 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking about benefit fraud.

The full range of information requested is not available in every instance but I hope that you will find the following helpful. It may be helpful if I deal with each question in turn.

Your first question asks about the number of staff employed on fraud prevention and the results achieved.

From October this year I have established a new security Branch in Leeds with a responsibility to ensure a co-ordinated and strategic approach to fraud and security matters, and to protect programme expenditure against fraud and abuse.

The Department of Social Security's strategy for combatting fraud is based on three principles:

PREVENTION minimising/eliminating opportunities for Fraud

DETECTION catching those who try to cheat the system

DETERRENCE persuading potential fraudsters that it is wrong and not worth the risk.

Along with their other duties, staff in many parts of the Department and its Agencies are concerned with fraud prevention. For example, the way in which claims for benefit are processed, or payments are made, can help to protect the system against abuse. Resources devoted to this general anti-fraud work are not separately identified.

However, figures for the specialist fraud commands within the Benefits Agency *are* available. As at 31 March 1993 Sector Fraud employed 2,837 staff in the prevention and detection of fraud and abuse. Organised Fraud, a specialist unit set up to investigate suspected organised fraud, employed about 240.

In the year ending 31 March 1993 sector Fraud recorded total savings of £516 million, made up of weekly benefit savings of £491 million, and instrument of payment savings of £25 million, at a cost of £64·7 million. In the same period Organised Fraud recorded total savings of £42 million and cost £7·7 million.

The fraud organisation was set up in its present form only in January 1991 and although it is constantly refining the way in which statistics are maintained, figures for the number of cases in which fraud was detected. However, I am able to tell you from the sector fraud figures available that in the year ending 31 March 1992 approximately 250,000 cases were successfully investigated and resulted in a saving of public funds. In the same year 4,379 prosecutions were undertaken. In the year ending 31 March 1993 the figures were approximately 270,000 investigations and 5,239 prosecutions.

The prosecutions undertaken in the last ten years are as follows:

	Number
1983-84	8,997
1984-85	6,702
1985-86	6,679
1986-87	6,603
1987-88	7,231
1988-89	8,222
1989-90	8,671
1990-91	7,911
1991-92	[1]4,379
1992-93	5,814

[1] Figures are not available for organised fraud for 1991-92.

The Department operates a selective and humane prosecution policy. It is felt that it is more important to check the abuse of the system than to mount expensive prosecutions where, having full regard to the nature of the offence and the debt involved, it would not be cost effective to do so. Steps are being taken to strike a better balance between the benefit savings achieved and the prosecutions undertaken.

Your second question asks about cases which were considered for prosecution by the Department or the Police.

In the year ending 31 March 1993 Organised Fraud's activities led to the arrest of 1,400 people, of whom 575 were subsequently

prosecuted. Of these 575 prosecutions, 556 (97 per cent.) were successful with over 200 receiving custodial sentences ranging from six months to eight years.

Police arrest is a very extreme measure normally used only in dealing with criminals involved in organised fraud, and has little or no relevance to the work of sector fraud and the customers of the Benefits Agency with whom they come into contact in the course of their investigations.

The Department's policy towards fraud is to detect it rapidly, investigate it efficiently and to prosecute offenders where appropriate. Prosecutions are handled by the laying of information and summons. I have quoted our prosecution figures since 1983-84 above.

I regret that statistics on arrests are not kept in a way which would enable me to answer your detailed enquiry.

Your third and fourth questions ask about the targets set for fraud savings, how these figures have been arrived at and details of the multipliers used in calculating them.

Instrument of Payment savings are not subject to any multiplier and all such savings are recorded at face value.

A multiplier of 32 weeks is applied to the amount of weekly Benefit Savings recorded as a result of other successful fraud investigations or interventions. This single multiplier is currently applied to all benefits payable by the Department and reflects the anticipated average period for which claims could be expected to run in the absence of a successful fraud intervention.

Given the nature of the work of Organised Fraud, no formal target is set for that organisation. Although Organised Fraud do achieve and record benefit savings its role has a large element of prevention and a target in monetary terms is not appropriate.

The target set for the Sector Fraud organisation is based mainly on previous years' achievements using empirical data and is set by the Secretary of State taking into account the resources which are available for the anti-fraud effort.

The target for 1993-94 is £557 million and early indications are that the target will be achieved. The target for 1994-95 has not been finalised but is likely to be higher than this year.

The targets are set as a global figure and are not broken down into the various benefits.

I would draw your attention to the Report "Fighting Fraud in 1992-93" which gives fuller detail of the fraud effort for that year.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Maxwell Insolvency Practitioners

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Government will respond to the Fourth Report of the Social Security Select Committee of Session 1992-93 on the work of the Maxwell insolvency practitioners, HC 835; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: The Government's response to the Select Committee's report is published today. We welcome the Committee's continued interest in the Maxwell affair and share its view that this is an exceptional case. We also welcome the Committee's recognition of the value of the measures we have taken in response to the plight of the Maxwell pensioners, which have ensured that pensions have been kept in payment while work to recover the missing pension fund assets continues.

The Government recognise that the pension scheme trustees and the liquidators of Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. have had to undertaken a vast amount of work in unravelling the huge amount of complex information surrounding pension scheme transactions in order to establish claims against employers and others. This work has now been largely completed. Writs have been issued against some financial institutions.

The Government strongly support the initiative taken by the Maxwell Pensioners Trust to promote an overall settlement to the disputes. A speedy settlement must be in everyone's best interests, especially the pensioners.

Chief Adjudication Officer

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the ninth annual report of the Chief Adjudication Officer; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Lilley: The report is being published today. The report's findings point to an improvement in some areas of adjudication, particularly on many of the benefits administered in Benefits Agency districts. Standards of adjudication within the child benefit centre, the Newcastle pensions directorate and the overseas benefit directorate remain high. The report also acknowledges the contribution that the Employment Service's quality control package has made to initiatives aimed at improving adjudication.

But in other areas standards are disappointing. I have accordingly sought assurances from the chief executives of the Employment Service Agency and the Benefits Agency that work is in hand urgently to address the weaknesses identified. I am pleased to note that numerous initiatives are already in place, including, in the Employment Service, a working group on the evidence needed to establish entitlement and, in the Benefits Agency, the requirement that district business plans are specific about adjudication standards.

I am satisfied that both the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency are committed to better standards of adjudication and the increased emphasis on quality in agency business plans for 1993-94 and I look forward to progress in coming years. The chief adjudication officer has commented in his report on the commitment of senior management to improving adjudication standards and welcomes all measures designed to effect such improvements.

Eleven recommendations to address certain of the problems identified in the report have been made by the chief adjudication officer. These recommendations are being considered and a formal response will be made in due course.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Nominal Rental Charges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what consideration has been given to calculating nominal rental charges for hon. Members' offices and for the rifle range; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Channon: None.

Members' Rooms

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how many hon. Members have more than one room in the parliamentary precincts.

Mr. Ray Powell: Five.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business (Ethnic Minorities)

5. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to help ethnic minority business.

Mr. Sainsbury: All the schemes and support funded by my Department to assist businesses are available to ethnic minority businesses.

Exports

15. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Confederation of British Industry to discuss exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: When my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade addressed the CBI's annual conference on 15 November he outlined the major improvements he has been making to the Department's export promotion efforts.

Deregulation

17. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the progress of his deregulation proposals.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry).

34. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many officials are employed in deregulation duties in his Department.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: At present 50 people, including secondees from the private sector, are employed in the deregulation unit. In addition, officials in all Government Departments are reviewing regulations for which they are responsible.

Exports (Japan)

19. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of exports to Japan.

Mr. Needham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers).

Paper Recycling

21. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals his Department has for supporting the recycling paper and cardboard industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: The producer responsibility initiative launched by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and myself is beginning to result in actions which should help to sustain the recycling infrastructure for paper and board. We are continuing to press the EC Commission to expedite consideration of industries' complaints concerning the German packaging ordinance.

Steel Subsidies

23. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has had with his EC counterparts with a view to eliminating state subsidies throughout the steel industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: At the Industry Council on 18 November, I stressed the importance of eliminating operating cost subsidies throughout the EC steel industry. The Council was unable to reach agreement on six requests for derogations from the steel state aids code. The formal conclusions of the 21 September Industry Council had confirmed the obligation to apply this code, and made particular reference to eliminating cost subsidies.

Trade (Eastern Europe)

24. **Ms Quin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what new measures he is proposing to take to increase trade between the United Kingdom and eastern Europe.

Mr. Needham: My Department already provides a range of services to encourage greater trade between the United Kingdom and eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union. The measures include support for outward missions—sometimes led ministerially—and participation in overseas trade fairs as well as the provision of general and specific information and advice about the markets and the opportunities in them.

The major reorganisation of DTI export services earlier this year has enhanced the services provided by the Department. Each of the six major markets in eastern Europe—those in the United Kingdom's list of the top 80 United Kingdom export markets—is now served by a dedicated desk officer. In addition, five of the export promoters—private sector secondees—taken on by the Department are already working closely with the relevant market branch to help United Kingdom companies find business in the region.

A detailed list of all DTI assistance to exporters is included in the British Overseas Trade Board annual report 1992-93. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Manufacturing Industry

25. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet the Engineering Employers Federation to discuss policies designed to improve capital investment in manufacturing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I met representatives of the EEF earlier this year to discuss their proposals for improving the competitiveness of United Kingdom manufacturing. The federation continues to have frequent contact with Ministers and senior officials in my Department.

Recession

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's assessment of the effects of the recent recession on business and employment in south-east England.

Mr. Sainsbury: The recession affected all parts of the country, including the south-east. Its impact on the service sector was noticeable in the south-east where service industries are a significant element in the regional economy.

Exports (Non-tariff Barriers)

27. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to protect British companies against non-tariff barriers to their exports.

Mr. Needham: A prime objective of the current GATT Uruguay round market access negotiations is the substantial reduction or elimination of non-tariff barriers by all participants. The Government fully support this objective and the European Commission, which negotiates on behalf of the European Community, continues to press trading partners for major concessions on non-tariff barriers.

Small Businesses (Regulation)

28. **Mr. Deva:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment has been made of the damage to small companies by excessive regulation.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: This is impossible to quantify at the moment. Our analysis of existing regulations is not yet complete. We have, however, received a great deal of evidence showing that the cumulative burden of regulation diverts the money and time of small firms management into unproductive channels.

Business Link

29. **Mr. Trend:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made with business link; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Business links are open in Birmingham and Leicester, where local companies have a single point of access to a wide range of business support services. Plans have been approved in principle for the development of business links in 17 areas which will lead to a further 50 business link outlets. By the end of this Parliament I expect to see in place a national network of more than 200 business links.

Telecommunications Licences

30. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on the issue of new licences for telecommunications operations.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government's policy on the issue of new licences for telecommunications operations continues to be based on the 1991 White Paper "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s" (Cm 1461). Class licences, which do not require an individual application, cover the provision of a wide range of telecoms services, while applications for individual licences are considered on their merits.

Aerospace Industry

31. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to achieve open and fair markets for the British aerospace industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department is liaising actively with the Commission, our European partners, and the United Kingdom aerospace industry on the GATT civil aerospace negotiations in order to bring about a more open international market for civil aircraft, engines, and equipment.

Single Market

32. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry about progress of the single market.

Mr. Needham: The President of the Board of Trade attended and addresed the CBI national conference on 15 November. Officials have frequent and intensive discussions with the CBI about ensuring the proper functioning of the single market.

Foam-filled Furniture

33. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he has received further representations from firms manufacturing foam and foam-filled furniture about the dangers of low-quality imports.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has had from United Kingdom furniture manufacturers about the risks from imported foam-filled furniture.

Mr. McLoughlin: Three identifiable businesses responding to the recent consultation on the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, as part of my Department's deregulation initiative review alleged that some imported foam-filled furniture does not comply with the regulations. The regulations apply to all domestic upholstered furniture intended for supply to the United Kingdom market, and accordingly local authority trading standards officers, who have day-to-day responsibility for enforcement of the legislation, have powers to deal with any non-complying furniture, whatever its country of manufacture.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes his Department is considering to existing legislation on the use of fire-retardant foam in furniture.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988, as amended, which include requirements for the use of fire retardant foam in domestic upholstered furniture, are being considered as part of the overall review of legislation under the deregulation initiative announced by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in February this year. In considering whether any changes to these regulations are necessary my Department will take account of the responses to the recently completed consultation with individual businesses, trade associations, local authorities, fire prevention, medical and consumer interests.

RECHAR 2

35. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the Government's approach to Rechar 2.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission circulated a Green Paper in June this year on the "Future of European Structural Funds Community Initiatives". We anticipate discussion will take place on this in a forthcoming Council of Ministers.

Gas (Competition)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Director General of Gas Supply to discuss competition in the gas industry.

Mr. Eggar: I last met the new Director General on 28 October to discuss a range of issues.

Car Dealing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the trading practices of car manufacturers with regard to car dealerships and car retailing were last reviewed by his Department; what conclusions were reached; and when he next proposes to review this matter again.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: These matters were investigated by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its report on the supply of new motor cars within the United Kingdom, published in February 1992.

The report concluded, inter alia, that a complex monopoly situation existed, arising from the selective and exclusive distribution system used by most car suppliers in the United Kingdom. The MMC identified a number of restrictions imposed by suppliers in their agreements with dealers which might be expected to operate against the public interest.

The Director General of Fair Trading and Department of Trade and Industry have negotiated with the major car suppliers with a view to concluding an undertaking on the MMC's recommendations. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is currently considering options for taking forward action on this report.

Anthrax Vaccine

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the volume and value of anthrax vaccine exports each year from 1987.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available from official sources because the United Kingdom trade classification does not separately identify anthrax vaccines. The manufacturers of anthrax vaccines in the United Kingdom report no exports during the last five years. Information prior to that could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department received a copy of the environmental statement for the proposed Sellafield mixed oxide nuclear fuel plant from British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Eggar: My Department receives communications from British Nuclear Fuels plc on a wide range of issues. These have included a copy of the published environmental statement for the proposed plant referred to by the hon. Member.

Energy Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech on energy policy made to a conference in London on 17 November by the Minister of Energy.

Mr. Eggar: I have today placed a copy of my speech of 17 November in the Library of the House.

EC Internal Market Council

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Internal Market Council of 11 November.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and the decisions taken, indicating the voting record of member states, at the European Trade Council on 11 November.

Mr. Needham: My noble Friend the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Small Firms attended the second Internal Market Council of the Belgian Presidency in Brussels on 11 November.

The Council formally adopted without change all three food additive common positions—colours, additives and sweeteners—agreed at the Internal Market Council on 27 September. It also agreed a common position on equipment for use in explosive atmospheres.

A common position was adopted unanimously on the amendment to directive 83/189/EEC on the provision of information on technical standards and regulations.

A common position was adopted on the footwear labelling directive which will allow manufacturers a choice between pictograms and textual labelling. Germany voted against and the Netherlands abstained.

A resolution for a more global approach to the problems of small and medium-sized enterprises was agreed in principle. The resolution also commits the Council to hold an annual debate on enterprise policy in the Community, particularly with regard to SMEs. A wide-ranging televised open debate included discussion on improving SMEs' access to finance and Community R and D programmes.

The Council was unable to reach agreement on a Presidency compromise proposal on the language regime for the Community Trade Mark Office to implement the European Council decision on a five language regime. The Presidency is to reflect further on the matter.

The Commission presented a proposal for a new regulation laying down improved measures to prohibit the import, transit or export of counterfeit or pirated goods. The Presidency agreed that the regulation would, if possible, be discussed at the 16 December Internal Market Council.

The Commission circulated new implementation figures and highlighted the overall improvement in implementation of single market measures this year. The United Kingdom is in second place with implementation of 91·5 per cent., two points behind Denmark.

The next formal meeting of the Council will take place on 16 December.

Wind Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how his Department's energy technology support unit was represented at the conference on wind power development in rural areas held in Stoneleigh on 11 November.

Mr. Eggar: The "Wind Energy On Your Farm" conference, held at Stoneleigh on 11 November 1993, was sponsored by the energy technology support unit on behalf of this Department.

One of the presentations to the conference was given by an ETSU representative.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Eggar: The figures for the Department, including its executive agencies and the former Department of Energy, as at 2 October 1993, are:

Grade level	*Total number of employees*	*Total number of women*
Grade 1	2	0
Grade 2	13	0
Grade 3	54	6
Grade 4	15	2
Grade 5	284	38
Grade 6	384	44
Grade 7	1,155	168
SEO	1,073	170
HEO	2,028	586
EO	2,324	1,004
AO	3,187	2,035
AA	2,573	1,755
Industrial	157	10
Total	13,249	5,818

Copper

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table to show the volume and value of *(a)* copper tubing and *(b)* copper pipe connectors imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: The available information is given in the following table.

United Kingdom imports of copper tubing and copper pipe connectors

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Copper tubing[1]			
Volume (thousand metric tonnes)	41·4	40·6	40·5
Value (£ million)	104·8	93·0	87·9
Copper pipe connectors[2]			
Volume (thousand metric tonnes)	3·5	3·7	3·9
Value (£ million)	15·6	18·6	18·1

[1] Copper tubes and pipes, defined as item 682.71 of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC).

[2] Copper tube or pipe fittings, defined as item 682.72 of the SITC.

Source: Business Monitors MA20, Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom, CSO.

National Newspapers

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer the concentration of ownership of national newspapers to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: No. The Director General of Fair Trading recently considered the structure and characteristics of the market for newspapers in the context of allegations of predatory pricing and abuse of market power by News International. He announced on 14 October that he would not be initiating formal action under the competition legislation.

Fireworks

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of fireworks sold in Britain was manufactured abroad for each year since 1980; and which countries are the main exporters of fireworks to Britain.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available.

Bills (Payment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations have been received by his Department urging him to legislate for the payment of bills by fixed dates.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not available. Representations have been received from individual small businesses and from other interested organisations seeking action to reduce the incidence of late payment, including legislation for a statutory maximum credit period, a statutory right to interest on overdue commercial debt or a combination of these.

Manufacturing

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the current growth areas in manufacturing industry; what volume of business is involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Manufacturing output in the third quarter of 1993 was 1·6 per cent. higher than in the same period of 1992. The performance of individual broad sectors, and their relative sizes, is shown in the table.

Sector		*Weights in Index of Production*[1]	*Change in output Q3/92 to Q3/93 (Per cent.)*
DF:	Coke, ref petrol and nuclear fuels	23	−0·4
DG:	Chemicals and manmade fibres	86	3·5
DJ:	Basic metals and metal products	74	−2·4
DK DM:	Engineering and allied industries	302	2·5
DA:	Food, drink and tobacco	110	−1·0
DB DC:	Textiles, leather and clothing	47	0·7
DD DN:	Other manufacturing	202	2·9
D:	All Manufacturing	844	1·6

[1] An indicator of the relative size of each sector.

Source: Central Statistical Office, press release CSO(93)167 and amendment (93)172.

Fire Safety

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes his Department is considering to existing legislation on the need for children's nightwear to be fire retardant.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* The Nightwear (Safety) Regulations 1985, which include requirements for children's nightwear to be fire retardant, are being considered as part of the overall review of legislation under the deregulation initiative announced by

my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade in February this year. In considering whether any changes to these regulations are necessary my Department will take account of the responses to the recently completed consultation with individual businesses, trade associations, local authorities, fire prevention, medical and consumer interests.

DEFENCE

Equipment Contracts

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all orders for fuses, ammunition and other equipment placed by or on behalf of his Department with Gebruder Junshans of Germany, A. S. Raufoss of Norway, Fratelli Borletti of Italy and the royal ordnance factory, Blackburn, from 1975 to date, giving in each case the value of the order, the type of fuse, ammunition, or other equipment concerned whether the order had been subject to competitive tendering, allocation or negotiation without competitive tendering, the dates on which the orders were placed, when they were completed and if any part of the order has still to be delivered.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are taken by his Department to cancel contracts and otherwise to discipline suppliers and manufacturers of equipment where there is evidence that such contracts have been gained by bribery, corruption or other breaches of procurement rules.

Mr. Aitken: If it is proven that the award of any MOD contract has resulted directly from bribery, corruption or other irregular practices, my Department has the legal right to cancel it if it is still in existence, and would normally do so. My Department would also take any other action against the contractor concerned which was appropriate to the circumstances of the case, including seeking full financial restitution and considering the basis of any future dealings with them.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the posts held by Mr. Gordon Foxley, with dates and the responsibilities which each post entailed.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Indonesia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia in regard to the restrictions on movement of indigenous people imposed by the Indonesian authorities prior to and during the visit by the United Kingdom military attaché in Jakarta to East Timor in early November.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

We are not aware of any restrictions on movement of the indigenous people imposed in connection with the recent visit to East Timor of defence attachés based in Jakarta.

HEALTH

NHS Estate

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of acres owned by the national health service estate for each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table:

Estimated acres owned by the national health service

	Land area Acres
1988-89	41,654
1989-90	41,617
1990-91	41,296
1991-92	40,508

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total value of the national health service estate for each year since 1979 at 1993 prices.

Mr. Sackville: The following valuations for the total value of the national health service estate are the only figures available, based on exercises undertaken by the Valuation Office Agency. Figures for 1987 and 1989 have been converted to price levels prevailing at the time of the 1 April 1992 valuation.

Valuation date	*Amount £*
25 June 1987	22,260,000,000
31 December 1989	22,770,000,000
1 April 1992	21,447,463,000

Source: Valuation Office Agency.
Note: Figures for 1987 and 1989 are represented at 1992 prices.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients for each of the four regional health authorities covering the Greater London area have been waiting for over 12 months, 18 months and 24 months for in-patient hospital treatment at the latest available date.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on waiting times for the four Thames regional health authorities which cover the London area is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", published twice yearly. The latest published figures are for March 1993. In addition provisional figures for the quarter ending 30 September 1993 were published on 1 November, in press release H93/1036. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Midwives

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the Royal College of Midwives about midwives travelling alone at night to clients' houses; and what steps are being taken to ensure that employing health authorities adopt safe working procedures.

Mr. Sackville: We have received no such representations.

Food Safety

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether regulations on food safety are being reconsidered under the Government's new proposals for deregulation.

Mr. Sackville: Yes. As part of the Government's deregulation initiative and in conjunction with the Department, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food issued the "Food Law Deregulation Plan" on 14 September, copies of which are available in the Library. The plan was drawn up following consultation with industry, enforcers and consumers. Its aim is to move to a less regulatory system of food law by removing from business, requirements that are no longer justified, whilst maintaining essential standards of food safety and consumer protection.

Bureaucracy

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she intends to take to reduce bureaucracy within NHS hospitals and trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is expected that after 1 April 1995 virtually all national health service hospital care will be provided by trusts. As trusts have to compete for contracts from purchasing authorities for the provision of care, their management should have the most cost-effective structure possible which is compatible with the proper discharge of their function.

Creuzfeldt Jakob Dementia

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will establish a scheme of no fault compensation for those who have contracted Creuzfeldt Jakob disease as a result of human growth hormone treatment, and for their families; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) on 27 May at column *671*.

"Making London Worse"

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she proposes to take in respect of the publication "Making London Worse" by the Greater London Association of Community Health Councils.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Greater London Association of Community Health Councils recently published a report. We welcome the views of any informed contributor such as the association on the process of developing London's health services through positive change. The Government policy framework is set out in "Making London Better."

Adoptive Mothers

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to extend the provision of statutory maternity benefits to adoptive mothers.

Mr. Hague: I ahve been asked to reply. Statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance provide a measure of earnings replacement to help working women give up work around the time of the birth in the interests of their own and their unborn baby's health. There are no plans to extend maternity benefits to mothers of adopted children.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 25 November 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

"A New Framework for Local Justice"

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his assessment of the costs of implementing the decisions under the White Paper, "A New Framework for Local Justice".

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of implementing the White Paper reforms will largely depend on decisions taken locally by magistrates courts committees. However, we estimate the cost of implementing the package of reforms to be in the region of £5 million. These transitional costs will be more than offset in due course through increased efficiency, but in the meantime the Government will ensure that the overall funding of the service takes account of any additional costs.

Chief Justices' Clerks

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his assessment of the cost of the establishment of the office of chief justices' clerk across the country.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The cost of the establishment of the post of chief justices' clerk will largely depend on decisions taken locally by magistrates courts committees, and by the size of particular areas and organisations. The indicative start-up costs of the changes planned for the magistrates courts were referred to in the Government's White Paper "A New Framework for Local Justice" as around £5 million. It is expected that some of the costs attributable to the appointment of chief justices' clerks will be met by a reallocation of resources rather than additional expenditure. Inquiries made in several areas where shadow chief justices' clerks have already been appointed indicate that the resulting savings can exceed the costs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals his Department has for achieving further progress towards the goals set out in article VI of the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have demonstrated our readiness to reduce our nuclear force levels wherever we can. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for defence announced on 16 November that each Trident submarine would carry no more than 96 warheads compared with the previous intention to carry no more than 128, and that the actual number might be significantly fewer. We believe that a comprehensive test ban and a convention prohibiting the production of fissile material for weapons purposes could, if widely applicable and effectively verifiable, make a valuable contribution to non-proliferation and we have made clear that we are prepared to work for the conclusion of such agreements.

Mr. Amanullah Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times to date, since May 1990, Mr. Amanullah Khan, a Pakistani national, has applied to enter the United Kingdom as a visitor; and how many times any such applications have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the absence of any information in London about visa applications by Mr. Amanullah Khan, I have asked posts in the sub-continent to let me have a report. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Medical Precursors

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the question of lifting the ban on the importation of medical precursors into Serbia and Montenegro was last discussed by the United Nations Security Council sanctions committee; what decision was taken; and what was the position of Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The question of lifting the ban on the importing of medical precursors into Serbia and Montenegro was last discussed by the United Nations sanctions committee on 21 May 1993 following an approach to the committee by the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Agreement in the committee could not be reached.

The United Kingdom Government representative to the sanctions committee has never raised an objection to applications put to the committee for imports of medical precursors, but as the committee works on the basis of consensus we recognise that if any member of the committee wishes to hold or block a request they have the right to do so.

Bosnia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications he has received from the Bosnian Muslim authorities; what replies he has given; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The only recent communication we have had with the Bosnian Government was about the know-how fund. We welcome the opportunity to meet representatives from all the Bosnian parties at the European Union meeting in Geneva on 29 November.

Gas

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the importation of gas from Russia to Serbia was last discussed by the United Nations Security Council sanctions committee; what was the result of that discussion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The importing of gas from Russia to Serbia was last discussed at the United Nations sanctions committee meeting on 23 September 1993. The application was for gas to produce fertilisers. The committee blocked the request as it considered the gas an input to industry.

The question of the export of energy-related items to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for humanitarian purposes has been regularly discussed by the sanctions committee. The committee has ruled that it will consider applications for these items only when full details of the stocks of such items currently held by the Serbians are provided to the committee. Despite receiving this request in October 1992 the Serbians have yet to provide such details. No imports have therefore been agreed.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to the taxpayer and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Brooke: During 1993 I have twice visited Paris, on the first occasion accompanying the chairman of the Arts Council to look at French approaches to public architecture and participative public education about it, the second to open the British Tourist Authority's "Maison de la Grande Bretagne". The cost of these visits was £536·10 and £516·09 respectively. I have also been to Brussels for two meetings of EC culture Ministers; the cost of the first of these visits was £701·95 and of the second will be in the region of £700.

TRANSPORT

Road Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next proposes to review his Department's national road traffic forecasts.

Mr. Key: The current forecasts, published in 1989, remain the Government's best view of the likely future growth in traffic. The forecasts and the methodology behind them are, however, kept under regular review. The Department is currently commissioning research to examine possible improvements to the methodology, and has made arrangements for experts in traffic modelling and other relevant fields to provide advice for the same purpose.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to encourage employees of BR to bid for franchises on management buy-out for services in East Anglia.

Mr. Freeman: Financial assistance will be available towards the costs of formulating MEBO bids. British Rail will reimburse costs on a scale of 85 per cent. of the first £10,000 of costs and 75 per cent. of the remainder, up to a maximum of £100,000 for each bid team.

While the Railways Act 1993 enables BR to be franchisee, it also empowers the franchising director not to invite BR to bid if he considers that desirable for the purpose, inter alia, of promoting the award of franchises to MEBOs.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of people who evade vehicle excise duty each year; and what is the cost of this evasion to Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr. Key: The number of unlicensed vehicles in use on the public roads at the end of December 1992 was estimated at just under 1·3 million. The latest information indicates that over 96 per cent. of VED payable is collected. The revenue loss to the Exchequer through VED evasion for 1992-93 was estimated at around £130 million.

Sir Christopher Foster

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what criteria Sir Christopher Foster was appointed to the Board of Railtrack; at what salary; how many days work per week is involved; and for how long the appointment will last.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend announced on 16 November the names of a number of prospective non-executive members of the Railtrack board, including Sir Christopher Foster. They are to be appointed when the company is incorporated at the end of February 1994. Sir Christopher has extensive relevant experience in transport economics, and has recently been special adviser to my right hon. Friend on rail privatisation, a position which terminated upon the announcement of his forthcoming appointment to Railtrack. His terms of appointment will be settled in due course, when the formal appointment is made.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what remuneration has been paid by his Department to Sir Christopher Foster in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: Sir Christopher Foster was a special adviser to the Secretary of State from 1 June 1992 until 16 November 1993. During that time his employers, Coopers and Lybrand, were paid at a rate of £5,000 per annum for his services.

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to satisfy himself that there is no conflict of interest between Sir Christopher Foster's role as adviser to his Department and his position as a director of Coopers and Lybrand.

Mr. Freeman: Sir Christopher Foster ceased to be my right hon. Friend's special adviser on 16 November. The need to avoid potential conflicts of interest was covered in the terms of his original appointment.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultancy contract awarded to Coopers and Lybrand, to establish a charging regime for track users under the proposed reorganisation and privatisation of British Rail;

(2) if he will list the consultancy commissions, and value thereof, of contracts awarded to Coopers and Lybrand in connection with the re-organisation and proposed privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Good progress has been made. Detailed proposals on the structure of access charges and calculation methods have been made and are being implemented. The breakdown of contract costs is a matter of commercial confidentiality. As I said in my answer of 3 November to the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Harvey), the Department has paid approximately £1·6 million to Coopers and Lybrand for work on access and charging since December 1991. Sums for the most recent work have yet to be settled.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many of the contracts awarded to Coopers and Lybrand in connection with the reorganisation and proposed privatisation of British Rail were *(a)* on the basis of competitive tendering and *(b)* by invitation;

(2) from what sources his Department sought advice on Coopers and Lybrand's suitability to carry out that work where consultancy contracts were awarded to Coopers and Lybrand in connection with re-organisation and proposed privatisation of British Rail on the basis of invitation.

Mr. Freeman: Two contracts have been awarded to Coopers and Lybrand in this connection on the basis of competitive tendering. Following the completion of work under the first contract, further work was carried out by invitation between April and August this year on an interim basis while a second tendering exercise was carried out. Coopers and Lybrand's suitability for this interim contract was determined by the Department's evaluation of their work on access and charging up to that point.

Vehicle Weights

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken by his Department to determine how many roads are capable of supporting a gross vehicle weight of 18 tonnes.

Mr. Key: The design of road pavements is related to the amount of wear and tear caused by the different types of vehicle. Current design standards take account of both current and agreed future changes in gross vehicle weight limits. The Department's roads are already capable of supporting a gross vehicle weight of 18 tonnes.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many road bridges in the United Kingdom are not capable of supporting a gross vehicle weight of 18 tonnes;

(2) what action is being taken by his Department to determine how many road bridges are capable of supporting a gross vehicle weight of 18 tonnes; and what proportion of these are owned by British Rail;

(3) how many road bridges in the United Kingdom will require strengthening in order to safely take coaches with gross vehicle weight of 18 tonnes; and what proportion of these are owned by British Rail.

Mr. Key: In 1988 the Department commenced a programme of assessing its structures on the English trunk road and motorway network in accordance with the bridge assessment code which covers the effects of higher vehicle and axle weights which will be permitted in the United Kingdom from 1999, including those of 18 tonne two-axled vehicles. To date approximately 700 structures have been assessed as being unable to carry the future loading in full. When all assessments have been completed, it is expected that approximately 1,100 structures will be shown to require strengthening. The strengthening of structures carrying the English trunk road and motorway network is programmed to be completed by the end of 1988. Very few structures carrying the English trunk road and motorway network are owned by British Rail, and none of them is expected to need strengthening.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlie the maintenance of the gross vehicle weight limit for coaches of 17 tonnes; and what consideration has been given to raising it to 18 tonnes.

Mr. Key: The main considerations in setting weight limits for all classes of vehicle are road wear and the strength of bridges. The agreement reached in the European Community in 1989 on gross weights for coaches on international journeys was based on the use of an 11·5 tonne rear-drive-axle. We are at present engaged in an exercise to assess and upgrade all the bridges in the United Kingdom to accept this heavier axle load. We therefore have a derogation from the directive to retain our existing axle limit of 10·5 tonnes until 1999.

Increasing the gross weight to 18 tonnes while retaining the existing maximum rear axle load would result in all the additional weight going on the front axle. That weight is effectively limited at present by the availability of suitable tyres for safe operation. Furthermore, such a vehicle would have to depend on perfect load distribution to avoid overloading either axle. We cannot therefore now increase gross weights.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to exclude the weight of safety equipment, including TELMA and double glazing, when calculating the gross vehicle weight for coaches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Our weight limits are designed to protect the infrastructure and bridges in particular. The weight of a vehicle will be felt on a bridge regardless of whether certain equipment is included in a definition of weight or not. Consequently we cannot exclude the weight of any equipment, safety related or otherwise, from the gross weight of the vehicle.

British Rail Managers

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Rail managers, having taken early retirement, have been re-employed on short-term or consultancy contracts by British Rail or associated rail organisations, during 1992-93.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not readily available in the form requested.

British Rail has re-engaged some retired staff but only on a limited basis and for specific short term talks tapping their knowledge and experience.

Schools (Road Safety)

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the existing guidelines regarding car parking restrictions outside schools; how the restrictions are enforced; what changes are planned to ensure more effective road safety outside schools; and in what timescale.

Mr. Key: Traffic conditions outside schools vary widely, from busy main roads to quiet back streets. Our

advice to local authorities is that road safety measures need to be tailored to the individual circumstances. Such measures may include traffic calming techniques or 20 mph speed limits. Mandatory parking or stopping restrictions may sometimes be appropriate and enforcement of them would be the responsibility of the police, except in London where increasingly the boroughs are taking this on. In most cases however advisory "keep clear" markings on the road are sufficiently effective. Comparatively few accidents happen outside school entrances, and we have no plans for new central initiatives on this subject.

Passengers (London)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table showing his Department's latest estimate of the number of passengers travelling into, out of and within London each day on *(a)* each of the divisions of British Rail, *(b)* London Underground and *(c)* London Buses; and what are the comparable figures for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Norris: The available information is given in the following tables.

In table 1, it is not possible to split the bus and underground figures to show the number of journeys into and out of London.

The figures in table 2 do not include journeys which did not terminate in central London, and cannot be split to show the number of passengers who started their journey outside London. The numbers leaving central London are likely to be very similar to those arriving.

Table 1
Passengers journeys per year on London Buses and London Underground 1982 to 1992-93

Millions

	London Buses	*London Underground*
1982	1,039	498
1983	1,089	563
1984-85	1,153	672
1985-86	1,146	732
1986-87	1,158	769
1987-88	1,211	798
1988-89	1,206	815
1989-90	1,183	765
1990-91	1,180	775
1991-92	1,149	751
1992-93	1,127	728

Table 2
Arrivals per weekday in central London on British Rail[1] 1982 to 1992

Thousands

	Network SouthEast divisions									*InterCity*
	South East[2]	*Central*[2]	*South West*	*Thames and Chiltern*	*Thameslink (North)*	*North*	*West Anglia and Great Northern*	*Great Eastern*	*London Tilbury and Southend*	
1982	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	—
1983	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		—	—
1984	148	[3]95	95	[3]33	[3]19	[3]35	[3]109		32	—
1985	159	[3]100	93	[3]23	[3]21	[3]22	[3]106		31	—
1986	168	99	95	19	17	15	98		33	65
1987	177	107	105	22	21	19	107		35	65
1988	183	109	106	22	23	20	110		38	67
1989	186	110	115	22	24	23	51	62	37	71
1990	179	114	110	21	25	22	50	58	38	70
1991	163	106	104	21	24	20	47	57	33	67
1992	153	107	100	20	22	19	47	53	29	65

[1] Based on surveys conducted in the autumn of each year.
[2] Includes Thameslink (South).
[3] Includes arrivals on InterCity trains.

Factory Ships

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what inspections he has made of Russian Klondyke factory ships in United Kingdom coastal waters;

(2) what assessment he has made of the risks to human life of Russian Klondyke factory ships.

Mr. Norris: As with other merchant vessels, these factory ships are liable to inspection as part of the port state control regime when they are in port. Ships at sea are not usually inspected not least because of the problems of access. Following recent incidents it has become clear that there is cause for concern about these particular vessels. and my Department is taking special steps to carry out an intensified programme of inspections of these vessels this week if weather conditions permit. We shall also be considering what further steps can and should be taken to ensure that these vessels do not pose a danger in terms either of potential calls on our rescue services, or as a pollution threat to the United Kingdom coastline.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the risks of oil spillage from Russian Klondyke factory ships; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many Russian Klondyke factory ships are currently in United Kingdom coastal waters;

(3) how many Klondyke factory ships in each of the last five years have required assistance from *(a)* the coastguard rescue, *(b)* the Lerwick lifeboat and *(c)* Lerwick harbour.

Mr. Norris: On 22 November 1993, 98 Klondykers were known to be in United Kingdom waters. Of these about 60 are Russian.

In each of the last five years the number of occasions when assistance was given to Klondyke factory ships by *(a)* coastguard, *(b)* Lerwick lifeboat, and *(c)* Lerwick harbour was:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
(a)	2	8	8	7	16
(b)	1	0	4	1	9
(c)	1	0	0	1	3

On the basis of eight incidents in the last four years resulting in pollution from Klondykers followjng accidents the risk is significantly greater than for other types of ship in United Kingdom waters.

Inspections carried out on these vessels when they are in port have included consideration of their compliance with the international convention for the prevention of pollution from ships. These inspections have not indicated a particular risk of illegal oil discharges from these vessels.

PRIME MINISTER

Dartmouth (Visit)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will pay an official visit to Dartmouth, South Devon.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no immediate plans to do so.

Nuclear Tests (Radiation)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the current position on his consideration of the report by the National Radiological Protection Board into the effects of radiation on British service personnel involved in nuclear tests.

The Prime Minister: I understand that a follow-up report by the National Radiological Protection Board—NRPB—on cancer and mortality among nuclear test veterans is now undergoing peer review prior to publication. The Government know of no new evidence to change the position from the previous NRPB report, which showed that the total incidence of death and malignant disease among test veterans has been no greater than among people generally. We will of course study the follow-up report once it is published.

Identity Cards

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Prime Minister which Department will be conducting the investigation into the feasibility of a national identity card scheme.

The Prime Minister: The Government keep the question of a national identity card under review. The Department of Social Security is considering whether identity cards can contribute to the fight against benefit payment fraud.

Letters

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister how many officials in his office are currently involved in drafting replies to letters for him to sign.

The Prime Minister: Officials provide drafts as necessary.

Higher and Further Education

Mr. Madel: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to introduce a national awards scheme to recognise outstanding achievement by higher and further education institutions.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to inform the House that Her Majesty the Queen has given her approval to the introduction of a national awards scheme to be known as the Queen's anniversary prizes for higher and further education.

The proposal for these prizes was initiated by the Royal Anniversary Trust. This trust was formed to fund certain celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Queen's accession in 1992. The awards scheme will be funded and operated by that trust, using the residue of money remaining in it at the end of 1992, in collaboration with Her Majesty's Government.

The purpose of the scheme is to recognise projects of the widest scope which are judged to be of outstanding excellence in service and benefit to the nation. It will be held every two years commencing in 1994, when applications will be sought in January. The prizes will be presented by her Majesty the Queen at a ceremony, which on the first occasion will be in February 1995.

The scheme is a free-standing initiative but obviously draws much on the experience of the existing Queen's awards arrangements. There are, of course, other awards schemes for further and higher education institutions and there continues to be a place for them in their particular fields. This new and distinctive scheme complements those activities and usefully provides a new focus for a vital part of the nation's endeavour.

The Government regard it as essential that the substantial expansion of further and higher education opportunities should be accompanied by increases in attainment and quality. I pay tribute to the many colleges and universities across the country which continue to work hard for these ends. Success brings its own reward, but it is right that particular excellence should receive particular recognition.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 25 November.

The Lord President: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the Anglo-German summit in Cologne.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Patents

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria are being adopted by the Patent Office to determine whether there is a significant inventive step in establishing the structure and function of any given gene; and what will be the arrangements for informing the research community that patent applications in this area will no longer be considered.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Patents Act 1977 requires the Patent Office to assess whether an invention is obvious to a skilled person or involves an inventive step. The Patent Office must make a judgment based on all the information submitted by the applicant for a patent and what is known about a particular area of technology. In making any judgment in a case relating to a particular gene the degree of difficulty in locating it would be a factor to be taken into account in assessing whether isolation of a gene amounted to an invention.

Until such time as the existing law is modified or appropriate case law has been established by the courts it would be wrong for the Patent Office to circumscribe the ability of companies or individuals to apply for patents relating to genes.

Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the extent to which assurances given to him by Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. about its treatment of lessees since 1991 are being met; and what action he is taking to monitor compliance.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The assurances were given to Ministers in 1991 by all major brewers. They related to the sympathetic treatment of tenants who might have real difficulties in taking on a long-term lease, such as those nearing retirement, and to the introduction of independent arbitration procedures. None of the representations made to my Department has revealed that the assurances are not being met, but the Department has, where appropriate, sought IEL's comments on particular cases.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received about the activities of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My officials and I have received a number of letters from, and on behalf of, Inntrepreneur lessees. My officials held a meeting with representatives of the National Association of Inntrepreneur Lessees (NAIL) on 23 September. As the hon. Member knows, following my meeting with him on 22 July, I met him again on 1 November, together with a representative of NAIL, to discuss these matters.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many representations he has received expressing concern at the policies of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. has within the brewing industry; what has been the thrust of such representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 5 July 1993, *Official Report,* column *35.* Since answering this question 54 letters have been received from, or on behalf of, Inntrepreneur lessees. In addition, as the hon. Member is aware, I met him and a representative of the National Association of Inntrepreneur Lessees earlier this month. These representations have mainly been about rent levels.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has held with Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd with a view to bringing about a meeting between them and representatives of the National Association of Inntrepreneur Lessees; and what response he has received.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: As the hon. Member is aware from my letter to him of 22 November, I wrote to Mr. R. G. Williams, chairman and managing director of Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd, which manages the property arm of Inntrepreneur Estates Limited, about the possibility of the company meeting representatives of the National Association of Intrepreneur Lessees.

Mr. Williams has explained that his company does not propose to meet NAIL, although it has met with individual IEL lessees and a legal representative of theirs. He also explained that the company will be initiating meetings with individual hon. Members who have expressed an interest in IEL matters.

Brewery Industry

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent discussions he has held with Sir Allen Sheppard, chairman of Grand Metropolitan Estates, in respect of developments in the brewery industry; what issues were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has had no recent discussions with Sir Allen Sheppard in respect of developments in the brewing industry. Sponsorship of this industry is of course the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has on the number of public house closures since the Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) Order 1989 was introduced; how many of these were Inntrepreneur lessees; when he intends to review the operation of the Beer Orders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Neither my Department nor the Office of Fair Trading has any information on the number of public house closures or the former ownership of closed houses. Such information is not required to monitor compliance with the Beer Orders.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 27 May 1993, *Official Report,* column *694.*

Economic Development, Merseyside

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the persons and organisations on Merseyside he has met during the current year to discuss economic development issues.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has this year met representatives of a number of organisations on Merseyside concerned with economic development, ranging from the Merseyside development corporation to the Mersey Partnership.

Victoria Street Offices

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department vacated the offices at 1-16 Victoria street, London; and what future plans there are for their use.

Mr. Eggar: My Department vacated 1-19 Victoria street in September 1991. On our future plans, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 4 November 1993, *Official Report,* column *349.*

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the rent and other associated costs in 1993-94 for 1-19 Victoria street, London.

Mr. Eggar: The expenditure on rent, rates and associated costs in 1-19 Victoria street will be £1·5 million in 1993-94.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will announce the timetable for the review of the nuclear industry.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I made to the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 20 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *245.*

Car Industry

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people were employed in *(a)* car retailing and *(b)* car repairing and servicing in 1990, 1991 and 1992; and what is the estimated size of car dealers networks in each of those years.

Mr. Sainsbury: The latest figures available from the census of employment records 211,200 people employed in the retail distribution of motor vehicles and components in 1991 and 171,000 in the repair and servicing of motor vehicles. This compares with 210,200 and 193,000 respectively in 1989. No figures are available for 1990 or 1992. Published statistics are not available on the size of car dealer networks.

Post Office Privatisation

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many officials, by grade, in his Department are currently working on the privatisation of the Post Office.

Mr. McLoughlin: Officials working primarily on the Post Office review and the privatisation of Parcelforce are as follows: 1·5 grade 5s; 2·5 grade 7s; 1 HEO; 1 HEO(D); 0·5 personal secretary and 2 AAs. Higher grade officials are also involved in these matters as necessary.

Telecommunications Industry

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on competition in the telecommunications industry.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government continue to base their telecommunications policy on the 1991 White Paper, "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s", Cm 1461. We are firmly committed to greater competition and liberalisation in telecoms. These policies have created a vigorous sector to the benefit of both business and residential customers.

Consumer Affairs Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what matters were discussed and what decisions taken at the Consumer Affairs Council in Brussels on 19 November.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Council discussed the draft timeshare directive, and agreed on a common position by a qualified majority vote.

Indonesia

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what guarantees were received from the Government of Indonesia concerning the military uses of exports from Britain of vehicles, planes and other military equipment.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 24 November 1993]:* Each export licence application is treated on its merits on a case-by-case basis. Her Majesty's Government's policy on the export of defence equipment is based on the right of sovereign states to their own self defence in accordance with article 51 of the UN charter.

Her Majesty's Government has no reason to believe that military goods exported under licence to Indonesia have been used for internal security purposes. We have received assurances from the Indonesian Government as recently as this summer that the Hawk aircraft, for example, will not be used for internal security purposes.

Konver Funding

Mr. Burns: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce his decisions on the bids for Konver funding by Essex county council and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom Konver programme committee met on 24 November. I plan to announce the decisions early in December.

DEFENCE

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many types of gun or cannon his Department deploys which can fire depleted uranium bullets or shells.

Mr. Hanley: The British Armed Forces are currently equipped with two kinds of ammunition containing depleted uranium: 120mm tank ammunition and 20mm ammunition for the Royal Navy's Vulcan Phalanx point defence weapons system.

Firepower Measurements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department measures the explosive firepower of the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons in terms of megaton equivalents.

Mr. Aitken: The explosive power of the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons is measured in kilotonne and megatonne equivalents.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the megaton equivalent of a *(a)* 10 kilotonne, *(b)* 20 kilotonne, *(c)* 100 kilotonne and *(d)* 200 kilotonne nuclear warhead.

Mr. Aitken: One kilotonne is equivalent to 0·001 megatonnes.

Departmental Land, Plymouth

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and addresses of the sites owned by the Ministry of Defence within the Plymouth city boundary and indicate their current uses.

Mr. Hanley: A list of the freehold sites in the Plymouth area together with their current use is as follows:

Ministry of Defence freehold sites in Plymouth

Site/establishment	*Current use*
The Royal Citadel	29 Commando Regiment (Royal Artillery)
Millbay Park	Sports ground used by Service personnel from the Royal Citadel
Manadon	Royal Naval Engineering College
Bowden Park	Sports ground used by Service personnel from RNEC Manadon
Ernesettle	Royal Naval Armament Depot
Bull Point, St. Budeaux	Royal Naval Armament Depot and Royal Naval sports pitches
Western King	Public open space (let to Plymouth City Council)
HM Naval Base	Operational Naval Base including North Yard, South Yard, Morice Yard, Goschen Yard, HMS Defiance, Weston Mill area and other minor sites
Keyham Sports Ground	Royal Naval Sports Ground
HMS Drake	Shore based Royal Naval accommodation
Various married quarter sites throughout the Plymouth area	Residential accommodation for married Service personnel and their families
Fort Staddon	Royal Naval Wireless Station
Staddon Heights	Army training area and public open space
Radford Woods, Plymstock	Former Royal Naval Oil Fuel Depot
Barton Road, Turnchapel	Former Royal Naval Oil Fuel Depot
Mount Batten	Former Royal Air Force Station
Mount Wise, Devonport	HQ Flag Officer Plymouth
RNH Stonehouse, Plymouth	Royal Naval Hospital
Brickfields, Devonport	Royal Naval Sports Grounds
Rectory, Devonport	Services Rugby Ground
Royal William Yard, Stonehouse	Former Naval Stores Depot
Stonehouse Barracks	HQ 3 Brigade Royal Marines
Seaton Barracks	Commando Logistic Regiment and Royal Marine Training Area
RM Coypool	Commando Logistic Regiment, Royal Marines
RM Turnchapel	539 Assault Squadron, Royal Marines

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Ministry of Defence land and buildings in Plymouth he expects to be surplus to MOD requirement in the next five years and to be disposed of to the private sector.

Mr. Hanley: The following surplus sites are expected to be sold over the next five years:

Former RAF Mount Batten
Royal William Yard
Western King Open Space
Mount Wise (Part of Site)
Former oil fuel depots at Radford Woods, Plymstock and at Barton Road, Turnchapel
Royal Naval Hospital, Stonehouse
Hamoaze House
Seymour House
26 residential properties

A number of small sites are also expected to be sold.

The rationalisation of MOD landholdings and the early sale of surplus land and buildings is a key priority. Opportunities for release of future sites in Plymouth will be kept under review.

Housing, Scotland

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of houses owned by his Department in *(a)* Dundee and *(b)* Scotland; how many of these houses are currently empty; and how many of these houses which have been empty for (i) one to two years, (ii) two to three years and (iii) more than three years.

Mr. Hanley: As at 30 September 1993, MOD owned 63 married quarters in Dundee, of which 27 were vacant, and 6,504 married quarters in Scotland, of which 731 were vacant, as follows:

Married quarters vacant	*Dundee*	*Scotland*
Less than 1 year	6	596
Between 1-2 years	0	101
Over 2 years	21	34

Our statistics do not separately identify those properties which have been vacant for more than three years.

The majority of the vacant quarters were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, already allocated to service families who were due to move in shortly, or held for units returning from overseas. Following various studies, it has now been decided to sell a site in Dundee which contains 21 properties vacated because of structural problems.

MOD also owned 238 civilian houses throughout Scotland, of which 16 had been vacant for less then six months and 47 for over six months. Fifty-four of the vacant civilian houses were leased properties awaiting early return to Dumbarton district council.

In addition 80 vacant service married quarters and 29 vacant civilian houses were in the process of being sold.

Equipment Sales

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sums have been earned from sales of defence equipment to those countries whose Governments have received directly or indirectly substantial repayments of tax as a result of the exercise of sovereign immunity during each of the last seven years.

Mr. Aitken: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to reveal details of sales of defence equipment. Information relating to the value of such sales is published in table 1.11 of "UK Defence Statistics". A copy of the 1993 edition is available in the House Library.

Winter Supplies

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the adequacy of supplies of winter uniforms and equipment to British forces under United Nations command in Vitez, Gorni Vakuf and surrounding areas.

Mr. Hanley: Adequate supplies of clothing and equipment for the British troops are held in Bosnia and all personnel have at least the same sort of cold weather clothing as those in Germany including winter underwear and gloves. Although over 80 per cent. of troops deployed in the former Yugoslavia have their full complement of cold weather clothing some troops in Vitez have yet to be issued with the enhanced package due to the closure of the supply route between Vitez and Split by fighting between the rival factions and by bad weather. Movement along the route has now commenced following negotiations with local military commanders and the remaining clothing supplies for the British troops will be a high priority.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Priorities

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are his Department's overseas development priorities for this parliamentary session.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Overseas Development Administration's priority objectives for the current financial year are set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report 1993, Cm 2202.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development described ODA's priority objectives for 1994-95 in a speech she made to the Royal Institute of International Affairs on 18 October. Copies of the report and the speech are in the Libraries of the House.

Forests

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government is taking to promote the implementation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development forest principles internationally.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 13 September my noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey and the Indian Minister of Environment and Forests, Kamal Nath, signed a memorandum of understanding establishing an Indo-British forestry initiative to work towards improved international co-operation on forest issues. The United Kingdom and India will together promote progress on the implementation of the UNCED forest principles and the success of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development's review of forestry in 1995.

My noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey has written to the chairman of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, Ambassador Razali, and the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Policy Co-ordination and Sustainable Development, Mr. Desai, proposing that the United Kingdom and India should jointly host an international workshop in 1994 to prepare for this review.

EDUCATION

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the specific purpose grants given to grant-maintained schools in south Yorkshire for each financial year since 1991-92, including the current year; and what was the purpose of each grant.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following self governing schools in South Yorkshire have received special purpose grants—SPGs:

School	*Amount paid (£) for each financial year* 1992-93	1993-94
Clifford C E First School, Sheffield		
SPG (Transitional)	21,834	—
SPG (Development)	2,915	4,985
SPG (Restructuring)	11,136	—
SPG (VAT)	1,044	4,141
SPG (Premises)	—	920
All Saints RC School, Sheffield		
SPG (Transitional)	—	59,640
SPG (Development)	—	24,490
SPG (VAT)	—	[1]31,391
Notre Dame School, Sheffield		
SPG (Transitional)	—	50,610
SPG (Development)	—	22,436
SPG (Restructuring)	—	8,652
SPG (VAT)	—	[1]28,664
St. John Fisher RC (VA) Primary, Sheffield		
SPG (Transitional)	—	24,338
SPG (Development)	—	4,863
SPG (VAT)	—	4,298

[1] Provisional figures to be finalised.

The purpose of each of the SPGs is as follows:

Special Purpose Grant (Transitional)
Available to help with the costs incurred as a result of the school's acquisition of self governing status.

Special Purpose Grant (Development)
Available to fund management training, staff development and implementation of the national curriculum.

Special Purpose Grant (Restructuring)
Available to help with essential staff restructuring which involves costs arising from premature retirement, redundancy or voluntary severance of teaching staff.

Special Purpose Grant (VAT)
Compensates for the payment of VAT on supplies and services, which self governing schools may not claim back.

Special Purpose Grant (Premises)
Assists self governing schools with the additional cost of school premises insurance.

Schools (Newspapers and Books)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent by London schools on newspapers and books in the last available year.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is not collected centrally in the form requested. The 33 inner and outer London local education authorities spent a total of over £61 million on books and equipment in nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in 1991-92, the latest year for which figures are available.

University College, Dearne Valley

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects the proposed university college to be situated on the Dearne valley to be in operation.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for those involved in the project. I understand that the University of Sheffield is considering its plans in the light of consultation with the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fish Conservation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make it her policy to take steps to suspend the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1993, and replace it with the proposals put forward by the National Federation of Fisheries Organisations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have given very careful consideration to the proposals put forward by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations but I shall not make a statement until the High Court has delivered its judgment in the federation's judicial review proceeding. The changes to fisheries policy covered the NFFO document "Conservation: An Alternative Approach" would not require the suspension of the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1993.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement about bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Soames: A further progress report on BSE in Great Britain for the period up to 29 October is available today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House. The report details increasingly firm evidence that the ruminant feed ban is effective in controlling the epidemic in the way which has been predicted. The number of suspect cases of BSE reported in the last three months is 12·7 per cent. below that for the same period last year, 10,270 cases in 1993 compared with 11,759 cases in 1992. There is also a dramatic reduction in the number of cases occurring in younger animals.

Wind Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how her Department was represented at the conference on wind energy opportunities on farms held in Stoneleigh on 11 November.

Mr. Jack: The conference was attended by an ADAS officer and an assistant regional planning advisor.

Meat Inspection

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what savings she expects the new meat inspection rules to bring to the meat industry; what supervision will be carried out to ensure standards are maintained; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The introduction of the new poultry meat inspection system will result in reductions in poultry meat inspection costs estimated in July 1993 at £1·75 million. There will however be costs associated with the employment and training of poultry inspection assistants which the industry will be expected to bear.

Poultry inspection assistants will work under the supervision of the official veterinarian of a member of his team who will ensure standards are maintained.

Premiums and Arable Area Payments

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the dates of payment of sheep and beef premium and arable area payments including set-aside for 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Jack: In England payments under the 1993 sheep annual premium scheme started on 5 October 1993 and 77 per cent. of claims had been paid by 19 November. Advance payments under the 1993 beef special premium scheme began in the middle of November and for the 1993 suckler cow premium scheme are expected to start in January. The remainder of the premium due for both these schemes will be paid between April and June 1994.

The first advance oilseeds payments under the 1992-93 arable area payments scheme were made on 26 August 1993 and over 99 per cent. of claims had been paid by 30 September. Payments for oilseeds, cereals, proteins and set aside started on 20 October 1993. Payments under the 1994 sheep annual premium scheme and the 1993-94 arable area payments scheme are not due until next year.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will now publish county-based figures with respect for the arable area payments scheme.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Wastes (Sea Disposal)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the meeting of the London convention on sea disposal of wastes, held in London on 8 to 12 November; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the final declaration and the statement made by the United Kingdom to the meeting.

Mr. Jack: The consultative meeting of the London convention held on 8 to 12 November considered and adopted four resolutions in furtherance of the process of amending the convention. These resolutions established: a ban on the disposal of radioactive wastes at sea; a ban on the sea disposal of industrial wastes; a ban with some exemptions, on the incineration of wastes at sea; a commitment to undertake a thorough review of the other provisions of the convention.

The United Kingdom fully supported the resolutions on industrial waste, incineration and the amendment process.

We abstained from the vote on the disposal of radioactive wastes and are currently considering the implications of the decisions on this matter. The United Kingdom delegation made no formal declaration or statement to the meeting but we were able to emphasise the United Kingdom's desire to see practical steps taken and properly applied to ensure protection of the marine environment and was able to report that, in advance of the present amendments, the United Kingdom had already terminated all dumping of industrial wastes and incineration at sea.

Drift Net Fishing

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives she is planning to take at the European Council of Fisheries Ministers meeting on 22 November to ensure that other member states do not extend the phase-out period for drift net fishing.

Mr. Jack: No mention was made of drift nets at the Fisheries Council on 22 November. The derogation permitting a limited use by France of drift nets up to 5 km long expires on 31 December 1993 unless the Commission makes a proposal to extend the derogation, and the Council accepts it. Should any such proposal be made, I will scrutinise it very closely to see whether the requirement in the regulation, that no ecological risk would be involved, is fully met.

Beef

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list for each month for the last two years the average market price of beef together with the tonnage going into intervention in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table:

United Kingdom intervention intake and beef prices October 1991 to September 1993

	Intervention intake in tonnes	*Prices in pence per kilogramm (liveweight)*
1991		
November	14,662	95·07
December	5,418	96·34
1992		
January	8,306	98·3
February	8,046	99·23
March	9,045	100·15
April	6,722	101·34
May	7,221	101·12
June	6,554	103
July	4,228	102·99
August	5,431	102·7
September	14,073	100·81
October	14,144	100·67
November	9,770	104·58
December	4,661	107·29
1993		
January	8,871	108·54
February	6,765	116·53
March	1,713	122·2
April	2,992	126·7
May	0	132·05
June	0	133·65
July	0	121·49
August	0	122·61
September	380	111·53
October	475	112·51

Note: The price given is the cattle reference price. This liveweight price indicates the price for cattle paid by the wholesaler and received by the producer.

Animal Diseases

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farms have been placed under movement restrictions as a consequence of the recent outbreak of *(a)* brucellosis and *(b)* warble fly; in which counties the herds infected are located; and how many are affected in each of those counties by each of those infections.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: One farm in Gywnedd, where brucellosis infection has been confirmed following culture of the relevant organism, has been placed under movement restrictions. Two farms in Cheshire where cattle have reacted positively to the serological test for brucellosis have also been placed under movement restrictions.

Thirty-nine premises in the following counties were placed under movement restrictions between April and July 1993 following confirmation of warbles infestation in imported cattle. Treatment notices were served on all farms within 3km of the above premises this autumn resulting in a further 1,490 farms placed under restriction pending treatment.

County	*Number*
Avon	2
Ayrshire	1
Bedfordshire	1
Cheshire	8
Cornwall	1
Devon	2
Dorset	1
Dyfed	1
Gloucestershire	1
Hampshire	2
Kent	1
Lancashire	1
Lothian	1
Oxfordshire	1
Shropshire	3
Somerset	6
Staffordshire	1
West Sussex	1
Wiltshire	3
Worcestershire	1

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle in total have tested positive for *(a)* brucellosis and *(b)* warble fly; how many of these were infected before entering the United Kingdom; how many have contracted the disease in this country; from which countries the infected cattle originated; and what known risks there were in those countries of brucellosis or warble fly which could be calculated to present a danger if animals were to be imported into the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since 1 September 1993, 21 cattle in Great Britain have reacted positively to serological tests for brucellosis. Disease has been confirmed by culture in nine animals, one of which was imported from France. Detailed epidemiological investigations to determine the source of infection are continuing. We understand that a small number of cattle herds in France are infected with brucellosis and are under restriction. However, all cattle imported into the United Kingdom from all member states must originate from officially brucellosis-free herds—as defined in Community rules—and must be tested negative for brucellosis within the 30 days prior to export.

Two hundred and twenty-one cattle imported from France between January and July 1993 proved to be infested with warble fly. The annual United Kingdom serum survey for warble fly currently being undertaken has so far disclosed four positive reactions. One of these animals was imported from France: the origin of the other three animals is at present unknown. There is a high incidence of warble fly in France, in common with a number of other member states. It is a legal requirement that all cattle imported into the United Kingdom, except those for immediate slaughter, must be treated within 24 hours of arrive for warble fly.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle infected with brucellosis have been slaughtered; and how many humans have been infected by the disease; and by what means the disease was transmitted from cattle to humans.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since 1 September 1993, 15 cattle which reacted positively to the serological test for brucellosis have been slaughtered, in nine of which the disease was confirmed; no humans have been infected. In the past, humans caught the disease by direct contact with infected cattle or by consumption of unpasteurised milk or milk products. There is no risk of infection from the consumption of pasteurised milk or milk products or from meat.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the estimated costs incurred by her Department in connection with arrangements for containing the risk from the presence of animals tested positive to foot and mouth, equine viral ateritis, warble fly and brucellosis, tracking down and testing the infected animals, publicising each threat, slaughtering the affected animals and compensating the losses where eligible; and what additional costs were incurred.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total cost in both nominal and real terms for each year since 1979 to her Department of programmes for tackling animal diseases imported into the United Kingdom which had previously been deemed to be eradicated.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Compensation paid to farmers by Agriculture Departments following compulsory slaughter of their stock for the diseases specified was, for the years indicated, as follows:

	1981 £	*1984* £	*1986* £	*1987* £	*1992* £
Foot and Mouth Disease	91,414	—	—	—	—
Newcastle Disease	—	816,325	—	—	—
Classical Swine Fever	—	—	451,435	276,525	—
Avian Influenza	—	—	—	—	6,202

Estimation of other expenditure specifically associated with these disease outbreaks would involve the Department in disproportionate costs.

New Forest (Hunting)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will provide details of the terms and conditions of the licences issued by the Forestry Commission to the New Forest buckhounds allowing them to hunt in the New Forest.

Mr. Jack: A copy of the permit issued by the Forestry Commission to the New Forest buckhounds for the 1992-93 season is already in the Library of the House. The permit for the 1993-94 season has the same terms and conditions.

NORTHERN IRELAND

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS in each year since 1989.

Mr. Ancram: The information is as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Administrative and Clerical	[1]6,066	5,939	6,200	6,568	6,671
Managerial	[2]—	497	723	926	950
Nursing and Midwifery	17,667	17,829	17,454	16,826	15,825

Notes: Figures are expressed in whole time equivalent.
[1]Includes managerial staff.
[2]Not available.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the total salary costs for *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS in each year since 1989.

Mr. Ancram: Total salary costs are as follows:

	1989-90 £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Administrative and clerical	46,818,579	52,828,708	59,612,780	68,802,552
Managerial	8,884,824	13,341,551	19,322,078	21,838,204
Nursing and midwifery	190,911,768	205,822,687	227,698,352	242,791,513

This information is not available in the form requested for the financial year 1988-89.

HEALTH

Private Ambulance Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received with regard to the regulation of private ambulance services; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what disciplinary action has been taken against those officials of the Guy's—St. Thomas's National Health Service Trust responsible for the awarding of a contract to Belmont ambulance service.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for the Guy's and St. Thomas's hospital trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Lord Hayhoe, the chairman, for details.

Lost Working Days

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a table showing different categories of sickness, ill health and injury and the number of working days lost for each category in 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: There is no information available centrally on the breakdown of working days lost by health related disease. The hon. Gentleman may wish to contact the Confederation of British Industry for details of its survey.

Suicide

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest available figures for the number of officially recorded suicides in the United Kingdom showing men and women separately for *(a)* all persons aged 18 years and over, *(b)* all persons aged 30 to 55 years, *(c)* all persons aged 18 years and over who were unemployed at the date of suicide and *(d)* all persons aged 30 to 55 years who were unemployed at the date of suicide.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of people who have been recorded as having committed suicide and who were unemployed is not available. At death registration informants are asked for last occupation rather than employment status of the deceased.

The table shows suicide deaths ICD E950-E959[1] by sex for ages 18 and over and 30 to 55 years for England and Wales for 1992. Data for 1992 are provisional.

1992	*18+*	*30-55*
Males	3,026	1,536
Females	895	371

[1] International Classification of Disease Code Ninth Revision.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each civil service grade in her Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Sackville: The information shows the position on 1 November 1993:

Total number of staff employed in the Department of Health

Grade (including grade equivalents)	*Total*	*Women*
Grade 1	3	0
Grade 2	8	0
Grade 3	25	5
Grade 4	28	11
Grade 5	211	79
Grade 6	135	45
Grade 7	571	151
SEO	413	121
HEO(D)	22	11
HEO	716	329
AT	8	4
EO	966	560
AO	1,376	1,003
AA	580	345
Others	178	79
TOTALS	5,240	2,743

Notes:

1. Professional grades have been shown under their equivalent unified grade.
2. The "Others" category relates to youth treatment service direct care staff and YTS industrial staff.
3. Casual members of staff have been excluded. In addition, the following staff have been excluded because they are not currently being paid by the Department:
   on loan to other government departments;
   on maternity leave of more than three months;
   on unpaid career breaks/study leave.

Community Care

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to amend the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Provisions relating to community care in England and Wales were contained in part III of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. We have no plans to amend those provisions.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether her Department is conducting research into the budget allocation between the national health service and social services as set out in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Bowis: No. The Act does not set out budgets for the national health service or for social services.

GP Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure per head of population in each family health services authority area on general practitioner services, separately identifying general practitioner fund-holders in 1990-91 and 1991-92, in cash and standard prices; and what expenditure per head was attributable to expenditure on behalf of the under five, five to 15, 16 to 64, and 64 plus years age groups.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will bring forward proposals to amend the contract between family health services authorities and general practitioners so that patients are able to make formal complaints about the staff employed by general practitioners.

Dr. Mawhinney: The contract to which the hon. Member refers is the statutory arrangement—known as the terms of service—under which general practitioners provide general medical services for the national health service. Where staff employed by a GP carry out duties within the terms of service on the GP's behalf, complaints about the performance of those duties can already be made using the formal complaints procedure. Professor Alan Wilson of Leeds university is chairing a full review of national health service complaints systems which is due to report at the turn of the year.

Birth Statistics

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many live births have been recorded *(a)* per region and *(b)* per hospital for each year over the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The numbers of live births by usual residence of mother for health regions in England, and for Wales, are shown in the table. Information on the number of live births per hospital could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Area of usual residence	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Northern	39,117	39,248	40,878	40,239	40,404	40,105	39,097	40,656	41,128	40,003
Yorkshire	46,507	46,672	48,022	48,340	49,344	49,972	49,637	51,187	50,769	49,703
Trent	57,165	57,652	58,751	59,284	61,050	61,618	61,666	63,571	63,129	62,142
East Anglian	23,075	23,685	24,487	24,592	25,799	26,600	25,979	26,590	26,288	26,095
North West Thames	45,596	46,207	47,468	48,124	49,633	50,639	49,666	50,793	51,459	51,992
North East Thames	49,894	51,228	52,006	52,959	55,314	56,466	56,094	57,999	57,059	56,968
South East Thames	44,007	44,644	46,902	47,558	49,956	51,402	51,073	52,086	51,412	51,313
South West Thames	34,688	34,908	36,367	36,734	38,236	39,258	38,822	40,101	39,975	40,229
Wessex	33,044	33,810	34,957	35,772	37,175	37,942	37,810	38,571	37,122	37,205
Oxford	30,948	31,811	33,070	33,201	34,661	35,698	35,809	36,424	36,187	36,076
South Western	35,523	36,193	37,560	38,119	39,840	40,981	40,772	41,090	40,342	40,125
West Midlands	68,224	68,726	70,351	70,408	72,469	72,809	73,346	75,092	74,210	71,992
Mersey	31,850	31,601	32,889	32,712	32,788	33,515	32,934	33,771	33,361	31,675
North Western	53,617	54,188	55,593	55,567	56,661	57,358	56,652	58,989	58,365	56,266
Wales	35,494	35,861	36,771	37,038	37,816	38,824	38,019	38,866	38,079	37,523

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many still births have been recorded in the United Kingdom *(a)* per region and *(b)* per hospital; and what percentage they have been of live births over the past 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information for England and Wales per region for 1991 and 1992 is shown in the table. The information relating to still births recorded by region for the years 1982-1990 is available from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys annual reference volume DH3 mortality statistics, perinatal and infant: social and biological factors, table 7b, copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on the number of still births per hospital could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Still births by regional health authority, England and Wales 1991 and 1992

	1991	*[1]Rate*	*1992*	*[1]Rate*
England	3,072	4·6	2,777	4·2
Wales	177	4·6	153	4·1
Northern	220	5·3	157	3·9
Yorkshire	235	4·6	220	4·4
Trent	318	5·0	297	4·8
East Anglian	112	4·2	105	4·0
North West Thames	238	4·6	220	4·2
North East Thames	271	4·7	229	4·0
South East Thames	226	4·4	246	4·8
South West Thames	174	4·3	140	3·5
Wessex	160	4·3	155	4·1
Oxford	153	4·2	116	3·2
South Western	166	4·1	164	4·0
West Midlands	376	5·0	319	4·4
Mersey	141	4·2	116	3·6
North Western	282	4·8	293	5·2

[1]Stillbirths per 1,000 live and still births.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Newham General Hospital

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the procedure to be followed, and bodies responsible for any decision, for the closure of Newham general hospital *(a)* as a directly managed unit or *(b)* as a trust within the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: There is a statutory requirement for district health authorities and family health services authorities to consult community health councils over any proposals to make substantial variations in the provision of local health services. Where a variation in service is the consequence of a decision taken by a national health service trust the responsibility for consultation remains with the DHA or FHSA. Ministers reserve to themselves the final decision where a closure is contested.

We are not aware of any closure proposal affecting Newham general hospital.

NHS Bed Bureaux

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will publish a table showing the volume of work undertaken by NHS bed bureaux for each year since 1989;

(2) if she will publish a table showing every bed bureau operating within the NHS and the location of each for each year since 1989.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Arrangements made by health authorities and trusts for coping with particularly high levels of admissions to hospital will vary according to local circumstances.

Anti-depressant Drugs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing *(a)* total and *(b)* per capita expenditure on anti-depressant drugs in each family health services authority area; and for each NHS region, during 1992-93.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information for the calendar year 1992 is shown in the table. The cost information is in terms of net ingredient cost, that is the basic cost of the drugs before discount and excluding dispensing costs and fees.

The antidepressant drugs are those shown in section 4.3 of the "British National Formulary".

Antidepressant drugs—British National Formulary section 4.3
England 1992

	Family Health Service Authority	*Net ingredient cost (£ thousands)*	*Net ingredient cost per head of population (£)*
321	Cleveland	1,044·7	1·87
322	Cumbria	1,050·2	2·14
323	Durham	1,368·7	2·25
324	Northumberland	634·3	2·06
325	Gateshead	453·6	2·23
326	Newcastle	548·3	1·95
327	North Tyneside	467·7	2·40
328	South Tyneside	246·3	1·57
329	Sunderland	555·4	1·87
	Northern RHA	6,369·1	2·06
341	Humberside	1,434·9	1·63
342	North Yorkshire	1,214·1	1·68
343	Bradford	985·6	2·06
344	Calderdale	347·0	1·79
345	Kirklees	728·1	1·90
346	Leeds	1,506·7	2·09
347	Wakefield	516·1	1·63
	Yorkshire RHA	6,732·5	1·82
361	Derbyshire	1,416·6	1·50
362	Leicestershire	1,652·0	1·83
363	Lincolnshire	1,303·7	2·18
364	Nottinghamshire	1,389·8	1·36
365	Barnsley	383·8	1·71
366	Doncaster	515·9	1·76
367	Rotherham	375·0	1·47
368	Sheffield	873·9	1·65
	Trent RHA	7,910·8	1·66
381	Cambridgeshire	953·0	1·41
382	Norfolk	1,622·3	2·13
383	Suffolk	1,265.1	1·95
	East Anglia RHA	3,840·5	1·84
401	Bedfordshire	795·7	1·48
402	Hertfordshire	1,571·2	1·58
403	Barnet	385·0	1·27
404	Brent and Harrow	495·6	1·10
405	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	853·7	1·32
406	Hillingdon	263·3	1·11
407	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	601·2	1·79
	North West Thames RHA	4,965·6	1·42
421	Essex	2,373·1	1·53
422	Barking and Havering	403·3	1·07
423	Camden and Islington	567·5	1·60
424	City and East London	681·1	1·16
425	Enfield and Harringey	536·8	1·13
426	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	591·5	1·31
	North East Thames RHA	5,153·4	1·36
441	East Sussex	1,418·9	1·97
442	Kent	2,278·2	1·48
443	Bexley and Greenwich	496·5	1·14
444	Bromley	434·4	1·48
445	Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	860·0	1·18
	South East Thames RHA	5,488·0	1·48
461	Surrey	1·824·8	1·76
462	West Sussex	1,182·3	1·66
463	Croydon	413·1	1·29
464	Kingston and Richmond	546·4	1·80
465	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	891·8	1·46
	South West Thames RHA	4,858·5	1·63
481	Dorset	1,281·5	1·93
482	Hampshire	2,758·6	1·74
483	Wiltshire	1,095·2	1·89
484	Isle of Wight	334·9	2·67
	Wessex RHA	5,470·2	1·85
501	Berkshire	1,253·4	1·65
502	Buckinghamshire	806·8	1·25
503	Northamptonshire	890·1	1·51
504	Oxfordshire	827·1	1·41
	Oxford RHA	3,777·4	1·46
521	Avon	1,262·9	1·30
522	Cornwall	865·2	1·82
523	Devon	1,755·9	1·68
524	Gloucestershire	940·7	1·74
525	Somerset	629·9	1·33
—	South Western RHA	5,454·6	1·56
541	Hereford and Worcester	1,013·4	1·47
542	Shropshire	654·1	1·58
543	Staffordshire	1,863·8	1·77
544	Warwickshire	702·0	1·43
545	Birmingham	1,705·0	1·69
546	Coventry	413·5	1·36
547	Dudley	397·4	1·28
548	Sandwell	541·6	1·84
549	Solihull	359·0	1·79
551	Walsall	445·1	1·69
552	Wolverhampton	493·5	1·99
—	West Midlands RHA	8,588·4	1·63
561	Cheshire	1,778·9	1·84
562	Liverpool	951·4	1·99
563	St. Helens and Knowsley	581·4	1·73

Family Health Service Authority		Net ingredient cost (£ thousands)	Net ingredient cost per head of population (£)
564	Sefton	585·0	1·98
565	Wirral	682·4	2·04
—	Mersey RHA	4,579·1	1·90
581	Lancashire	2,712·0	1·92
582	Bolton	427·6	1·62
583	Bury	370·5	2·05
584	Manchester	975·3	2·24
585	Oldham	304·4	1·38
586	Rochdale	489·1	2·38
587	Salford	509·1	2·21
588	Stockport	686·7	2·38
589	Tameside	370·1	1·68
591	Trafford	490·0	2·27
592	Wigan	595·0	1·90
—	North Western RHA	7,929·6	1·99
—	England	81,117·6	1·68

Notes:

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
2. BNF section based on the September 1991 BNF.
3. For net ingredient cost per head OPCS 1991 mid-year resident population projections for 1992 have been used.

Birth Defects

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of cranial synostosis have occurred per 100,000 births in each health authority over the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is in the table:

Incidence of certain anomalies of development of bones of head including cranio synostosis[1]: single years, 1983-92 for the regional health authorities of England and for Wales

Rates per 100,000 births

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
England and Wales	32	26	31	28	28	17	15	15	15	11
England	34	32	27	32	29	29	17	16	16	11
Wales	22	22	8	8	13	13	24	8	3	8
Northern	20	33	46	30	30	42	43	17	15	17
Yorkshire	28	38	29	33	26	18	22	16	20	8
Trent	78	48	52	37	54	48	32	28	11	19
East Anglian	22	34	37	28	31	22	35	26	34	8
North West Thames	39	37	27	33	24	41	42	15	23	10
North East Thames	20	31	23	17	27	23	28	12	12	14
South East Thames	25	16	19	23	36	19	29	13	12	12
South West Thames	17	34	16	16	39	53	46	17	5	20
Wessex	30	56	40	22	24	18	32	13	5	8
Oxford	23	22	57	36	23	31	14	31	30	6
South Western	36	3	24	18	27	15	15	10	15	12
West Midlands	63	39	34	20	27	18	23	11	15	4
Mersey	9	44	21	30	33	33	15	12	15	19
North Western	15	37	25	30	42	29	35	20	19	7

[1] These data have been selected using code 756.0 of the International Classification of Disease (9th Revision). This code covers anomalies of the skull and face bones and includes cranio synostosis. The data presented are taken from the National Congenital Malformation Notification Scheme. This scheme is voluntary and includes all malformations identified at or within 10 days of birth. The system may not be very effective in identifying all cases of cranio synostosis as many cases do not become apparent for some months.

Nannies

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will bring forward proposals to require the registration of nannies as suggested by the Professional Association of Nursery Nurses; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: No. Parents who employ a nanny to care for their children in their own home are responsible for making the arrangements and are well placed to ensure that the nanny is taking good care of their children.

Asthma

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the expenditure on general practitioner prescribed anti-asthma medication and preparations in each family health services authority area in 1992-93; and if he will express that as an expenditure figure per head.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information for the calendar year 1992 is shown in the table. The cost information is in terms of net ingredient cost, that is, the basic cost of the drugs before discount and excluding dispensing costs and fees.

The drugs used for the treatment of asthma are those shown in the following "British National Formulary" sections:

3.1—Bronchodilators
3.2—Corticosteroids
3.3—Cromoglycate and related therapy.

Drugs for the treatment of asthma—British National Formulary sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3
England 1992

Family health services authority		Net ingredient cost (£ thousands)	Net ingredient cost per head of population (£)
321	Cleveland	3,599·1	6·43
322	Cumbria	3,186·6	6·50
323	Durham	4,413·7	7·27
324	Northumberland	2,393·4	7·79
325	Gateshead	1,367·9	6·74

Family health services authority		Net ingredient cost (£ thousands)	Net ingredient cost per head of population (£)
326	Newcastle	1,995·6	7·08
327	North Tyneside	1,315·6	6·74
328	South Tyneside	1,073·6	6·83
329	Sunderland	2,185·2	7·35
	Northern RHA	21,530·8	6·95
341	Humberside	5,525·3	6·27
342	North Yorkshire	4,245·0	5·87
343	Bradford	2,869·4	6·01
344	Calderdale	1,302·9	6·72
345	Kirklees	2,338·2	6·10
346	Leeds	4,597·6	6·37
347	Wakefield	2,498·5	7·88
	Yorkshire RHA	23,376·8	6·32
361	Derbyshire	6,030·0	6·37
362	Leicestershire	5,959·0	6·60
363	Lincolnshire	4,151·4	6·96
364	Nottinghamshire	6,605·2	6·44
365	Barnsley	1,535·8	6·83
366	Doncaster	2,284·3	7·78
367	Rotherham	1,559·4	6·11
368	Sheffield	3,665·3	6·90
	Trent RHA	31,790·3	6·66
381	Cambridgeshire	3,983·5	5·88
382	Norfolk	5,007·3	6·56
383	Suffolk	3,995·4	6·17
	East Anglia RHA	12,986·2	6·22
401	Bedfordshire	3,130·3	5·83
402	Hertfordshire	6,158·2	6·19
403	Barnet	1,531·6	5·07
404	Brent and Harrow	2,514·0	5·56
405	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	3,542·9	5·48
406	Hillingdon	1,237·3	5·21
407	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1,637·1	4·88
	North West Thames RHA	19,751·5	5·64
421	Essex	8,310·0	5·34
422	Barking and Havering	1,885·0	4·99
423	Camden and Islington	1,947·3	5·48
424	City and East London	3,304·3	5·64
425	Enfield and Harringey	2,253·4	4·76
426	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	2,164·2	4·81
	North East Thames RHA	19,864·5	5·23
441	East Sussex	4,402·0	6·11
442	Kent	7,763·1	5·05
443	Bexley and Greenwich	2,367·8	5·45
444	Bromley	1,381·2	4·71
445	Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark	4,001·2	5·51
	South East Thames RHA	19,915·3	5·36
461	Surrey	5,417·1	5·23
462	West Sussex	4,455·2	6·25
463	Croydon	1,422·5	4·44
464	Kingston and Richmond	1,664·0	5·49
465	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	3,248·2	5·32
	South West Thames RHA	16,206·9	5·43
481	Dorset	4,054·0	6·10
482	Hampshire	8,819·2	5·56
483	Wiltshire	3,358·2	5·80
484	Isle of Wight	984·2	7·84
	Wessex RHA	17,215·7	5·82
501	Berkshire	4,922·1	6·49
502	Buckinghamshire	3,658·8	5·67
503	Northamptonshire	3,469·8	5·88
504	Oxfordshire	3,405·6	5·80
	Oxford RHA	15,456·2	5·99
521	Avon	5,377·3	5·55
522	Cornwall	3,405·3	7·16
523	Devon	6,931·8	6·63
524	Gloucestershire	4,094·4	7·56
525	Somerset	2,560·9	5·42
	South Western RHA	22,369·7	6·39
541	Hereford and Worcester	4,965·5	7·19
542	Shropshire	3,218·3	7·80
543	Staffordshire	6,628·2	6·30
544	Warwickshire	4,195·3	8·53
545	Birmingham	6,530·5	6·47
546	Coventry	1,949·2	6·40
547	Dudley	1,640·1	5·27
548	Sandwell	2,203·9	7·49
549	Solihull	1,421·6	7·08
551	Walsall	1,785·5	6·78
552	Wolverhampton	1,424·0	5·75
	West Midlands RHA	35,962·2	6·81
561	Cheshire	6,448·1	6·67
562	Liverpool	3,315·0	6·92
563	St. Helens and Knowsley	2,487·8	7·39
564	Sefton	1,971·9	6·69
565	Wirral	2,460·1	7·34
	Mersey RHA	16,682·9	6·92
581	Lancashire	10,375·9	7·34
582	Bolton	1,944·6	7·37
583	Bury	1,362·8	7·55
584	Manchester	3,625·5	8·34
585	Oldham	1,485·3	6·74
586	Rochdale	2,011·9	9·78
587	Salford	1,931·4	8·39
588	Stockport	2,003·3	6·94
589	Tameside	1,487·1	6·73
591	Trafford	1,640·4	7·60
592	Wigan	2,331·2	7·46
	North Western RHA	30,199·5	7·57
	England	303,308·4	6·27

Notes:

1. The data cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered.
2. BNF section based on the September 1991 BNF.
3. For net ingredient cost per head OPCS 1991 mid year resident population projections for 1992 have been used.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget allocated to community care is being spent on *(a)* residential nursing homes and *(b)* nursing homes by each separate health authority.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Private Patients

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private patients have been using national health service paid beds in each of the four regional health authorities covering the Greater London area for the first 10 months of 1993.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the four Thames regional health authorities for details.

NHS Management Executive

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the number of people employed by the NHS management executive for each year since its inception.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister for Health gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 25 May 1993 at column *506*.

Scarborough Health Services

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what capital developments have been implemented by the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire health trust since its establishment.

Mr. Sackville: The Department collects information on schemes costing over £1 million. No scheme of that value has been implemented since the establishment of the trust. The hon. member may wish to contact the trust chairman, Mr. Tom Pindar, for details on any scheme costing £1 million or less.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent *(a)* medical, *(b)* nursing, *(c)* administrative and clinical and *(d)* other staff were employed (i) by Scarborough health authority on 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1991 and (ii) by Scarborough health authority and Scarborough and North East Yorkshire health trust on 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information available is shown in the table.

Staff groups within Scarborough district health authority and North East Yorkshire health national health service trust 1989-92 (whole time equivalent)

	September 1989	*September 1990*	*September 1991*	*September 1992*
Medical and Dental	60	60	70	130
Nursing and Midwifery	890	940	970	990
Administrative and Clerical	220	240	n/a	270
Others	540	560	210	610
Total	1,710	1,790	1,250	1,990

Notes:
All figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
n/a—Indicates that the figures are not available.
The 1991 "Others" figure only includes direct care staff not included elsewhere, no management/support staff are included.
The 1992 "Administrative and Clerical" and "Others" field will not include any management/support staff from Scarborough DHA.
The "Medical and Dental" figures include consultants and associated specialists in 1992 only.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the HCHS revenue budget allocated to Scarborough health authority in 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94; and what budget would have been awarded to the authority in each of these years if his Department's and Yorkshire Health's capitation funding formulae had been applied in full.

Mr. Sackville: Revenue allocations to district health authorities are the responsibility of regional health authorities and detailed information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Brian Askew, chairman of Yorkshire regional health authority for details.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people presenting themselves at the accident and emergency department at Scarborough district were attended to within five minutes in each month of 1993.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Tom Pindar, the chairman of Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS trust for details.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rewards and incentives beyond the pre-existing Whitley Council arrangements have been introduced for the staff at Scarborough district hospital since the creation of the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire health trust.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Tom Pindar, chairman of the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare national health service trust for details.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what surplus or deficit on HCHS revenue spending was achieved by Scarborough health authority in 1990-91 and 1991-92 and by Scarborough and North East Yorkshire health trust in 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: The Scarborough health authority recorded a deficit of £924,000 in 1990-91 and a surplus of £29,512 in 1991-92 on hospital community health services revenue spending. The figure for 1990-91 is not comparable with the figures for 1991-92 because of the introduction of capital charges and changes to accounting policies following the introduction of the internal market. Scarborough and North East Yorkshire health trust recorded a deficit of £528,000 in 1992-93.

Oxendon House, Leighton Buzzard

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions her Department has had with Bedfordshire county council about the future of Oxendon house, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: The Department has been kept informed about recent developments in relation to Bedfordshire county council's children's home, Oxendon house. I understand that the acting principal of the home has been arrested and charged by the police and that four other members of staff have been suspended. Following advice from the social services inspectorate, the county council is conducting an investigation into allegations of inappropriate therapies and restraint techniques and the general culture of the home. Meanwhile the home has been closed, the children relocated and 45 members of staff have been given leave of absence.

The social services inspectorate is continuing to monitor the situation.

NHS Salaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the total salary costs for *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the national health service in each region in each year since 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney: Analysis of salaries and wages costs for hospital and community health services—HCHS—in England are shown in the tables. The figures for 1992-93 are provisional.

HCHS salary costs for administration and clerical staff

Region	*1989-90 £000s*	*1990-91 £000s*	*1991-92 £000s*	*1992-93 £000s*
Northern	59,873	68,294	74,398	66,316
Yorkshire	68,955	76,647	71,129	56,606
Trent	90,141	102,750	110,586	96,330
East Anglia	36,648	43,159	47,768	43,959
North West Thames	77,695	94,959	103,049	88,836
North East Thames	101,809	116,802	112,500	91,945
South East Thames	98,880	111,716	115,472	95,480
South West Thames	72,451	83,251	84,887	60,440
Wessex	52,498	58,770	66,360	56,323
Oxford	48,151	55,314	62,209	60,169
South Western	59,830	70,223	52,830	34,511
West Midlands	110,016	123,706	136,394	139,224
Mersey	52,959	58,602	43,756	29,224
North Western	90,513	100,324	106,761	96,395
SHA	18,245	22,513	26,757	29,805
NHS Trusts	—	—	168,578	455,694
Total	1,038,664	1,187,030	1,383,434	1,501,257

HCHS salary costs for managerial staff

Region	*1989-90 £000s*	*1990-91 £000s*	*1991-92 £000s*	*1992-93 £000s*
Northern	9,809	15,301	21,007	22,650
Yorkshire	13,035	23,501	27,114	27,773
Trent	9,183	14,969	24,547	26,395
East Anglia	8,505	11,232	14,833	16,318
North West Thames	13,778	19,568	25,020	25,137
North East Thames	19,180	29,010	33,824	34,005
South East Thames	12,959	19,993	27,434	30,011
South West Thames	9,230	16,167	20,556	26,498
Wessex	8,648	15,718	21,698	23,209
Oxford	5,402	10,123	15,622	18,677
South Western	11,573	15,670	15,122	10,004
West Midlands	17,007	23,498	34,907	42,427
Mersey	8,399	13,801	13,602	11,093
North Western	9,773	18,870	28,817	30,247
SHAs	2,362	4,111	5,440	7,933
NHS Trusts	—	—	54,296	141,854
Total	158,843	251,472	383,839	494,231

HCHS salary costs for nursing and midwifery staff

Region	*1989-90 £000s*	*1990-91 £000s*	*1991-92 £000s*	*1992-93 £000s*
Northern	327,830	351,182	356,965	310,195
Yorkshire	355,539	380,633	347,362	263,155
Trent	451,088	484,754	487,920	409,895
East Anglia	193,638	211,961	220,493	194,181

Region	1989-90 £000s	1990-91 £000s	1991-92 £000s	1992-93 £000s
North West Thames	350,313	373,184	366,548	250,916
North East Thames	431,427	467,107	417,118	324,807
South East Thames	381,547	412,477	414,177	330,649
South West Thames	304,296	328,232	288,082	221,386
Wessex	278,293	299,341	309,975	240,092
Oxford	216,270	234,391	255,309	227,566
South Western	326,431	353,054	243,011	98,199
West Midlands	503,545	543,884	567,466	540,793
Mersey	258,812	270,931	173,629	114,597
North Western	448,128	477,019	492,033	414,415
SHAs	66,060	70,730	84,210	89,712
NHS Trusts	—	—	747,160	2,041,241
Total	4,893,217	5,258,880	5,771,458	6,071,799

Sources:

1. Annual accounts (1989-90 and 1990-91) and annual financial returns (1991-92 and 1992-93) of regional and district health authorities in England, NHS Trusts (1991-92 and 1992-93 only) and special health authorities.

Notes:

1. Salaries and wages costs incurred by family health services authorities are excluded as corresponding costs are not identified on the same basis.
2. Managerial staff consists of general and senior managers, the main reason for the increase has been the reclassification of some staff in professional and administrative groups into these grades.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional secure accommodation places have been made available for juveniles since 1991.

Mr. Bowis: Two new secure units have opened since 1 January 1992, providing a total of 18 secure places. Local authorities are currently engaged in a capital programme to provide additional secure places for juvenile remands.

Mersey Health Services

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the members of each hospital trust in the Mersey region giving their addresses and professional or other background.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) gave the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) on 20 July 1993 at column *121*.

The private address of a trust non-executive director is a personal matter and it is not appropriate to release this information.

An announcement will be made shortly concerning national health service trust chairmen and non-executive directors who have been appointed in the fourth wave.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* the hospitals she has visited and *(b)* the persons and organisations she has met during the course of the current year in the Mersey region, in order to discuss national health service matters; and the dates on which the meetings took place.

Mr. Sackville: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Mersey region on 26 July as part of a programme of visits to regions throughout the country. My right hon. Friend visited Ashworth hospital, Alder Hey children's hospital and Aintree Park group practice, where she met a cross-section of staff and discussed a range of different subjects.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements she has made to ensure adequate financing of the intensive care unit at the Alder Hey children's hospital, Liverpool; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Purchasers are responsible for ensuring the availability of a comprehensive range of services, within available resources taking account of the priorities set by Government. It is for them to decide, in discussion with the management of the hospital, on the level of funding for the intensive care unit.

Purchasers will be using the recent report "The Care of Critically Ill Children" from the British Paediatric Association to undertake an immediate review of their requirements for paediatric intensive care. The Alder Hey children's hospital provides excellent services for the people of Mersey, where the provision of paediatric intensive care beds exceeds the recommendations of the report. Copies of the BPA report will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will visit Broadgreen hospital, Liverpool, to discuss with staff and representatives of Liverpool East community health council the proposed closure of the accident and emergency unit.

Mr. Sackville: On 16 September I announced that a decision had been taken to agree to the closure of the accident and emergency department at Broadgreen hospital. The decision was based on our assessment of the best, long-term interests of the people of Liverpool and followed a period of public consultation on the proposal. All correspondence on this matter was seen, including the response from Liverpool East community health council, and I met with a delegation of Members of Parliament from Liverpool, before the decision was made. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to visit Broadgreen hospital.

Benzodiazepine

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken by her Department to discourage the over-prescribing of benzodiazepines; what plans she has to restrict represcribing; if she will bring forward proposals for legislation; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Advice from the Committee on Safety of Medicines—CSM—concerning the prescribing of benzodiazepines was given to doctors in "Current Problems Number 21" in January 1988, copies of the relevant pages will be placed in the Library. This strongly emphasised the dangers of dependence with benzodiazepines and advised doctors to limit their use to short-term relief—two to four weeks only—of anxiety and insomnia that is severe, disabling, or subjecting the individual to extreme distress. Similar advice is given in the "British National Formulary", which the Department issues free to all prescribing doctors twice a year.

Following the publication of the "Health of the Nation" White Paper, the "Mental Illness Key Area Handbook", published in January 1993, suggested that family health services authorities should agree with general practitioners local targets for reducing benzodiozepine prescriptions. We also intend to circulate a copy of the Mental Health Foundation's publication, "Guidelines for the prevention and treatment of benzodiazepines dependence" to all family health services authorities in the near future, copies of which will be placed in the Library. We have no plans to introduce legislation in this area.

Intensive Care

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what investigations she has carried out into the circumstances which led to the deaths of three Manchester patients following 50-mile ambulance journeys to Blackpool; and what steps she is taking to ensure that there are sufficient intensive care resources in Manchester and Liverpool hospitals to prevent such circumstances from arising in the future;

(2) how many cases involving intensive care treatment in *(a)* the Liverpool and *(b)* the Manchester areas have been diverted to hospitals in other areas in each of the past six months; to which areas they have been diverted; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of diverted intensive care cases is not available centrally. Purchasers of health care are responsible for ensuring the availability of a comprehensive range of services. It is for them to decide, in discussion with providers, how best to meet the need for intensive care facilities within available resources.

It would be inappropriate to comment on the circumstances of the deaths of the three Manchester patients before any possible inquest is held. We understand that North Western regional health authority is holding discussions with district health authorities to establish whether the level of provision of intensive care beds in Manchester matches demand.

The Government are currently funding a study by the Royal College of Anaesthetists into access to intensive care.

Mr. Stanley Clarke

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the response time by the London ambulance service in respect of pensioner Stanley Clarke from Lancashire who collapsed and died of a suspected heart attack in Woolworth's store, Old road, Chingford; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact, Mr. Martin Gorham, chief executive of the London ambulance service, for details.

Fireworks

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in Britain were injured by fireworks for each year since 1980; and what percentage of those injured for each year were under 16 years old.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The number of fireworks injuries recorded at hospital accident and emergency departments from the DTI's annual national fireworks survey, carried out for the 21 days before bonfire night, the night itself, and the seven days following, since 1980, are as follows:

Year	*Total number of injuries*	*Percentage of those injured under 16 years old Per cent.*
1980	555	70·1
1981	681	67·5
1982	626	66·1
1983	833	61·2
1984	778	62·9
1985	968	61·3
1986	846	55·1
1987	960	56·3
1988	877	50·9
1989	800	51·8
1990	805	48·9
1991	723	50·1
1992	942	51·8

NATIONAL FINANCE

Inward Investment

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to bring investments by or on behalf of foreign Governments in British industry within the national tax structure as being a commercial activity.

Mr. Dorrell: I have noted the hon. Member's suggestion.

Advance Corporation Tax

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what sums have been repaid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 on account of sovereign immunity and by way of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments or on sums assumed to be dividend payments either directly or indirectly to the Government of Kuwait or to any bank managing funds on its behalf in respect of shareholdings or other investments in British companies;

(2) what sums have been repaid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 on account of sovereign immunity and by way of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments to either the Government of Brunei or to any bank or financial institution managing funds on its behalf in respect of shareholdings or other investments in British companies;

(3) what sums have been repaid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 on account of sovereign immunity and by way of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments to the Government of Abu Dhabi or to any bank or financial institution managing funds on its behalf in respect of shareholdings or other investments in British companies;

(4) what sums have been repaid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 on account of sovereign immunity and by way of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments to the Government of Singapore or to any bank or financial institution managing funds on its behalf in respect of shareholdings or other investments in British business;

(5) what sums have been repaid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 on account of sovereign immunity and by way of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments or on sums assumed to be dividend payments either directly or indirectly to the Government of Singapore.

(6) how much has been paid by the Inland Revenue in the five years to March 1993 in the current financial year in respect of advance corporation tax rebates on dividend payments to the Government of Qatar or to any financial institution or company managing funds invested in British business on its behalf.

Mr. Dorrell: The normal rules of Revenue confidentiality preclude the provision of information about the affairs of named individuals or entities.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total sum repaid through the exercise of sovereign immunity in respect of the repayment of advance corporation tax relating to dividend payments to foreign Governments or to banks and financial institutions managing investments and shareholdings in British business on behalf of those Governments during each of the last seven years.

Mr. Dorrell: The approximate amount of tax credits paid on dividends—excluding those paid direct by the payer of the dividends—on sovereign immunity grounds in the years requested is as follows:

	£ million
1986-87	116
1987-88	147
1988-89	154
1989-90	147
1990-91	138
1991-92	164
1992-93	116

Loan Repayment

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much of the 10 billion ecu loan arranged in September 1992 has been repaid; and what was the sterling value of that amount which has been repaid on the basis of exchange rates *(a)* at the time the loan was arranged, *(b)* immediately after the devaluation of September 1992 and *(c)* at the time it was repaid;

(2) how much of the 10 billion ecu loan arranged in September 1992 has been repaid; and what was the sterling value of that amount which remains outstanding on the basis of exchange rates *(a)* at the time the loan was arranged, *(b)* immediately after the devaluation of September 1992 and *(c)* at current exchange rates;

(3) how much of the 10 billion ecu loan arranged in September 1992 has been drawn down; and what was the sterling value of that amount *(a)* when the loan was arranged, *(b)* immediately after the devaluation of September 1992 and *(c)* on the basis of current exchange rates;

(4) what was the sterling value of the 10 billion ecu loan facility arranged in September 1992 *(a)* when it was arranged in September 1992, *(b)* after the devaluation of September 1992 and *(c)* at current exchange rates.

Mr. Nelson: The 10 billion ecu borrowing programme, announced on 3 September 1992, had three elements: an ecu 5 billion multi-currency revolving credit facility, arranged and drawn down in deutschmarks in various amounts over the month of September 1992; a DM 5 billion bond issued in October 1992; and a US$ 3 billion bond issued in December 1992.

The actual amount of the multi-currency drawing was DM 9,944,550,000. The sterling value of this facility when it was arranged—3 September 1992—was equivalent to £3,554,798,928, and at end-September 1992 was equivalent to £3,962,761,506. The same sum in deutschmarks was the equivalent of £3,936,564,801 at the exchange rate as at the close of business in London on 23 November 1993.

DM 5 billion as at end October 1992 was equivalent to £2,073,656,271 and, on present valuation as defined above, was equivalent to £1,979,257,383. US$ 3 billion as at end December 1992 was equivalent to £1,980,198,020 and, on present valuation as defined above, was equivalent to £2,025,931,929. None of this borrowing has been repaid.

Taxation

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will add to the table given in the *Official Report*, of 3 November, column *255*, estimating the tax liabilities in

1994-95 for the given income ranges showing the effect of all tax changes including those announced in the 1993 Budget and including both indirect taxation and intermediate taxation.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on average changes in income tax and national insurance contribution liabilities is given in the tables. The figures for 1994-95 assume statutory indexation of allowances and thresholds and include measures already announced in the March 1993 Budget. It is not possible to provide an equivalent analysis of the other taxes.

Average change in 1994-95 compared with 1993-94 indexed regime

Income tax

Range of individual's income in 1994-95 £	*Numbers gaining* '000s	*Amount* £	*Numbers losing* '000s	*Amount* £
Under 5,000	0	0	0	0
5,000—10,000	4,000	19	1,600	60
10,000—15,000	3,000	20	3,100	100
15,000—20,000	1,300	20	2,700	120
20,000—25,000	570	20	1,500	130
25,000—30,000	220	20	980	160
30,000—40,000	180	20	930	350
40,000—50,000	60	20	360	360
50,000—70,000	30	20	250	370
70,000—80,000	10	20	50	370
Over 80,000	20	20	170	360
TOTAL	9,200	20	11,700	150

Income tax and National Insurance contributions

Range of individual's income in 1994-95 £	*Numbers gaining* '000s	*Amount* £	*Numbers losing* '000s	*Amount* £
Under 5,000	0	0	1,600	10
5,000—10,000	1,200	18	5,700	50
10,000—15,000	480	20	5,600	130
15,000—20,000	170	20	3,800	210
20,000—25,000	80	20	2,000	260
25,000—30,000	40	20	1,200	310
30,000—40,000	40	20	1,100	480
40,000—50,000	10	20	400	500
50,000—70,000	10	20	260	510
70,000—80,000	—	—	60	510
Over 80,000	10	20	180	500
TOTAL	2,100	20	21,800	170

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each civil service grade in his Departments *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Sir John Cope: Information on the staffing in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments, as at 1 April 1993, is set out in the attached tabled.

Staffing of Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments: Numbers by grade and by women employed in grade at 1 April 1993

	Total employed headcount	*Total women headcount*
Treasury (inc Forward)		
Grade 1	5	—
Grade 2	6	1
Grade 3	24	2
Grade 4	5	—
Grade 5	68	6
Grade 6	26	—
Grade 7	206	44
Senior Executive Officer	88	24
Higher Executive Officer (D)	14	4
Higher Executive Officer	128	42
Administration Trainee	10	2
Executive Officer	173	67
Administrative Officer	245	138
Administrative Assistant	100	63
Senior Economic Assistant	26	5
Economic Assistant	14	5
Senior Assistant Statistician	5	—
Assistant Statistician	3	1
Senior Information Officer	1	—
Information Officer	1	1
Senior Librarian	1	1
Librarian	4	3
Assistant Librarian	6	4
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	2	—
Professional and Technology Officer	2	—
Chief Typing Manager	2	2
Typing Manager	3	3
Senior Personal Secretary	19	19
Personal Secretary	121	121
Typist	56	55
Senior Scientific Officer	1	—
Higher Scientific Officer	1	—
Senior Catering Officer	10	2
Catering Manager 1	28	4
Catering Manager 2	21	4
Catering Manager 3	44	21
Catering Manager 4	34	21
Chef 1/Chief Cook 1	1	1
Support Manager 1	1	—
Support Manager 2	4	3
Support Manager 3	7	2
Support Grade Band 1	58	18
Support Grade Band 2	112	38
Industrial Grades	496	362
Total Treasury (inc Forward)	2,182	1,089
Central Statistical Office		
Grade 1	1	—
Grade 2	1	—
Grade 3	3	—
Grade 4	1	—
Grade 5	20	3
Grade 6	5	—
Grade 7	77	14
Senior Executive Officer	47	15
Higher Executive Officer	164	67
Executive Officer	356	181
Administrative Officer	480	315
Administrative Assistant	67	52
Senior Assistant Statistician	15	3
Assistant Statistician	9	3
Senior Information Officer	1	—
Information Officer	1	—
Librarian	1	—
Assistant Librarian	1	1
Mapping and Charting Officer	1	1
Higher Graphics Officer	1	1
Graphics Officer	4	1
Typing Manager	1	1
Senior Personal Secretary	3	3
Personal Secretary	23	23
Personal Secretary (Trainee)	1	—
Typist	20	20
Support Manager 3	1	1
Support Grade Band 1	6	5
Support Grade Band 2	19	10
Total Central Statistical Office	1,330	720

	Total employed headcount	Total women headcount
Customs and Excise		
Grade 1	1	1
Grade 2	3	—
Grade 3	9	1
Grade 4	1	—
Grade 5	77	4
Grade 6	131	13
Grade 7	501	53
Senior Executive Officer	1,683	156
Higher Executive Officer (D)	8	—
Higher Executive Officer	5,332	1,195
Executive Officer	8,452	3,023
Administrative Officer	5,758	3,286
Administrative Assistant	2,392	1,597
Senior Economic Assistant	1	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	3	—
Assistant Statistician	—	—
Senior Information Officer	4	3
Information Officer	4	2
Assistant Information Officer	3	2
Librarian	2	1
Assistant Librarian	3	2
Legal Officer	3	—
Legal Trainee	3	1
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	1	—
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	3	—
Professional and Technology Officer	6	—
Chief Typing Manager	3	3
Typing Manager	28	28
Senior Personal Secretary	13	12
Personal Secretary	105	101
Personal Secretary (Trainee)	9	9
Typist	432	431
Senior Scientific Officer	4	2
Higher Scientific Officer	2	—
Scientific Officer	2	1
Assistant Scientific Officer	2	1
Higher Photographic Officer	1	—
Photographic Officer	3	—
Support Manager 1	1	—
Support Manager 2	2	—
Support Manager 3	13	10
Support Grade Band 1	174	88
Support Grade Band 2	592	247
Higher Telecommunications Technical Officer	1	—
Assistant Telecommunications Technical Officer	1	—
Other	31	2
Total Custom and Excise	25,804	10,273
Government Actuary		
Grade 2	1	—
Grade 3	3	—
Grade 4	7	—
Grade 6	2	—
Grade 7	1	—
Senior Executive Officer	3	3
Higher Executive Officer	4	—
Executive Officer	4	2
Administrative Officer	6	4
Administrative Assistant	1	—
Senior Personal Secretary	1	1
Personal Secretary	3	3
Typist	11	—
Actuary	22	3
Trainee Actuary	14	4
Support Grade Band 1	1	—
Support Grade Band 2	2	—
Total Government Actuary	76	21

	Total employed headcount	Total women headcount
Inland Revenue		
Grade 1	1	—
Grade 2	5	—
Grade 3	21	—
Grade 4	37	—
Grade 5	238	16
Grade 6	988	68
Grade 7	2,250	375
Senior Executive Officer	332	74
Higher Executive Officer	641	241
Executive Officer	919	467
Administrative Officer	849	538
Administrative Assistant	553	402
Economic Assistant	1	—
Senior Assistant Statistician	6	—
Assistant Statistician	1	1
Legal Officer	3	1
Legal Trainee	1	—
Senior Graphics Officer	1	—
Graphics Technical Grade	5	2
Graphics Officer	12	9
Trainee Graphics Officer	1	—
Chief Typing Manager	23	23
Typing Manager	33	33
Senior Personal Secretary	23	23
Personal Secretary	120	119
Typist	282	275
Senior Scientific Officer	3	2
Higher Scientific Officer	8	4
Scientific Officer	1	1
Senior Photgraphic Officer	2	1
Photgraphic Officer	1	—
Support Manager 1	1	—
Support Manager 2	6	1
Support Manager 3	36	12
Support Grade Band 1	284	190
Support Grade Band 2	826	228
Departmental Grades:		
Inspector "S"	1,059	129
Regional Collector	404	33
Inspector	5,069	1,648
Collector (HG)	1,079	334
Revenue Executive	13,486	7,316
Revenue Officer	19,341	14,310
Revenue Assistant	10,462	7,437
Certified Revenue Assistant	4,231	3,198
Senior Valuer	710	141
Valuer	370	115
Assistant Valuer	152	15
Graduate Valuer	42	14
Cadet Valuer	172	58
Senior Valuation Executive	43	3
Staff Officer	203	39
Valuation Technician/VCHG	994	403
Valuation Clerk	785	527
Stamping Officer	24	3
Inspector of Engineering	1	—
Mechanist Grades	3	—
Foreman Mechanist	1	—
Revenue Typing Managers	296	295
Revenue Personal Secretaries	612	610
Revenue Typists	3,317	3,294
Industrial Grades	7	2
Total Inland Revenue	71,377	43,030
Department for National Savings		
Grade 1	1	—
Grade 2	1	—
Grade 5	7	1
Grade 6	9	—
Grade 7	42	3

	Total employed headcount	Total women headcount
Senior Executive Officer	122	19
Higher Executive Officer	339	129
Executive Officer	865	483
Administrative Office	2,639	2,020
Administrative Assistant	2,230	1,638
Senior Assistant Statistician	1	—
Senior Information Officer	2	1
Senior Graphics Officer	2	—
Higher Graphics Officer	2	—
Senior Research Officer	2	—
Typing Manager	8	8
Senior Personal Secretary	1	1
Personal Secretary	8	8
Typist	93	93
Support Manager 2	6	3
Support Manager 3	16	8
Support Grade Band 1	47	19
Support Grade Band 2	120	30
Total Department for National Savings	6,563	4,464
National Investment and Loans Office		
Grade 5	1	—
Grade 7	2	1
Senior Executive Officer	2	1
Higher Executive Officer	6	1
Executive Officer	12	4
Administrative Officer	8	6
Administrative Assistant	2	2
Personal Secretary	1	1
Typist	1	1
Support Grade Band 1	1	1
Support Grade Band 2	2	2
Total National Investments and Loans Office	38	20
Registry of Friendly Societies		
Grade 2	1	1
Grade 3	1	—
Grade 4	2	—
Grade 5	7	—
Grade 6	2	1
Grade 7	21	6
Senior Executive Officer	14	4
Higher Executive Officer	24	7
Executive Officer	30	12
Administrative Officer	25	15
Administrative Assistant	8	6
Typing Manager	1	1
Personal Secretary	8	8
Typist	2	2
Support Manager 3	1	1
Support Grade Band 1	2	—
Support Grade Band 2	8	—
Total Registry of Friendly Societies	157	64
Royal Mint		
Grade 3	1	—
Grade 4	1	—
Grade 5	2	—
Grade 6	2	—
Grade 7	11	—
Senior Executive Officer	15	3
Higher Executive Officer	16	4
Executive Officer	51	26
Administrative Officer	96	66
Administrative Assistant	14	13
Museums Grade F	1	—
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	9	—
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	19	—
Professional and Technology Officer	77	1
Technical Grade 1	2	—
Typing Manager	1	1
Senior Personal Secretary	1	1
Personal Secretary	5	5
Typist	8	8
Senior Scientific Officer	2	—
Higher Scientific Officer	3	1
Scientific Officer	15	1
Higher Photographic Officer	1	—
Photographic Officer	1	—
Process and General Supervisory Grade D	2	—
Support Grade Band 1	7	3
Support Grand Band 2	14	13
Departmental Grades	6	—
Industrial Grades	590	19
Total Royal Mint	973	165
The Office of Her Majesty's Paymaster General		
Grade 5	1	—
Grade 6	3	—
Grade 7	9	1
Senior Executive Officer	26	6
Higher Executive Officer	97	47
Executive Officer	175	112
Administrative Officer	395	315
Administrative Assistant	202	170
Typing Manager	1	1
Personal Secretary	3	3
Typist	9	9
Support Manager 3	2	2
Support Grade Band 1	8	8
Support Grade Band 2	25	14
Total Office of Paymaster General	956	688

VAT

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims by do-it-yourself house-builders for refund of value-added tax under the provisions of Customs and Excise notice No. 719 were met in whole or in part during the years ended 31 December 1991 and 31 December 1992 and the half-year ended 30 June 1993.

Sir John Cope: The number of claims for refund of VAT by do-it-yourself house-builders met in whole or in part is as follows:

	Number
1 January to 31 December 1991	9,515
1 January to 31 December 1992	10,896
1 January to 30 June 1993	5,060

Private Electricity Supply Companies

Sir David Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what authority private electricity supply companies may charge customers who pay bills in monthly instalments the new rate of VAT prospectively, to cover all instalments up to next April.

Sir John Cope: For VAT purposes, supplies of electricity are treated as taking place each time a payment is received by the supplier or a tax invoice is issued by him,

whichever is the earlier. The rate of tax to be charged will normally be the rate in force at that time. Consumers should not be charged VAT on any payments made by them before 1 April 1994.

EC Trade Deficit

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to correct the trade deficit with EC partners; what is his current policy on the pound/deutschmark exchange rate; if he will make it his policy to allow the rate to float; and what has been his policy on the exchange rate in the last three months.

Mr. Nelson: The balance of trade with European countries reflects a range of factors, including the effects of the recession in continental Europe. The key to United Kingdom producers' future success both as exporters and in competition with imports in domestic markets is their ability to keep costs down and quality high. The Government have facilitated this by getting inflation down to its lowest level for a generation.

I have no specific target for the pound/deutschmark exchange rate nor for the sterling exchange rate index. But the exchange rate and domestic indicators, including the growth of the money supply and the behaviour of asset prices, are taken into account in guiding monetary policy.

WALES

Queensferry Roundabout

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has had concerning his proposals to widen the highway Queensferry-Aston-Ewloe roundabout.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement of results of the public consultation and reasons for the choice of the preferred route for the proposed A494 trunk road, River Dee to Ewloe improvement, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were sold, giving the amount of cash gained by their sale, in 1990, 1991, 1992 and for the current year.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of local authority dwellings sold and their total selling prices are given in the table.

Sales of local authority dwellings in Wales[1]

	Number of sales	*Total selling prices £ millions*
1990	6,377	81·4
1991	3,642	52·7
1992	2,767	43·2
January-June 1993	1,170	18·1

[1] Excludes new town sales.
Source: Local authority returns.

Buckley-Clwyd Relief Road

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to authorise the construction of the Buckley-Clwyd inner relief road; what is its likely cost; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This is a Clwyd county council scheme. The council has made a side roads order for the scheme and submitted it to my right hon. Friend for confirmation. The objection period expires on 26 November after which date a decision will be taken on whether an inquiry is necessary. I have no details on the cost of this scheme.

School Building Works

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement concerning the prospect for the modernisation of the Llay Park county primary school, Llay, Clwyd;

(2) if he will make a statement concerning the prospects and timetable for the building extension project for Hope high school, Clwyd.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Matters relating to the prospect of building works are for the local education authority and the school concerned.

Clwyd Alyn Estate

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the Clwyd Alyn housing association estate at Garden City, Deeside.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Arrangements for my forthcoming visit to the Alyn and Deeside district have yet to be agreed.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what moneys he has made available to Clwyd Alyn housing association to enable it to modernise its garden city estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Housing for Wales has agreed to provide up to £2·5 million of grant funding. Together with private finance, this is expected to meet the eligible costs to Clwyd Alyn housing association of works on the houses on the garden city estate.

Roads Projects

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the start date and what is the cost, respectively, of the roads projects on Deeside at *(a)* A550 Shotwick-Woodbank-Drome corner, *(b)* the Aston Hill road widening, *(c)* the Ewloe roundabout interchange and *(d)* the new River Dee crossing scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the 1993 Supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s".

Wind Energy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how his Department was represented at the conference on development of wind energy in rural communities held at Stoneleigh on 11 November.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Department was not represented at the conference.

Alltami Bypass

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for a bypass of Alltami, near Mold; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Plans for the improvement of the A494 trunk road between Mold and Ewloe are shown in the 1933 supplement to "Roads in Wales, Progress and Plans for the 1990s". The scheme is shown in the long term with construction not likely to begin before April 1999. The hon. Gentleman may wish to be aware that the public will be consulted on alternative routes and a consultation exercise is planned for early in the new year.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total salary costs for *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the national health service in each year since 1989.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is as follows:

	1989-90 £000s	*1990-91 £000s*	*1991-92 £000s*
a. Administrative and Clerical	64,001	73,218	84,648
b. Managerial	6,479	9,207	16,849
c. Nursing	338,195	364,485	402,503

Source: Health Authorities' Annual Accounts.

Notes:

i. Figures include expenditure by Health Authorities, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and the Health Promotion Authority for Wales but exclude that of Family Health Services Authorities whose corresponding costs are not identifiable on the same basis.

ii. It should be noted that over the period senior managers' terms and conditions of service have been extended to second and third level managers and some senior nurses and other professional staff have transferred to the senior management grades. The introduction of Project 2000 nursing reforms has led to the reclassification of student nurses from salaried nurses to bursaried students; and there has also been a growth in the number of healthcare assistants who are paid on local pay scales and are not classified as nursing staff.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS in each year since 1989.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information, which relates to the whole-time equivalent of staff employed as at 30 September, is as follows:

	Administrative and Clerical		*Nursing and Midwifery*		
	Managerial[1]	*Other*	*Other*	*Learners*[2]	*Total*
1989	187	7,378	24,919	3,118	28,037
1990	416	7,653	25,018	3,075	28,093
1991	683	8,050	25,028	2,934	27,962
1992	848	8,347	25,451	1,970	27,421
1993	1,028	8,577	25,206	1,033	26,239

Notes:

Includes staff employed by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and those Family Health Service Authorities using District Health Authority payroll systems.

The use of locally devised payscales from 1991 onwards may affect the comparability of figures as these staff cannot be allocated centrally to a specific staff group and are not, therefore, included above.

[1] General managers, senior managers and managers. The growth in the number of these staff arises partly from the extension in 1989 of senior manager terms and conditions of service to second and third level managers including some managers in staff groups other than administrative and clerical.

[2] Since the autumn of 1991 student nurses have been classified as students and are no longer included in the NHS staff figures. Staff numbers shown in the table in 1992 and 1993 are students finishing pre Project 2000 courses. There were some 1,800 Project 2000 student nurses at September 1993.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime, North West

9. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent crime figures for the North West.

Mr. Howard: Notifiable offences recorded by the police in the north west region rose by 2·6 per cent. in the 12 months ending June 1993 compared with an increase of 3·8 per cent. for England and Wales as a whole.

Police Reform

13. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reaction he has had to his announcement on reform of the police force on the basis of the Sheehy report.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has received widespread support for the broad thrust of his proposals.

Prison Population

14. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons are detained in prisons; and what the figures were five and 10 years previously.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On Friday 19 November 1993 there were 47,360 prisoners in prison service accommodation and 28 in police cells, giving a total of 47,388 in prisons in custody.

Only end of month figures are available for the earlier years. The figure for 30 November 1988 was 50,365, including 1,025 in police cells. The figure for 30 November 1983 was 43,895, including 531 in police cells.

Prison Ships

15. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his policy towards the use of prison ships.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Marine detention facilities are one of the options being considered as part of prison service contingency planning. The aim is to identify options for coping with levels of prisoner population that exceed available prison accommodation.

Intimidation of Witnesses

16. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the intimidation of witnesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There is a deep seated public concern, reflected in correspondence I have received and in more general reports, about the intimidation of witnesses and other citizens who assist the police in the fight against crime. We intend to meet that concern by inviting Parliament to approve a new offence of witness intimidation intended to supplement the existing criminal law in this area.

Crime Prevention

17. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has conducted into the effectiveness of custodial sentences in preventing crime.

Mr. Maclean: The research and statistics department of the Home Office regularly publishes material which is relevant to the consideration of the effectiveness of sentencing.

A recent Home Office study of 193 burglars given community service orders in 1987 produced results suggesting that imprisoning them for one year could have prevented between three and 13 crimes per burglar.

Crime (Research)

18. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations he has carried out into the causes of crime; and what conclusions he has come to.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office research and planning unit has carried out a number of research studies, which have dealt with the predictors of offending. They show that the reasons why people become offenders are complex and wide ranging.

Right to Silence

19. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made on his plans to abolish the right to silence.

Mr. Maclean: I intend to bring forward legislation which will allow the courts to draw proper inferences from a defendant's silence, either when questioned by the police or during the trial.

Police Bureaucracy

20. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers will be returned to operational duties by his plans to cut paperwork and to reduce the number of police middle managers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This will be for individual chief constables to determine in the light of the particular circumstances of their own forces. But my right hon. and learned Friend has made it possible for some 5,300 police officers to be redeployed to front line operational police duties.

New Prisons

21. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new prisons he plans to have built in the next five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The new prison at Doncaster is due to be completed and opened in April 1994. Six new prisons are to be built under the private sector design, control and finance initiative announced on 2 September.

Sheehy Report

22. **Mr. Raymond S. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding his response to the Sheehy report on police pay and responsibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the oral reply given earlier today to the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown).

Capital Punishment

23. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reintroduce capital punishment for the murder of a policeman.

Mr. Maclean: We have no such plans. Matters relating to capital punishment are traditionally decided by a free vote in Parliament with Members voting in accordance with their own judgment of the issues involved.

Police, Derbyshire

24. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to increase the number of police officers in Derbyshire.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Derbyshire, in common with all other police authorities, has made an application for extra officers. Decisions on these applications will be made when the level of police funding in 1994-95 has been decided.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those who received enbargoed copies of the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary on the Derbyshire constabulary prior to its publication on 16 November; and on what dates copies were forwarded to each of the hon. Members representing parliamentary constituencies within Derbyshire.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that in accordance with normal practice, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary sent embargoed copies of the report to the police authority and the force. Reports by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary are not routinely sent to hon. Members but copies are placed in the Library on the day of publication.

Immigration (Carriers' Liability)

25. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the operation of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987 has an important effect in reducing the number of people who are able to travel to the United Kingdom without proper documents. Our strategy for its operation combines extensive training and guidance for carriers with the vigorous pursuit of charges incurred.

Country Sports

26. **Sir Michael Grylls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to uphold the right to take part in lawful country sports; and if he will make a statement.

27. **Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in drawing up plans to prevent the disruption of legal country sports.

Mr. Charles Wardle: We will introduce in the Criminal Justice Bill, to be brought forward this session, a criminal offence of aggravated trespass to ensure that the police have the necessary powers to prevent or to deal with those trespassers who seek to obstruct or disrupt a lawful activity.

Police, Northumbria

28. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what submission has been made to him for extra police officers in the Northumbria police authority area for 1994-95.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has received an application from the Northumbria police authority for 80 additional police posts for 1994-95.

Summer Time

29. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he now intends to introduce double summer time.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 4 November 1993 at column *363*.

Shamrock Farms (Primates)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken in the case of the conditions and handling of imported primates by Shamrock Farms, Brighton.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The actions I required to be taken following the investigation last year were set out in the reply given to a question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 2 December 1992 at columns *215-16*. The further action which I took to monitor progress in implementing my requirements, was described in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 1 April 1993 at column *383-84*. Since then, I have continued to receive regular reports from the Animals (Scientific Procedures) inspectorate, and these show that satisfactory progress is being made in accordance with my instructions.

Crime Statistics, London

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many criminal offences were recorded by the police in Lewisham in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1992; and how many in each case resulted in a conviction.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her question on 18 October 1993 at columns *143-44*.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each year since 1985 how many *(a)* rapes, *(b)* burglaries in dwellings, *(c)* thefts from vehicles and *(d)* incidents of domestic violence were recorded by the police in Lewisham; and how many of these resulted in a conviction.

Mr. Maclean: The available information relates to notifiable offences recorded by the police and is given in the table. It is not possible to link recorded crime statistics with convictions, as the information collected on convictions is compiled on a different basis.

Certain notifiable offences recorded by the police in Lewisham

Year	Rape	Burglary in a dwelling	Theft from a vehicle	Incidents of domestic violence
1985	14	4,218	3,981	43
1986	32	4,748	5,181	33
1987	24	4,042	5,578	70
1988	41	4,899	4,823	78
1989	27	5,193	4,874	152
1990	32	5,966	4,210	169
1991	57	5,555	4,694	321
1992	43	6,322	4,454	357

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will categorise the violent crimes recorded by the police in Lewisham for each year since 1985; and how many cases of violent crime recorded in Lewisham in each such year resulted in a conviction.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table. It is not possible to link recorded crime statistics with convictions, as the information collected on convictions is compiled on a different basis.

Offences of violent crime recorded in Lewisham

Year	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery
1985	644	102	580
1986	695	133	616
1987	728	103	897
1988	846	155	688
1989	1,170	147	644
1990	1,269	145	810
1991	1,471	169	1,181
1992	1,324	196	1,127

Police Establishment

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the police establishment for each sector within the Metropolitan police force for April 1992 and for each month thereafter, including details of supernumerary posts.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers there are in each rank of the police force; and how many are *(a)* women, *(b)* black and *(c)* Asian.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Table 1 gives the numbers of women officers and of officers from ethnic minorities in the police service as at 31 August 1993, the latest date for which this information is available.

More detailed data on officers from ethnic minority groups is collected only annually. Table 2 gives numbers of black and Asian officers, reported by police forces as at 31 December 1992.

Table 1

Police ranks	*Total strength*	*Women Officers*	*Officers from ethnic minorities*
Chief Constable	50	0	0
Deputy Chief Constable	55	0	0
Assistant Chief Constable	127	5	0
Chief Superintendent	509	11	1
Superintendent	1,402	31	3
Chief Inspector	2,179	56	5
Inspector	6,979	241	31
Sergeant	20,201	1,041	111
Constable	96,593	15,148	1,699
Total	128,095	16,533	1,850

Table 2

Police Ranks	*Black Officers*	*Asian Officers*
Chief Constable	0	0
Deputy Chief Constable	0	0
Assistant Chief Constable	0	0
Chief Superintendent	0	0
Superintendent	0	1
Chief Inspector	4	0
Inspector	12	10
Sergeant	55	40
Constable	900	429
Total	971	480

Extradition

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of extradition cases in which the British Government are now involved which seek the return of a British national to the United Kingdom to face criminal charges.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are currently seeking the extradition of 37 British nationals to the United Kingdom to face criminal charges. This does not include people whose return is sought from the Republic of Ireland under arrangements for the mutual backing of warrants.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement of the proposals by the EC Justice Ministers at Limelette, Belgium, on 27-28 September, to draw up a new convention on extradition.

Mr. Maclean: At the Limelette meeting, EC Justice Ministers agreed a declaration instructing the judicial co-operation working group on criminal matters to continue with work initiated during the United Kingdom"s presidency of the European Community to find ways of improving and simplifying extradition arrangements between the Twelve which are at present conducted mainly under the 1957 European convention on extradition. The group was invited to examine and report to Ministers in a year on a number of possible measures which, if adopted, would streamline extradition between the Twelve, and on whether such measures might be incorporated in a new convention between the Twelve.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were extradited to the United Kingdom from countries overseas in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table. It does not include people returned from the Republic of Ireland under arrangements for the mutual backing of warrants.

Year	*Number extradited*
1988	14
1989	17
1990	21
1991	25
1992	17
[1]1993	15

[1]to date

Sri Lankan Tamils

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankan Tamils have been deported from the United Kingdom in each of the last three years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information available relates to all Sri Lankan citizens deported and is given in the table. No distinction is made in statistical records between Tamils and other Sri Lankans.

Sri Lankan citizens removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process

Year	*Number*
1991	4
1992	6
[1]1993	5

[1]January to September

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the present position of the Sri Lankan Tamils at present detained at Harmondsworth detention centre, stating how long each person has been detained at this centre, what is the reason for their being detained there and when he expects a decision regarding their case to be arrived at.

Mr. Charles Wardle: On 23 November five Sri Lankan citizens were detained at Harmondsworth detention centre. Three had been held since July—14, 16 and 24 respectively—one since 21 August and one since 6 October. The reason for detention in each case was that the immigration service was not satisfied the applicant would comply with conditions of temporary admission. Four of the applicants have been refused asylum and await determination of their appeals. A decision on the one remaining appliction will be taken as soon as possible.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Sri Lankan Tamils are at present detained in prison in England and Wales awaiting adjudicators' decisions as to their status and right to remain in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None.

Hunting (Prosecutions)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* cases brought against and *(b)* successful prosecutions of (i) hunt saboteurs for violence against hunters and hunt followers and (ii) hunters and hunt followers for violence against hunt saboteurs in each year since 1990.

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is set out as follows. The figures represent staff in the Home Office and its agencies on 22 November 1993 including those on loan or outward secondment.

	Total	*Total/ Female*
Administrative Assistant	2,155	1,585
Administrative Officer	4,457	3,127
Administrative Trainee	9	2
Assistant Chief Officer	3	0
Assistant Director	8	0
Assistant Divisional Officer	5	0
Assistant Immigration Officer	42	23
Assistant Information Officer	7	2
Assistant Inspector of Fire Services	28	0
Assistant Librarian	14	9
Assistant Scientific Officer	91	69
Assistant Statistician	1	1
Assistant Storeperson	112	8
C. of E./R.C. Chaplain (P/T)	132	27
C. of E. Chaplain	103	5
Chaplain General Prisons	1	0
Chief Education Officer	1	0
Chief Immigration Officer	360	51
Chief Inspector-Animals S.P. Inspector	1	0
Chief Typing Manager	4	4
Commandant	1	0
Communications Officer 2	1	0
Communications Officer 3	8	0
Consultant Voluntary Services Unit	2	2
Divisional Officer 1	1	0
Divisional Officer 2	1	0
Executive Officer	2,126	1,177
Farm Manager 1	6	0
Farm Manager 1A	15	0
Farm Manager 2	11	0
Farm Manager 3	25	1
Farm Manager 4	19	0
Farms and Gardens Officer	4	0
Fireground Supervisor	1	0
Governor 1	38	0
Governor 2	85	7
Governor 3	115	13
Governor 4	308	38
Governor 5	458	31
Governor 5 (APS)[1]	22	5
Grade 1 (PUSS)	1	0
Grade 2 (DUSS)	8	0
Grade 3	25	7
Grade 4	4	0
Grade 5	96	23
Grade 6	102	13
Grade 7	613	157
Graphics Officer	14	3
Graphics Technical Grade	1	1
Head of Department 3	1	0
Head of Department 4	1	0
Head of Department 5	1	0
Head of Department 6	1	0
Head Pharmacist	1	0
Higher Executive Officer (Development)	24	10
Higher Executive Officer	1,171	475
Higher Graphics Officer	1	0
Higher Instructional Officer	28	2
Higher Professional and Technical Officer	134	5
Higher Psychologist	45	31
Higher Scientific Officer	182	81
Higher Telecommunications Technical Officer	41	0
HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services	1	0
HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary	1	0
HM Inspector of Fire Services 1	2	0
HM Inspector of Fire Services 2	7	0
HM Inspector of Constabulary	4	0
Immigration Officer	2,113	782
Industrial	3,024	205
Information Officer	18	13
Inspector (Immigration Service)	69	0
Inspector—Animals S.P. Inspector	19	2
Instructional Officer I	1,049	149
Instructional Officer II	2	0
Interpreter	7	2
Lecturer 2	24	6
Legal Officer	3	2
Librarian	8	5
Matron Housekeeper	1	1
Medical Officer	81	6
Medical Officer (P/T)	112	6
Night Patrol	949	84
Nursing Grade A	5	4
Nursing Grade C	60	56
Nursing Grade D	100	82
Nursing Grade E	86	60
Nursing Grade F	118	100
Nursing Grade G	30	23
Nursing Grade H	7	6
Personal Secretary	492	490
Pharmacist	19	13
Pharmacy Technician	23	21
Principal Lecturer	3	0
Principal Medical Officer	6	1
Principal Officer	1,378	44
Principal Officer (APS)[1]	36	10
Principal RC Chaplain	1	0
Prison Auxiliary	1,553	302
Prison Officer	19,002	1,775
Prison Officer (APS)[1]	37	19
Professional and Technology Officer	99	11
Psychological Assistant	40	27
Psychologist	1	0
Psychologist-Graduate Trainee	26	19
R.C. Chaplain	15	1

	Total	Total/ Female
Regional Catering Manager	6	0
Research Officer (Social Science)	16	9
Scientific Officer	117	66
Senior Assistant Statistician	8	2
Senior Divisional Officer	1	0
Senior Executive Officer	429	128
Senior Information Officer	10	4
Senior Inspector-Animals S.P. Inspector	3	0
Senior Instructional Officer	1	0
Senior Lecturer	4	0
Senior Legal Assistant	2	1
Senior Librarian	1	1
Senior Medical Officer	39	5
Senior Officer	3,395	157
Senior Personal Secretary	42	42
Senior Pharmacist	1	0
Senior Professional and Technical Officer	168	1
Senior Psychologist	47	29
Senior Research Officer (Social Science)	11	6
Senior Scientific Officer	193	31
Senior Telecoms Technical Officer	1	0
Staff Principal Pharmacist	5	0
Storeperson	461	21
Stores Officer Grade A	1	0
Stores Officer Grade B	2	0
Stores Officer Grade C	11	2
Stores Officer Grade D	12	3
Support Grade Band 1	152	105
Support Grade Band 2	734	446
Support Manager 1	1	0
Support Manager 2	4	3
Support Manager 3	14	13
Technical Grade 1	16	4
Technical Grade 2	8	3
Telecom Engineering Technician	195	1
Telecom Technical Enginer II	58	0
Telecoms Technical Officer	2	0
Temporary Prison Officer	4	4
Territorial Inspector	5	0
Trainee Graphics Officer	1	1
Trainee Statistician	1	1
Trainee Typist	1	1
Typing Manager	32	32
Typist	772	771

Note:
[1] APS—Accelerated Promotion Scheme.

Mr. Anthony Stock

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make a statement concerning the conviction of Mr. Anthony Stock for robbery.

Mr. Maclean: On 24 November my right hon. and learned Friend referred Mr. Stock's conviction to the Court of Appeal under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968.

Metropolitan Police Housing

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many residential properties are owned by the Metropolitan police; and how many of these are currently empty.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that, as at 31 October 1993, the receiver to the Metropolitan police district owned 2,241 residential properties for police purposes.

A total of 323 were leased to housing associations and 148 were vacant. Of the 148 vacancies, 69 were allocated to officers who had not taken occupation; 34 were vacant for sale on the open market; 29 were vacant and available for allocation; and 16 were vacant for building works.

Policy Records

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether personal or police records for which his Department has responsibility have been transferred to the far east for the purpose of making microfiche copies.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. But we have not ruled out the possibility that work on the computerisation of criminal records currently held on microfiche might be carried out in the far east or anywhere else, provided that rigorous safeguards for security and confidentiality are in place. We expect to announce our decision on this matter next spring.

Juvenile Crime

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the most common crimes committed by juveniles in Lewisham in each year since 1985; and of those juveniles convicted of an offence over this period what was the average sentence served.

Mr. Maclean: Information available centrally on juveniles aged 10 to under 17 years within the Lewisham area is given in the tables.

Table 1

Number of juveniles aged 10 to under 17 convicted at juvenile and magistrates' courts within the Lewisham area by type of offence 1985-1992[1]

PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Lewisham juvenile court								
Violence against the person	29	22	22	16	10	10	6	6
Sexual offences	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	2
Burglary	61	53	41	36	29	15	9	8
Robbery	12	2	16	9	7	4	9	8
Theft and handling stolen goods	181	123	109	76	38	35	14	11
Fraud and forgery	5	2	1	1	2	—	1	1
Criminal damage	7	7	7	1	—	1	—	5
Drug offences	8	8	1	1	6	1	3	3
Other (excluding motoring)	4	3	10	7	4	7	7	2
Motoring offences	—	1	2	2	1	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	307	221	210	149	97	73	49	46
Greenwich juvenile court								
Violence against the person	16	18	17	23	24	25	16	19

PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Sexual offences	3	2	—	2	2	—	—	3
Burglary	51	51	48	40	43	37	22	11
Robbery	7	1	1	7	2	8	14	6
Theft and handling stolen goods	159	119	130	101	73	62	48	33
Fraud and forgery	4	5	3	2	1	—	1	—
Criminal damage	6	3	5	5	8	10	5	4
Drug offences	4	3	3	3	6	7	3	—
Other (excluding motoring)	4	2	8	9	9	5	3	7
Motoring offences	1	3	3	2	—	—	1	1
Total Indictable offences	255	207	218	194	168	154	113	84
Greenwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	1	2	2	—	—	—	3	1
Sexual offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Burglary	2	1	2	4	—	—	2	2
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	11	15	8	3	1	1	8	3
Fraud and forgery	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Drug offences	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	1	—	1	—	2	—
Motoring offences	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	16	20	15	9	2	3	17	8
Woolwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sexual offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	3	5	1	3	—	4	1	2
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	1	—	—	2	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	1	—	1	—	1	—	1	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	5	7	3	4	4	4	2	2

[1] Provisional.

Table 2

Average sentence length (months) given at juvenile and magistrates' courts for offences commited by juveniles within the Lewisham area by type of offence 1985-1992[1]

PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Lewisham juvenile court								
Violence against the person	2·2	2·9	—	1·9	—	6·0	3·0	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	2·8	2·3	1·0	3·3	6·0	2·5	—	—
Robbery	3·0	—	3·2	0·7	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	2·5	3·8	3·1	3·1	—	0·7	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	2·2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	3·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	4·0	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	0·9	1·4	4·0	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	2·6	2·8	2·9	2·8	6·0	2·8	3·0	—
Greenwich juvenile court								
Violence against the person	—	3·5	1·9	4·0	—	—	4·0	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	4·1	3·2	3·8	3·9	5·1	3·3	3·0	4·0
Robbery	0·8	—	—	—	—	—	6·0	6·0
Theft and handling stolen goods	3·7	4·0	3·7	2·5	—	0·7	4·5	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	3·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	3·0	—	—	3·0	6·0	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	3·6	3·7	3·6	3·0	5·2	2·8	4·4	5·0
Greenwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	3·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	1·4	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	4·0	—	4·0	—	—	—	—

PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	3·0	4·0	—	4·0	—	1·4	—	—
Woolwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	0·7	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	3·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	3·0	—	—	0·7	—	—	—	—

[1] Provisional

Table 3

Number of juveniles aged 10 to under 17 convicted at the Crown Court by committing petty sessional division within the Lewisham area and type of offence 1985-1992[1]

Committing PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Lewisham juvenile court								
Violence against the person	2	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Burglary	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	—
Robbery	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	2
Theft and handling stolen goods	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	3	—	4	3	1	1	5	3
Greenwich juvenile court								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	—	1	1	2	1	2	—	—
Greenwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	1	1	—	1	2	1	1
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1
Burglary	5	3	—	1	5	4	1	—
Robbery	5	—	1	4	4	5	—	1
Theft and handling stolen goods	1	1	—	—	2	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	2	2	—	1	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	13	7	2	6	12	12	2	3
Woolwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	1	5	—	4	4	—	1	—
Robbery	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	2	2	1	1	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	1	—	3	—

Committing PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	2	8	3	6	7	1	4	—

[1] Provisional

Table 4

Average sentence length (months) given at the Crown Court for offences committed by juveniles by committing petty sessional division within the Lewisham area and type of offence 1985-1992[1]

Committing PSD/type of offence	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	[1]1992
Lewisham juvenile court								
Violence against the person	9·0	—	—	3·0	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	—	—	9·5	—	—	6·0	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	12·0	—	—	12·0
Theft and handling stolen goods	9·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	3·0	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	9·0	—	3·0	7·3	12·0	—	6·0	12·0
Greenwich juvenile court								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	—	12·0	—	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	—	—	—	—	3·0	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	—	—	12·0	—	—	3·0	—	—
Greenwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	6·0	—	—	8·0	—	—	6·0
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	3·5	4·0	—	—	4·3	10·0	—	9·0
Robbery	10·0	—	—	7·5	—	5·3	—	9·0
Theft and handling stolen goods	4·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	12·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	7·9	5·0	—	7·5	5·3	6·5	—	8·0
Woolwich Petty Sessional Division								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	—	2·0	—	—	—
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	6·0	—	5·0	—	—	—	—
Robbery	—	4·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	6·0	—	—	—	—
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	12·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total Indictable offences	—	7·0	—	5·2	2·0	—	—	—

[1] Provisional.

Racial Offences

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives he has pursued to help combat racial attacks.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have on many occasions expressed their abhorrence of racial violence and harassment and fully supports police efforts to tackle racially motivated crime.

In 1989 the inter-departmental racial attacks group, chaired by the Home Office, produced its first report stressing the importance of dealing with racial attacks as a priority task and recommending a multi-agency approach to combatting racial crimes. The report was distributed to all local authorities and to all police forces, and the implementation of the recommendations by forces has been monitored by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

A follow-up report was published in January 1992, which detailed progress made so far, noted good practice,

and proposed how the police and local agencies might further develop their response to racial attacks and harassment.

National and local police training addresses the issue of radical attacks, as part of a wider programme of race awareness training. The Home Office funds the specialist support unit in police-community and race relations training, which deals among other matters with racial attacks training for police trainers.

Each year the Home Office sponsors the Holly Royde seminar on community and race relations which brings together police officers from forces across the country with the purpose of addressing community and race relations issues in an operational context and developing action plans for implementation in forces.

Other initiatives include:

the establishment in 1988 of a Home Office-funded pilot multi-agency project in Newham, East London, which produced a report in 1991 providing a detailed understanding of the practice of multi-agency co-ordination;

the production of a crime prevention leaflet on racial attacks in several different ethnic minority languages, and encouragement of reporting of incidents through poster campaigns;

Home Office sponsored research on victimisation in east London and Manchester.

The Home Affairs Committee is conducting an inquiry into racial attacks and harassment. I gave evidence in July. Future Government action will be informed by the Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been prosecuted to date under part III of the Public Order Act 1986—racial hatred—for offences committed at a designated football match.

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data collected centrally do not detail the circumstances and/or the venue where the offence took place.

Prisoners (Home Leave)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards home leave for violent or dangerous prisoners.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government fully recognise and share public concern that prisoners who present a risk to public safety should not be released on home leave. Steps to tighten the existing procedures governing the grant of home leave were introduced in October 1992 to ensure that no prisoner who is eligible to be considered for an initial period of home leave should be recommended for release into the community before a detailed and thorough risk assessment of his or her potential danger to the public has been carried out. This is particularly important in the case of any offender with violent or dangerous propensities or antecedents.

Guidance to governors on the operation of home leave, including the risk assessment procedure is contained in "Circular Instruction 43/92", a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library.

The prison service is presently conducting a review of the operation of the home leave and temporary release schemes. The working group undertaking the review is tasked with ensuring that public safety is not compromised by offenders being allowed leave as part of their gradual re-integration into society. It includes representatives from the police and probation services, and from Victim Support as well as the prison service. The working group's programme of work is nearing completion following which we shall study its report and any recommendations it may make, with great care.

Young Offenders

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate a full trial into a scheme for young offenders to receive training at sea on the vessel Excelsior, at Lowestoft, for periods of up to three months, to be deducted from their sentences if they passed the training satisfactorily.

Mr. Maclean: Funds are available through the probation supervision grants scheme for voluntary organisations providing sail and similarly challenging training to operate projects designed to strengthen the range and content of programmes for the supervision of offenders who are serving sentences in the community. I see a number of benefits from this approach, and will want to test the effectiveness of this kind of training and consider the scope for integrating it into other sentences. We are discussing with a number of probation services the extent to which offenders could participate in Excelsior Sailing Trust activities, which could be funded under the scheme.

Fast Response Cars

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fast response police cars are currently in use in the metropolis; for which main purposes they are used; how many officers are directly involved in driving them; what is the cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that 339 fast response cars are presently used by the Metropolitan police. The main purpose of such vehicles is to respond to emergency calls. They are also used for general patrol duties. A total of 2,077 officers have authority to drive these vehicles. The approximate total annual cost for the purchase, maintenance and other running costs is £2·94 million.

Prisoners' Families (Visits)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the commitment by the Prison Service to pay for the travel costs of prisoners' families to make a second visit each month to their family member in prison where such families are eligible to receive public funds for such travel.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters have been delegated to the director general of the prison service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Bridget Prentice, dated 25 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the position regarding the proposed extension of the Assisted Visits scheme to cover the second statutory monthly visit.

The White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" included a commitment to consider extensions of the scheme as resources permit. We also have indicated in the Prison Service Business plan that the extension should take place this financial year.

No final decision on this matter has been taken. It will be necessary to do so in the light of the resources available to the Prison Service. I am afraid that it is not yet possible to say when it will be possible to finance the second visit per month. You may be assured, however, that we are well aware of the need to maintain close prisoner and family ties and the importance which prisoners and their families attach to visits.

Prison National Standards

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the document concerning the prison national standards will be published.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 25 November 1993.

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about when the document concerning the Prison National Standards will be published.

Drafting work on a Code of Standards for the Prison Service is nearing completion and we expect to publish it shortly.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to enable owners of relevant breeds to remove their dogs' muzzles to allow them to drink or to receive veterinary attention in a public place, especially if this is within a private motor vehicle.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government do not intend to weaken protection afforded by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Recent tragic events have shown how wrong this would be.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many fatalities there have been due to dog attacks since Royal Assent was given to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991; if he will name the breed of each dog involved; and whether it was registered under the Act;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 following the recent death in Cleveland.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The tragic events in Cleveland underline the need for the strict provisions in the Dangerous Dogs Act, and how right the Government have been not to heed those who have sought to weaken it.

I understand that the dog involved in the Cleveland attack was identified by a veterinary surgeon as being a pit bull terrier type, with some mastiff or bull mastiff qualities. It has not been registered under the Act.

In other words, it fell within the Act's definition of a dog of the type known as a pit bull terrier.

I am aware of one other fatal injury caused by dogs since the coming into force of the Dangerous Dogs Act on 12 August 1991. This occurred in November 1991, and involved an attack on a boy by his family's pets, a Lakeland terrier, a great dane and a German shepherd, none of which are required to be registered under the Act.

Security Service

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Director General of the Security Service is on performance-related pay.

Mr. Howard: No.

Criminal Compensation

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received respecting recent changes in criminal compensation rules; what has been the nature of these representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Since announcing last November our intention to replace the present criminal injuries compensation scheme with a tariff scheme next year we have received representations and comment from a number of hon. Members, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, representative bodies of the legal profession, Victim Support local schemes and the national office, the Trades Union Congress and members of the public.

The representations have covered a range of issues, the main ones being the rationale for the change, the scope of the new arrangements, the way in which the new scheme will be administered and the appeal arrangements.

Ministerial Letters

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officials are currently involved in drafting replies to letters for Ministers in his Department to sign.

Mr. Howard: The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Many officials are involved as part of their normal duties in drafting replies for Ministers.

"A False Sense of Security"

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has made to the document, "A False Sense of Security" published by the Children's Society, a copy of which has been sent to him; and what initiatives or policy changes he intends to put forward in response to that report.

Mr. Maclean: The second report of The Children's Society's advisory committee on young offenders, "A False Sense of Security", will be launched at a one day conference organised by The Children's Society today, 25 November 1993, at which I shall be giving a keynote address. My right hon. and learned Friend and I will be giving careful consideration to the contents of the report.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide *(a)* an estimate of the total number of claims expected for prescribed disease D12—coal miners' chronic bronchitis and emphysema—in each of the first three years following its prescription, *(b)* an estimate of the total number of awards expected for prescribed disease D12 in each of the first three years following its prescription and *(c)* an estimate of the total annual expenditure, pursuant to such awards over each of the three years in question.

Mr. Scott: The number of claims cannot be predicted with any certainty but operational plans have provided for

handling 80,000-90,000 claims in the first year following prescription. The estimated total annual benefit cost is £6 million, based on the assumption that around 9,000 benefit awards will be made, nearly all in the first year. The numbers of new claims and awards in second and subsequent years are expected to be small.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many industrial disablement claims for asbestos-related diseases referred to special medical boards, and the numbers in which the diseases were diagnosed in each year since 1991 in the same format as tables given in reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) of 28 January 1992, *Official Report*, columns *514-16*.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the table.

Asbestos related diseases
First examination and those re-examined where the diseases were not previousy diagnosed

	References					*Positive diagnosis*				
	D1	*D3*	*D8*	*D9*	*Total*	*D1*	*D3*	*D8*	*D9*	*Total*
1991										
Cardiff	68	72	26	57	223	32	67	5	22	126
Glasgow	227	65	32	32	356	68	58	9	22	157
London	105	192	38	73	408	49	180	6	18	253
Manchester	158	63	51	29	301	63	56	11	10	140
Newcastle	944	67	35	90	1,136	53	61	9	23	146
Sheffield	107	80	30	78	295	45	74	6	41	166
Stoke	25	26	17	23	91	14	20	4	8	46
Swansea	13	4	11	12	40	6	3	5	5	19
All Centres	1,647	569	240	394	2,850	330	519	55	149	1,053
1992										
Cardiff	70	49	29	47	195	53	42	8	17	120
Glasgow	295	88	27	45	455	96	77	5	31	209
London	126	199	50	97	472	49	186	10	27	272
Manchester	181	81	55	44	361	46	70	11	5	132
Newcastle	205	59	21	65	430	42	55	8	24	129
Sheffield	102	93	35	74	304	43	87	3	41	174
Stoke	27	34	21	18	100	13	30	9	11	63
Swansea	26	6	5	11	48	12	4	—	4	20
All Centres	1,112	609	243	401	2,365	354	551	54	160	1,119

100 per cent. of cases examined by Medical Boarding Centres (Respiratory Diseases) but excluding cases boarded for reassessments and those disallowed prior to boarding.
D1 = Pneumoconiosis
D3 = Diffuse Mesothelioma
D8 = Primary Carcinoma of the Lung
D9 = Bilateral diffuse pleural thickening

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of disability living allowance claims this year have been *(a)* successful at the initial stage, *(b)* successful at the review stage and *(c)* successful on appeal.

Mr. Scott: In the period from 1 April 1993 to 31 October 1993 inclusive:

(a) 50 per cent. of new claims were successful.

(b) 46 per cent. of reviews (for whatever reason), were successful; and

(c) 44 per cent. of appeals decided were successful.

The figures relating to reviews and appeals do not necessarily relate to claims made during the relevant period. Reviews may be requested for reasons other than dissatisfaction with the result of a claim, for example, changes of circumstances.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Scott: The number of permanent staff employed by the Department, including its agencies, on 31 October 1993 was as follows:

Grade (including equivalent professional and other grades)	*Total staff*[1]	*Number of women*[1]
Grade 1	1	0
Grade 2	4	0
Grade 3	14	2
Grade 4	12	4
Grade 5	122	30
Grade 6	317	74
Grade 7	686	146
Senior Executive Officer	1,433	366
Higher Executive Officer	5,890	2,480
Executive Officer	25,071	15,370
Administrative Officer	45,716	34,367
Administrative Assistant	15,469	10,719
Others	160	114
TOTAL	94,895	63,672

[1] Including part-time staff paid for more than 10 hours a week.

Notes:
1. Total of 94,895 equates to 88,435 full-time equivalent staff.
2. The table excludes:
   i) staff on loan or secondment and not being paid by the Department
   ii) staff on unpaid leave for more than three months or on unpaid maternity leave
   iii) casual staff.

Pensions

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will show as a table for each EU member state the level in pound sterling of the basic state pension, the SERPS or mandatory private pension and a total of both for an employee on national average earnings, married in a one-income household with no dependent children at time of retirement from the latest figures available.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportinate cost. However the report of a study commissioned by the Department last year—the Watsons report—contains this information for six EC member states, including the United Kingdom. A copy of that report is in the Library.

Quarry House

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give to the nearest £5,000 the value of the carpet in the entrance area of Quarry house, headquarters of his management executive.

Mr. Burt: The cost of the carpet linking the two courtyards within Quarry house was £15,000. This was part of the Quarry house project and a contribution to the Percent of Art initiative.

Vaccine Damage Compensation

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in how many applications for vaccine compensation the reason has been given that there is insufficient documentary evidence;

(2) if he will list the number of cases in which applications for vaccine compensation have been rejected; and if he will provide the reasons why applications have been rejected in each case;

(3) in how many cases involving applications for vaccine compensation medical examinations have been carried out.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to undertake a comprehensive review of the vaccine compensation scheme.

Mr. Hague: We keep the vaccine damage payments scheme under constant review.

Media Interviews

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the guidelines governing when media interviews dealing with the administration and efficiency of the Benefits Agency are given by officials of the agency and when by Ministers.

Mr. Scott: There are no such guidelines. Each request for interview is considered in the light of the relevant circumstances.

Child Support Agency

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to remove from the Child Support Agency the powers to overturn clean break divorce settlements which have been established by courts or agreements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Clean break settlements concern the financial affairs of former partners. There can be no clean break between parents and their children, and calculation of maintenance by the agency is based on the current needs of children, and the current income and outgoings of their parents. The formula which the agency uses to assess maintenance does take account of the practical consequences of such settlements, since the current housing costs of absent parents are allowed for in calculating their maintenance liability, and capital settlements may affect the assessable income both of absent parents and of parents with care. Where the practical outcome is that an absent parent has higher costs or lower income, his maintenance liability will consequently be less.

The operation of the Child Support Agency is being kept under review.

Sickness and Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what numbers of new claimants have been accepted for *(a)* sickness benefit and *(b)* invalidity benefit in each of the past 12 months.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the number of claims made to sickness and invalidity benefit for each month in Great Britain.

Month	*Number of Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit claims*
November 1992	94,000
December 1992	79,000
January 1993	95,000
February 1993	90,000
March 1993	101,000
April 1993	90,000
May 1993	85,000
June 1993	94,000
July 1993	92,000
August 1993	88,000
September 1993	92,000
October 1993	91,000

Notes:
1. Figures are based on a 100 per cent. clerical count, rounded to the nearest thousand and are subject to amendment.
2. Separate figures are not available for Sickness Benefit and Invalidity Benefit.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the criteria according to which people are considered eligible to receive invalidity benefit with particular reference to ME—myalgic encephalomyelitis—sufferers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Invalidity benefit is payable to people who remain incapable of work when their entitlement to sickness benefit or statutory sick pay ends, and who have satisfied the national insurance contribution conditions

which apply to sickness benefit. Entitlement does not depend on the nature of a person's incapacity, and people suffering from ME qualify in the same way as other claimants if they satisfy these conditions.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many officials in his Department are currently involved in drafting replies to letters for Ministers in his Department to sign.

Mr. Hague: The ministerial correspondence section, which allocates correspondence and ensures accuracy of drafts, comprises 15 staff.

It is part of the responsibility of most executive grade officers in the Department to produce draft replies to correspondence on issues within their area of responsibility. It is therefore impossible to quantify the number involved in producing drafts.

Disability Legislation

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to introduce anti-discrimination legislation on behalf of disabled people; what representations he has received on this subject; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The Government have no plans to introduce such legislation. A number of organisations of and for disabled people and the all-party disablement group have made representations. While the Government share the aim of ending discrimination against disabled people, they do not see comprehensive legislation as the appropriate vehicle for doing so. At the Prime Minister's request, I am working with members of the all-party disablement group, to identify areas for further action where discrimination could be eliminated at little or no cost.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the management structure of the NHS management executive *(a)* before and *(b)* after the post of special project director was created.

Mr. Stewart: The post of special project director is outwith the management structure of the NHS Management Executive, reporting direct to the Chief Executive, NHS in Scotland.

EMPLOYMENT

Part-time Workers

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many part-time workers were in employment in *(a)* June 1993 and *(b)* June 1992.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information is as follows:

Part-time workforce in employment in Great Britain: Seasonally adjusted (thousands)

	Number
June 1992	6,683
June 1993	6,769

Employment Training

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the job entry rate for employment training leavers in each region.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest information available is in the following table:

Percentage of all leavers from employment training during the period April 1992 to January 1993 going into a job

Region	*Percentage into a job*[1]
South East	28
London	26
Eastern	30
South West	32
West Midlands	30
East Midlands	38
Yorkshire and Humberside	36
NW, Greater Manchester	33
North West	35
Northern	31
Wales	39
Scotland	34

Source: ET National Follow-up Survey.

[1] Into a Job includes full-time work, part-time work and self employment three months after leaving.

Training and Enterprise Councils (Secondments)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many civil servants from his Department on secondment to training and enterprise councils have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been accepted under the voluntary early retirement scheme; and of those, how many are now working permanently for the TEC to which they were seconded; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Applications for voluntary early retirement were received from 171 staff on secondment to training and enterprise councils. A total of 153 were accepted. No information is available on the number, if any, now working permanently for the TEC to which they were seconded.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many officials are currently involved in his Department in drafting replies to letters for Ministers to sign.

Miss Widdecombe: We do not keep a record of the number of officials currently involved in drafting ministerial replies and this information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Health and Safety Publications

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will reverse the decision of the Health and Safety Executive to award the contract for the distribution of official health and safety publications to Promotion Logics and Dillons bookstores; what assessment he has made of the level of public access to these publications and the competitive effect on other bookstores; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive but I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns. I have already made inquiries and once these are complete I will write to him.

SCOTLAND

NHS Management Executive

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether it is the normal practice for posts in the NHS management executive to be advertised; and if he will list the exceptions there have been to such practice in recent years.

Mr. Stewart: Apart from the post of the chief executive, the only senior posts in the management executive to be advertised in recent years have been those of director of finance, director of operations and director of human resources.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will conduct an investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Lawrence Peterken's dismissal as general manager of Greater Glasgow health board and his subsequent appointment to the post of special projects director with the NHS management executive.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has already instituted such an investigation.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the job description and the terms and conditions under which the job of national health service management executive special projects director was offered to Mr. Peterken's.

Mr. Stewart: Mr. Peterken's duties will be to examine a number of issues that flow from the reforms that have been introduced in the NHS in the last few years. He will be employed on the terms and conditions applicable to general managers of health boards.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland at what stage his views were sought on the appointment of Mr. Laurence Peterken's to the post of special projects director with the NHS Management Executive.

Mr. Stewart: This appointment was made by the Chief Executive, NHS in Scotland, after consulting my right hon. Friend and my noble and learned Friend.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the management structure of the NHS Management Executive (a) before and (b) after the post of special project director was created.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The post of special project director is outwith the management structure of the NHS Management Executive, Reporting direct to the Chief Executive, NHS in Scotland.

Forestry Commission

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations the review group has received on the subject of the privatisation of the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Lang: More than 340 organisations and 1,450 individuals have made submissions or offered comment direct to the Forestry review group. Comment has also been addressed to Ministers and officials in the other departments represented on the group. The majority of letters are concerned about the effect that privatisation might have on access to woodlands, security of timber supplies and the environment.

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the future of the Forestry Commission.

Sir Hector Monro: Forestry Ministers have asked the forestry review group to review the effectiveness of the current incentives for forestry investment, in accordance with the manifesto commitment, and options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands, and to make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies.

My right hon. Friend does not wish to make any statement about the future of the Forestry Commission until Ministers have received and studied the advice of the review group.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements exist for the making of submissions to him from local people, organisations and local authorities in respect of which areas of Forestry Commission land should not be privatised.

Sir Hector Monro: Forestry Ministers have asked the forestry review group to review options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands, and to make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies.

Once they have received and considered the advice of the review group they will decide what further action, if any, should be taken.

In the meantime, individuals and interested bodies are welcome to address comments on the work of the review group to its Secretary:

G. S. Pearson
Secretary, Forestry Review Group
Room 5/42
New St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3TG

Young Persons Secure Accommodation

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places in secure accommodation there are for persons aged under 16 years in Scotland; and where they were located, in each year since 1986.

Mr. Stewart: The number of secure places in Scotland formally approved by the Secretary of State since 1986 is as follows:

	Number
Rossie school Montrose	25
St. Mary's Kenmure school Glasgow	24
Kerelaw school Stevenston	24 (18 in 1986-1988)

	Number
Howdenhall children's unit Edinburgh	5
Rimbleton house Glenrothes	2
Brodie youth care centre Polmont (formerly Weedingshall)	2 (0 in 1986; 1 in 1987-89)
Hightrees assessment centre Closeburn (formerly Closeburn)	2 (0 in 1986)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much direct central Government support is paid towards the cost of the secure accommodation for persons aged under 16 years in each financial year since 1986 in *(a)* Rossie school, Montrose, *(b)* St. Mary's Kenmure school, Glasgow, *(c)* Kerelaw school, Stevenson, *(d)* Howdenhall children's unit, Edinburgh, *(e)* Rumbleton house, Glenrothes, *(f)* Weedingshall youth care centre, Polmont and *(g)* Closeburn assessment centre, Closeburn.

Mr. Stewart: Capital grants were paid by the Secretary of State towards secure accommodation as follows:

	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £	1992-93 £
Rossie school	68,396	71,448	69,770	36,626	41,336	59,139	64,152
St Mary's Kenmure school	9,560	165,483	—	21,177	37,064	60,074	109,459
Weedingshall youth care centre (now Brodie)	—	—	—	63,000	—	—	—
Howdenhall centre	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]106,718

Note:
[1] Part of total grant offer of £1,139,784.

Until 1990 the Secretary of State paid grants towards the revenue costs of Rossie and St Mary's schools, but specific information on these payments is not readily available.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the average annual cost of keeping a person in the accommodation units at *(a)* Rossie school, *(b)* St. Mary's Kenmure school, Glasgow, *(c)* Kerelaw school, Stevenson, *(d)* Howdenhall children's unit, Edinburgh, *(e)* Rumbleton house, Glenrothes, *(f)* Weedingshall youth care centre, Polmont and *(g)* Closeburn assessment centre, Closeburn; and what proportion of such cost is met by direct Government grant.

Mr. Stewart: The annual cost of keeping a person in the secure units (based on current weekly bed-rate figures) is as follows:

	£
Rossie school	59,696
St. Mary's Kenmure	56,940
Kerelaw school	65,780
Howdenhall children's unit	58,500
Rimbleton house	60,060
Weedingshall youth care centre (now Brodie)	74,270
Closeburn assessment centre (now Hightrees)	77,168

The Scottish Office does not pay grants to assist with revenue costs.

List D Schools

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the amount of central Government financial support paid to list D category schools in Scotland in each of the five years preceding their abolition from 1 April 1986; and if he will express that central Government support as a percentage of the total cost of these schools in each year.

Mr. Stewart: The Secretary of State paid grants towards the capital costs of those schools up to 1986 as follows:

	£
1981-82	366,476
1982-83	229,599
1983-84	227,005
1984-85	308,269
1985-86	354,684

At the same time, the Secretary of State paid grants towards the revenue costs of the schools but specific information is not readily available on the percentage of final current expenditure which these grants met.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS in each year since 1989.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested for the NHS in Scotland is as follows:

	September 1989	September 1990	September [1]1991	September [1]1992	March [1]1993
(a) Head count					
Nursing and midwifery[2]	74,949	74,573	75,068	73,605	71,506
Managerial staff[3,5]	800	1,072	1,315	1,678	1,834
Administrative and clerical[4]	16,617	17,136	17,679	18,584	18,677
(b) Whole-time equivalent					
Nursing and midwifery[2]	64,452·3	63,687·2	63,503·0	61,652·0	60,252·5
Managerial staff[3,5]	797·6	1,064·5	1,301·3	1,661·6	1,810·2
Administrative and clerical[4]	14,425·3	14,859·3	15,282·8	15,978·0	16,125·8

Notes:
[1] 1991, 1992, 1993 figures include the State Hospital, Carstairs.
[2] Nursing and midwifery staff include qualified, unqualified and in training nurses. The decrease of numbers between 1991, 1992 and 1993 is wholly accounted for by a decrease in and transfer out of NHS employment of those in training: in particular, Project 2000 student nurses, who are excluded from the figures, are not directly employed by the NHS.
[3] 1989 data include administrative and clerical staff on grade 18 and above; 1990-1992 data include grades 7 and above.
[4] Excludes managerial staff. Includes control assistants and ambulance officers.
[5] The increase in numbers in this group is partially accounted for by the transfer of some professional staff to senior manager grades.

Former NHS Workers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to make use of the experience of former NHS workers

Mr. Stewart: The Scottish Office has for many years made use of experience of staff previously employed in the NHS and I expect this practice to continue.

Health Board Managers

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what experience of the health service is required of applicants for the post of general manager of a health board.

Mr. Stewart: This is a matter for the recruiting health board itself to consider.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent communications he has had with Mr. Bill Fyfe, chairman of Greater Glasgow health board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My noble and learned Friend met health board chairmen, including Mr. Fyfe, on 5 November. In addition, my right hon. Friend spoke to Mr. Fyfe by telephone on Wednesday 24 November.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which firms have been chosen to do public relations work for Greater Glasgow health board; and what has been the total value of this contract.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* Firms employed by Greater Glasgow health board in 1992-93 and 1993-94 (to 31 October 1993) are Faulds, Michael Kelly Associates Limited, Proscot, Alan Clark Associates and PR Consultants (Scotland), with a total spend of £534,954·40 in 1992-93 and £168,624·38 in 1993-94 to date.

Local Authority Boundaries

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from *(a)* Musselburgh and *(b)* Prestonpans in favour of putting those two towns in separate local authority areas; and how many representations he has received opposing the creation of such a boundary.

Mr. Stewart: Since publication of the White Paper, "Shaping the Future—The New Council", a total of 29 individual letters from Musselburgh and two from Prestonpans have expressed concern over the restructuring proposals for these areas. In addition, a number of representations from outwith these areas have expressed concern over the problems to which the White Paper boundaries would give rise in Prestonpans.

Melrose Bypass

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the finishing of construction of the proposed Melrose bypass.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* I am currently considering the report of the public local inquiry into the proposal for the Melrose bypass phase 3 and a decision will be issued as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Countryside Survey

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he published the survey of the countryside commissioned by his Department; how many copies were printed; to whom they have been distributed; and what policy proposals he intends to develop arising from the findings of the report.

Mr. Yeo: The results of Countryside Survey 1990 were published by the Department on 17 November in a main report and a summary report. 1,500 copies of the main report and 3,300 copies of the summary report have been printed. The reports have been distributed to the 150 guests at the launch, representing Government Departments, non-departmental public bodies, non-governmental organisations, research institutions, industry, academia and the press. Wider distribution of 1,000 copies of the summary report to include local authorities is in progress. Copies have been deposited in the House Library and are also available from my Department's publications sales unit priced at £12 for the main report and £6 for the summary report.

Countryside survey 1990 reports on the 12-year period leading up to 1990. Since 1990 the Government have set in place a range of positive policy measures in the countryside. These include the introduction of the countryside stewardship scheme in England and the Tir Cymen scheme in Wales in June 1992; in 1991 the introduction of the hedgerow incentive scheme; in 1992; the extension and development of environmentally sensitive areas; and the integration of environmental measures in the reform of the common agricultural policy.

Further work has been commissioned by my Department to improve our understanding of the reasons for the changes recorded, and we shall commission a further survey in the year 2000.

Shopping Centres

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his current proposals concerning out-of-town shopping centres.

Mr. Baldry: The Secretary of State's current policy is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 6, "Town Centres and Retail Developments", published in July. It should be

taken into account by local authorities as they prepare their development plans, and in deciding individual applications. Among other things, it stresses a suitable balance in providing for retail development between town centre and out-of-centre retail facilities, taking account of factors such as accessibility and effective competition that will benefit consumers generally.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for how many out-of-town shopping centres he has given planning permission for each year since 1979; and which companies have been successful.

Mr. Baldry: The Secretary of State granted permission, on appeal, for major retail developments over 1,000 sq. metres floor space as follows:

Year	*Number of Appeals Allowed*
*1984-85	28
1985-86	42
1986-87	82
1987-88	88
1988-89	65
1989-90	37
1990-91	43
1991-92	47
1992-93	70

* This covers the period from 1 January 1984 to 31 March 1985

No data is readily available for the period 1979-1983, nor is data readily available for the number of called-in applications approved. It is not possible to distinguish between town centre schemes and out of town developments, nor to identify the developers or companies involved, without unreasonable cost.

Sainsbury's, Yeovil

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the planning application for Sainsbury's plans to develop Wyndham Hill in Yeovil.

Mr. Baldry: As a departure from the development plan the application has been referred to the Secretary of State, who will decide whether or not to call it in.

Local Government Review

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the mode of transport used by each member of the Local Government Commission in performing their duties in the local government review, with the class of travel used.

Mr. Baldry: Travel expenses necessarily incurred by members on Commission business are payable in accordance with the arrangements made for senior staff of the commission. Civil service terms and conditions excluding pay apply to these staff. Accordingly, the commission has discretion to determine its own arrangements for reimbursement of travel expenses within the rules and principles set out in the civil service management code.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total cost of the public opinion surveys carried out in the course of the local government review.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the current situation with regard to local government reorganisation.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend announced on 2 November his decision to implement the Local Government Commission's recommendations in respect of the Isle of Wight. We are currently considering the Government's response to the commission's recommendations concerning Derbyshire, Cleveland and Durham. The commission is preparing reports on Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, and on Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire. The commission has been directed to begin reviews of the remaining shire counties on 13 December 1993 and to submit all reports on or before 30 December 1994.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities he has visited since his appointment as Secretary of State.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities he has visited since his appointment as Secretary of State.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cities and towns he has visited in England since his appointment.

Mr. Gummer: Fourteen cities and 13 towns.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Gummer: The following information covers non-industrial staff:

Grade	*Total*	*Women*
Grade 1	1	0
Grade 2	7	3
Grade 3	34	5
Grade 4	7	0
Grade 5	144	20
Grade 6	309	30
Grade 7	776	128
SEO and equivalent	740	133
HEO and equivalent	981	305
EO and equivalent	1,224	524
AO and equivalent	1,601	995
AA and equivalent	790	518
Totals	6,614	2,661

Capital Receipts Holiday

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the capital receipts holiday.

Mr. Baldry: We have no such plans.

Local Government Reorganisation 1974

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the local government reorganisation in 1974; and what savings have been made to date.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not available.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost to public funds of the Local Government Commission's travel expenses up to 28 October.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the Local Government Commission.

City Pride

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what additional resources are available to urban areas as a result of City Pride.

Mr. Baldry: There are no additional resources for City Pride. Central and local government as well as the private sector will continue to spend large sums of money in London, Birmingham and Manchester. City Pride is about making the most of this investment, building on the vision and strengths of the partnership which exist there and providing a lasting foundation for growth. The Department has already constructive discussions with the three cities about taking forward this new initiative.

Trading Standards Service

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the impact of the proposals contained in the Local Government Review on the Trading Standards Service; and what measures the Government plans to take to protect this service.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission's recommendations must enable adequate provision to be made for all existing local government functions, including the trading standards service. This is a matter we shall be looking at as we receive the commission's final reports for each area.

Environmental Taxes

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the proposals advanced by the OECD for implementation of environmental taxes in OECD member countries.

Mr. Gummer: The OECD have done a good deal of analytical work on the use member countries make of economic instruments to advance environmental policies, but I am not aware that they have made any proposals for the implementation of environmental taxes.

Housing (Managing Agents)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to make it compulsory for landlords to consult leaseholders in sheltered accommodation, where known, before the appointment of a managing agent in all circumstances;

(2) what reforms he plans to ensure that leaseholders in sheltered accommodation can dismiss or replace an unsatisfactory managing agent more easily;

(3) what plans he has to ensure that landlords and managing agents who breach the Landlord and Tenant Acts are prosecuted;

(4) what steps he has taken to ensure that leaseholders in sheltered accommodation are aware of their rights under the Landlord and Tenant Acts 1985 and 1987, and the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act.

Sir George Young: All leaseholders are protected by the contractual terms of their leases, which define the rights and duties of landlords and tenants and the basis of service charges. In addition, the Landlord and Tenants Acts 1985 and 1987 give tenants additional statutory rights.

The Government have no plans to make it compulsory for landlords to consult leaseholders in any type of accommodation before appointing a managing agent. However, under the existing legislation, a recognised tenants association has the right, at any time, to serve a notice on the landlord asking him to consult the association about the appointment or employment of a managing agent. Tenants of flats, either individually or as a group, can apply to the county court for the appointment of a manager if the landlord or his agent is in breach of his management obligations.

In addition, if, in accordance with the Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act, a group of tenants enfranchise and purchase the freehold of their block, they will be able to dismiss an unsatisfactory agent and appoint their own replacement.

Where a landlord has failed to comply with certain provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Acts the tenant has the right to seek redress through the courts. In certain cases the landlord may be committing a criminal offence and a local authority which is a housing authority may prosecute.

The Department issues press releases to draw attention to new or amended legislation which affects the rights of landlords and tenants. It also publishes information booklets on these rights from time to time which are supplied to the public on request. The booklets may also be obtained from local libraries and citizens-advice bureaux.

Community Charge Form (Auction)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement as to how the previous occupant of No. 10 Downing street's completed community charge form for 1989 came into the hands of auctioneer Trevor Vennett-Smith of Gotham, Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the local authority concerned.

Wildlife Habitats

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is proposing to take to prevent further decline in the number of important wildlife habitats as revealed in the 1990 countryside survey.

Mr. Yeo: Countryside Survey 1990 reports on the 12-year period leading up to 1990. Since 1990 the Government has set in place a range of positive policy measures in the countryside. These include the introduction of the countryside stewardship scheme in England in June 1991 and the similar Tir Cymen scheme in Wales; the introduction of the hedgerow incentive scheme in 1992 and the extension and development of environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs). The United Kingdom has also strongly advocated the integration of environmental considerations in the reform of the common agricultural policy.

The United Kingdom played a leading role in the negotiations which resulted in the EC Habitats Directive and consequently welcomed its adoption in May 1992 as a step forward for nature conservation in the Community. The Government is fully committed to meeting its obligations under the directive and has just undertaken a wide public consultation process on its proposals for implementing the directive.

Acid Rain

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is undertaking to prevent damage to flora and fauna from acid rain.

Mr. Yeo: The Government have in place a range of measures to control and progressively reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, the two main precursors of acid rain. These measures were set out in the 1990 Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", and subsequent annual reports. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Homelessness

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he can provide figures on homelessness for *(a)* Coventry, *(b)* the west midlands and *(c)* London and the average for major cities in the United Kingdom.

Sir George Young: The latest estimates of the number of households for whom local authorities in the west midlands and London accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation appear in table 1(a) of "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act 1985: England. Statistics for the second quarter of 1993".

The latest reported figure for Coventry, and other major cities in England, appear in the associated supplementary table.

Copies of both are in the Library.

For information about Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland respectively.

Deregulation

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regulations being considered as part of his Department's plans for deregulation in pollution control.

Mr. Yeo: A list of regulations affecting business, including those dealing with pollution control, was placed in the House of Commons library on 20 April 1993.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regulations being considered as part of his Department's plans for deregulation in environment protection.

Mr. Yeo: A list of regulations affecting business, including those dealing with environmental protection, was placed in the House of Commons Library on 20 April 1993.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many officials in his Department are currently involved in drafting replies to letters for Ministers to sign.

Mr. Gummer: It is not possible to identify the number of officials involved in drafting replies for ministerial signature. Many staff in my Department will be involved at some time in assisting with gathering material for, and the drafting of, letters for Ministers to sign.

Council Tax

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax valuation remain outstanding *(a)* in total, *(b)* by local authority and *(c)* by standard region.

Mr. Curry: As at 30 October 1993, there were 597,931 proposals to alter the council tax valuation list outstanding. This figure is broken down on the tables below by billing authority and by Valuation Office Agency region. The information is not collected by standard statistical region.

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority—Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	*DoE Code*	*Billing authority*	*Received*	*Settled*	*Outstanding*
East Anglia					
Bedford	0205	Bedford	2,326	351	1,975
	0210	Luton	816	141	675
	0215	Mid Bedfordshire	2,105	234	1,871
	0220	South Bedfordshire	1,334	260	1,074
Cambridge	0505	Cambridge	1,417	301	1,116
	0510	East Cambridgeshire	1,166	234	932
	3510	Forest Heath	1,181	172	1,009
	3525	St. Edmundsbury	1,653	306	1,347
	0530	South Cambridgeshire	2,215	416	1,799
Chelmsford	1505	Basildon	2,165	372	1,793
	1515	Brentwood	1,565	264	1,301

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
	1525	Chelmsford	2,468	235	2,233
	1535	Epping Forest	1,885	129	1,756
	1540	Harlow	913	82	831
	1565	Thurrock	1,487	277	1,210
	1570	Uttlesford	1,836	364	1,472
Colchester	1510	Braintree	2,509	291	2,218
	1520	Castle Point	1,364	110	1,254
	1530	Colchester	2,448	356	2,092
	1545	Maldon	1,254	184	1,070
	1550	Rochford	1,126	91	1,035
	1555	Southend-on-Sea	1,773	191	1,582
	1560	Tendring	2,629	216	2,413
Ipswich	3505	Babergh	1,380	247	1,133
	3515	Ipswich	1,232	237	995
	3520	Mid Suffolk	1,672	271	1,401
	3530	Suffolk Coastal	2,553	657	1,896
	3535	Waveney	1,501	299	1,202
Norwich	2605	Brockland	1,920	321	1,599
	2610	Broadland	1,808	293	1,515
	2615	Great Yarmouth	1,062	211	851
	2620	North Norfolk	2,473	413	2,060
	2625	Norwich	1,417	371	1,046
	2630	South Norfolk	2,212	303	1,909
Peterborough	2815	East Northamptonshire	1,325	216	1,109
	0515	Fenland	846	99	747
	0520	Huntingdonshire	1,333	357	976
	2635	Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	2,774	141	2,633
	0525	Peterborough	1,177	163	1,014
	2525	South Holland	1,328	98	1,230
St. Albans	1910	Dacorum	1,465	184	1,281
	1920	Hertsmere	1,535	345	1,190
	1930	St. Albans	1,725	124	1,601
	1940	Three Rivers	1,126	167	959
	1945	Watford	1,164	168	996
Stevenage	1905	Broxbourne	860	93	767
	1915	East Hertfordshire	1,744	161	1,583
	1925	North Hertfordshire	1,759	229	1,530
	1935	Stevenage	574	103	471
	1950	Welwyn Hatfield	1,206	78	1,128
REGIONAL TOTAL			80,806	11,926	68,880

Council Tax

Proposals by billing authority—Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
East Midland					
Derby	1005	Amber Valley	1,982	310	1,672
	1020	Derby	2,450	825	1,625
	1045	Derbyshire Dales	2,727	354	2,373
	1025	Erewash	1,238	318	920
	1040	South Derbyshire	1,408	296	1,112
Doncaster	4405	Barnsley	1,575	280	1,295
	4410	Doncaster	1,686	381	1,305
	4725	Wakefield	1,975	575	1,400
Grimsby	2015	Cleethorpes	785	70	715
	2510	East Lindsey	3,260	379	2,881
	2020	Glanford	1,060	268	792
	2025	Great Grimsby	437	31	406
	2045	Scunthorpe	245	35	210
Hull	2010	Boothferry	1,277	218	1,059
	2040	East Yorkshire	1,453	294	1,159
	2005	E Y Borough of Beverley	2,105	324	1,781
	2030	Holderness	1,317	269	1,048
	2035	Kingston-upon-Hull	1,517	432	1,085

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstnding
Leicester	2405	Blaby	1,341	107	1,234
	2415	Harborough	1,473	298	1,175
	2425	Leicester	1,838	375	1,463
	2440	Oadby and Wigston	517	97	420
Lincoln	2505	Boston	787	61	726
	2515	Lincoln	483	207	276
	3030	Newark and Sherwood	1,370	219	1,151
	2520	North Kesteven	1,656	590	1,066
	2530	South Kesteven	1,422	175	1,247
	2535	West Lindsey	1,695	253	1,442
Loughborough	2410	Charnwood	1,982	306	1,676
	2420	Hinckley and Bosworth	1,116	63	1,053
	2430	Melton	1,211	91	1,120
	2435	North West Leicestershire	855	160	695
	2445	Rutland	951	149	802
Mansfield	3005	Ashfield	743	146	597
	3010	Bassetlaw	1,299	130	1,169
	1010	Bolsover	487	68	419
	1015	Chesterfield	898	214	684
	3025	Mansfield	846	250	596
	1035	North East Derbyshire	1,151	171	980
Northampton	2805	Corby	457	86	371
	2810	Daventry	966	95	871
	2820	Kettering	1,102	155	947
	2825	Northampton	1,240	238	1,002
	2830	South Northamptonshire	1,421	264	1,157
	2835	Wellingborough	502	86	416
Nottingham	3015	Broxtowe	1,284	365	919
	3020	Gedling	1,601	355	1,246
	3035	Nottingham	1,540	229	1,311
	3040	Rushcliffe	2,070	369	1,701
Sheffield	4415	Rotherham	3,342	444	2,898
	4420	Sheffield	3,121	597	2,524
REGIONAL TOTAL			71,264	13,072	58,192

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
London					
Barking	5060	Barking & Dagenham	580	51	529
	5480	Havering	2,630	257	2,573
Bromley	5180	Bromley	6,627	821	5,806
	5240	Croydon	4,721	719	4,002
	5870	Sutton	2,400	385	2,015
City of London	5030	City of London	111	12	99
Ealing	5270	Ealing	4,588	754	3,834
	5540	Hounslow	2,976	545	2,431
Enfield	5090	Barnet	5,878	713	5,165
	5300	Enfield	4,662	430	4,232
	5420	Haringey	4,808	727	4,081
Greenwich	5120	Bexley	3,376	516	2,860
	5530	Greenwich	2,601	220	2,361
	5690	Lewisham	2,509	321	2,188
Harrow	5150	Brent	2,799	498	2,301
	5450	Harrow	2,126	313	1,813
	5510	Hillingdon	2,296	300	1,996
Islington	5360	Hackney	2,623	429	2,194
	5570	Islington	3,592	610	2,982
Kensington	5390	Hammersmith & Fulham	4,377	896	3,481

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
	5600	Kensington & Chelsea	8,014	908	7,106
Lambeth	5660	Lambeth	5,186	400	4,786
	5840	Southwark	3,379	393	2,966
London Support Unit	5210	Camden	5,406	831	4,576
	5990	City of Westminster	6,210	1,087	5,123
Redbridge	5780	Redbridge	3,250	475	2,775
	5930	Waltham Forest	1,634	236	1,398
Tower Hamlets	5750	Newham	1,203	235	968
	5900	Tower Hamlets	1,613	51	1,562
Wimbledon	5630	Kingston upon Thames	1,967	318	1,649
	5720	Merton	1,865	233	1,632
	5810	Richmond upon Thames	4,000	595	3,405
	5960	Wandsworth	1,922	250	1,672
Regional Total			111,929	15,529	96,400

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
North Western					
Bolton	4205	Bolton	2,986	981	2,005
	4210	Bury	2172	252	1,920
Burnley	2305	Blackburn	1,082	303	779
	2315	Burnley	659	92	567
	2330	Hyndburn	732	171	561
	2340	Pendle	1,090	187	903
	2350	Ribble Valley	1,726	143	1,583
	2355	Rossendale	1,500	240	1,260
Chester	0605	Chester	2,032	523	1,509
	0620	Ellesmere Port & Neston	788	247	541
	4325	Wirral	3,241	635	2,608
Crewe	0610	Congleton	1,234	177	1,057
	0615	Crewe & Nantwich	1,762	266	1,496
	0630	Macclesfield	2,576	413	2,163
	0635	Vale Royal	1,986	378	1,608
Lancaster	2310	Blackpool	1,232	310	922
	2325	Fylde	1,829	130	1,699
	2335	Lancaster	2,354	277	2,077
	2370	Wyre	2,062	318	1,744
Liverpool	4305	Knowsley	965	306	659
	4310	Liverpool	2,950	253	2,697
	4320	Sefton	3,239	500	2,739
Manchester	4215	Manchester	1,842	141	1,701
Preston	2320	Chorley	973	216	757
	2345	Preston	1,498	315	1,183
	2360	South Ribble	1,725	355	1,370
	2365	West Lancashire	1,635	397	1,238
Rochdale	4220	Oldham	1,429	252	1,177
	4225	Rochdale	1,386	258	1,128
Salford	4230	Salford	2,277	634	1,643
	4245	Trafford	2,503	271	2,232
Stockport	1030	High Peak	1,241	160	1,081
	4235	Stockport	2,709	220	2,489
	4240	Temerside	1,413	255	1,158
Warrington	0625	Halton	1,262	328	934
	4315	St Helens	1,761	544	1,217
	0640	Warrington	2,120	411	1,709
	4250	Wigan	3,063	610	2,453
Regional Total			69,034	12,469	56,565

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
Northern					
Alnwick	2905	Alnwick	1,334	424	910
	2910	Berwick-upon-Tweed	882	103	779
	2915	Blyth Valley	364	65	299
	2920	Castle Morpeth	1,045	74	971
	2925	Tynedale	1,649	112	1,537
	2930	Wansbeck	281	19	262
Bradford	4705	Bradford	4,742	708	4,034
Carlisle	0905	Allerdale	1,397	105	1,292
	0915	Carlisle	1,272	161	1,111
	0925	Eden	2,171	306	1,865
Durham	1305	Chester-le-Street	459	156	303
	1310	Darlington	1,151	265	886
	1315	Derwentside	742	103	639
	1320	Durham	1,219	67	1,152
	1325	Easington	267	20	247
	1330	Sedgefield	732	134	598
	1335	Teesdale	1,255	13	1,242
	1340	Wear Valley	824	59	765
Halifax	4710	Calderdale	3,302	651	2,651
	4715	Kirklees	6,217	1,208	5,009
Harrogate	2705	Craven	2,218	131	2,087
	2710	Hambleton	2,136	72	2,064
	2715	Harrogate	3,765	306	3,459
	2720	Richmondshire	1,253	99	1,154
Leeds	4720	Leeds	6,621	902	5,719
Middlesbrough	0705	Hartlepool	495	125	370
	0710	Langbaurgh-on-Tees	1,346	265	1,081
	0715	Middlesbrough	818	277	541
	0720	Stockton-on-Tees	1,413	279	1,134
Newcastle	4510	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2,034	360	1,674
	4515	North Tyneside	1,342	200	1,142
Sunderland	4505	Gateshead	1,716	349	1,367
	4520	South Tyneside	1,013	154	859
	4525	Sunderland	1,220	386	834
Ulverston	0910	Barrow-in-Furness	678	98	580
	0920	Copeland	855	137	718
	0930	South Lakeland	3,279	493	2,786
York	2725	Ryedale	2,481	196	2,285
	2730	Scarborough	2,374	256	2,118
	2735	Selby	2,433	285	2,198
	2740	York	1,238	297	941
Regional Total			72,033	10,370	61,663

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
South Eastern					
Brighton	1405	Brighton	1,963	548	1,415
	3820	Crawley	876	120	750
	1420	Hove	1,611	437	1,174
	1425	Lewes	1,832	302	1,530
	3830	Mid Sussex	1,977	242	1,735
Chatham	2215	Dartford	904	156	748
	2225	Gillingham	851	265	586
	2230	Gravesham	1,121	192	929
	2240	Rochester-upon-Medway	1,128	148	980
	2255	Swale	1,811	190	1,621

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
Eastbourne	1410	Eastbourne	1,690	317	1,373
	1415	Hastings	1,103	171	932
	1430	Rother	2,436	568	1,868
	1435	Wealden	3,175	675	2,500
Folkestone	2210	Canterbury	2,246	336	1,910
	2220	Dover	1,569	367	1,202
	2250	Shepway	1,869	219	1,650
	2260	Thanet	1,419	287	1,132
Guildford	3615	Guildford	2,619	290	2,329
	3630	Runnymede	3,605	271	3,334
	3640	Surrey Heath	1,424	382	1,042
	3650	Waverley	2,488	350	2,138
	3655	Woking	1,411	309	1,102
Reigate	3605	Elmbridge	2,536	331	2,205
	3610	Epsom & Ewell	689	77	612
	3620	Mole Valley	1,572	48	1,524
	3625	Reigate & Banstead	2,218	316	1,900
	3635	Spelthorne	1,224	356	863
	3645	Tandridge	2,045	376	1,670
Tunbridge Wells	2205	Ashford	2,725	182	2,543
	2235	Maidstone	2,271	143	2,128
	2245	Sevenoaks	2,813	80	2,733
	2265	Tonbridge & Malling	2,339	189	2,150
	2270	Tunbridge Wells	2,271	315	1,956
Worthing	3805	Adur	893	248	645
	3810	Arun	2,945	358	2,587
	3815	Chichester	2,843	351	2,492
	3825	Horsham	2,653	300	2,353
	3835	Worthing	1,670	355	1,315
REGIONAL TOTAL			74,836	11,169	63,667

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
Southern					
Aylesbury	0405	Aylesbury Vale	3,050	337	2,713
	0415	Chiltern	1,974	159	1,815
	0420	Milton Keynes	2,281	300	1,981
	0410	South Buckinghamshire	1,319	84	1,235
	0425	Wycombe	2,792	133	2,654
Basingstoke	1705	Basingstoke and Deane	2,205	659	1,546
	1710	East Hampshire	2,240	379	1,861
	1730	Hart	1,080	183	897
	1750	Rushmoor	739	243	496
	1765	Winchester	2,851	510	2,341
Bournemouth	1205	Bournemouth	3,141	563	2,578
	1210	Christchurch	1,190	165	1,025
	1240	East Dorset	2,286	173	2,113
	1220	Poole	2,690	333	2,357
Dorchester	1215	North Dorset	1,468	57	1,411
	1225	Purbeck	1,273	233	1,040
	1230	West Dorset	2,585	122	2,463
	1235	Weymouth and Portland	958	74	884
Oxford	3105	Cherwell	2,215	273	1,942
	3110	Oxford	2,013	147	1,866
	3115	South Oxfordshire	2,618	271	2,347
	3120	Vale of White Horse	2,469	274	2,195
	3125	West Oxfordshire	1,685	183	1,502
Portsmouth	1720	Fareham	1,503	179	1,324
	1725	Gosport	943	89	854
	1735	Havant	1,338	200	1,138
	1745	Portsmouth	1,768	327	1,441

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
Portsmouth (IOW)	2105	Medina	1,377	247	1,130
	2110	South Wight	1,651	244	1,407
Reading	0305	Bracknell Forest	1,121	124	997
	0310	Newbury	2,610	281	2,329
	0315	Reading	2,093	179	1,914
	0320	Slough	865	202	663
	0325	Windsor and Maidenhead	2,239	212	2,027
	0330	Wokingham	2,159	238	1,921
Southampton	1715	Eastleigh	1,495	347	1,148
	1740	New Forest	3,698	686	3,012
	3915	Salisbury	2,765	280	2,485
	1755	Southampton	1,957	355	1,602
	1760	Test Valley	2,623	281	2,342
Swindon	3905	Kennet	1,746	178	1,568
	3910	North Wiltshire	3,380	499	2,881
	3920	Thamesdown	2,371	181	2,190
	3925	West Wiltshire	2,531	171	2,360
REGIONAL TOTAL			89,355	11,360	77,995

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
Western					
Barnstaple	1135	Mid Devon	1,717	459	1,258
	1115	North Devon	2,008	338	1,670
	1145	Torridge	1,591	262	1,329
	3320	West Somerset	899	201	698
Bath	0105	Bath	1,799	395	1,404
	0115	Kingswood	915	120	795
	0120	Northavon	2,406	397	2,009
	0125	Wansdyke	1,540	298	1,242
Bristol	0110	Bristol	4,954	650	4,304
	0130	Woodspring	4,116	349	3,767
Exeter	1105	East Devon	3,208	590	2,618
	1110	Exeter	1,780	173	1,607
	1130	Teignbridge	3,646	652	2,994
	1140	Torbay	2,140	484	1,656
Gloucester	1605	Cheltenham	2,264	666	1,598
	1610	Cotswold	3,309	588	2,721
	1615	Forest of Dean	2,612	449	2,163
	1620	Gloucester	789	192	597
	1625	Stroud	3,195	425	2,770
	1630	Tewkesbury	1,335	208	1,127
Plymouth	0805	Caradon	1,830	247	1,583
	1120	Plymouth	2,863	747	2,116
	1125	South Hams	3,532	644	2,888
	1150	West Devon	1,835	262	1,573
St Austell	0810	Carrick	2,306	353	1,953
	0835	Isles of Scilly	214	16	198
	0815	Kerrier	2,065	417	1,648
	0820	North Cornwall	2,111	284	1,827
	0825	Penwith	1,432	143	1,289
	0830	Restormel	1,756	245	1,511
Taunton	3305	Mendip	2,551	294	2,257
	3310	Sedgemoor	1,897	362	1,515
	3325	South Somerset	3,659	705	2,954
	3315	Taunton Deane	2,256	450	1,808
REGIONAL TOTAL			76,532	13,085	63,447

Council Tax
Proposals by billing authority
Cumulative to 31 October 1993

VOA region and office	DoE Code	Billing authority	Received	Settled	Outstanding
West Midland					
Birmingham	4605	Birmingham	7,082	1,219	5,863
Coventry	4610	Coventry	2,411	619	1,792
	3705	North Warwickshire	902	133	769
	3710	Nuneaton and Bedworth	1,218	137	1,081
	3715	Rugby	1,116	154	962
Kidderminster	1805	Bromsgrove	1,406	240	1,166
	4615	Dudley	2,490	271	2,219
	1845	Wyre Forest	1,402	209	1,193
Lichfield	3410	East Staffordshire	1,478	161	1,317
	3415	Lichfield	1,589	219	1,370
	3445	Tamworth	284	32	252
	4630	Walsall	1,288	269	1,019
Sandwell	4620	Sandwell	1,392	300	1,092
Shrewsbury	3205	Bridgnorth	1,628	442	1,186
	3210	North Shropshire	1,646	479	1,167
	3215	Oswestry	605	37	568
	3220	Shrewsbury and Atcham	1,949	169	1,780
	3225	South Shropshire	1,317	58	1,259
	3230	Wrekin	1,349	132	1,217
Stoke-on-Trent	3420	Newcastle-upon-Lyme	1,226	289	939
	3425	Stafford	2,062	441	1,621
	3435	Staffordshire Moorlands	1,583	242	1,341
	3440	Stoke-on-Trent	1,138	226	912
Warwick	4625	Solihull	1,964	283	1,681
	3720	Stratford-upon-Avon	3,695	610	3,085
	3725	Warwick	2,307	322	1,985
Wolverhampton	3405	Cannock Chase	862	224	638
	3430	South Staffordshire	1,893	247	1,646
	4635	Wolverhampton	1,915	427	1,488
Worcester	1810	Hereford	483	193	290
	1815	Leominster	1,969	408	1,561
	1820	Malvern Hills	2,586	473	2,115
	1825	Redditch	811	147	664
	1830	South Herefordshire	1,459	218	1,241
	1835	Worcester	915	111	804
	1840	Wychavon	2,254	415	1,889
REGIONAL TOTAL			61,678	10,556	51,122
TOTAL FOR ENGLAND			707,467	109,536	597,931

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average cost to public funds of processing an appeal against a property valuation for council tax purposes.

Mr. Curry: The estimated average cost of processing a council tax appeal in the current financial year is £115. This estimate includes Valuation Office Agency and valuation tribunal costs.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of transitional costs in respect of local government reorganisation in England.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has made no estimate of the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the level of total standard spending and aggregate external finance to meet the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Baldry: We intend to take any transitional costs of local government reorganisation into account in deciding the appropriate provision for local government expenditure for a year. My right hon. Friend intends to announce his proposals for the 1994-95 local government finance settlement shortly.

Nirex

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be done with the toxic effluent arising from the excavations for the Nirex low level radioactive waste repository.

Mr. Yeo: Construction and operation of the Nirex repository will be undertaken in accordance with the statutory controls.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what volume of rock and spoil will be or has been removed in the construction of *(a)* the reference design for the Nirex low and intermediate level radioactive waste depository and *(b)* the channel tunnel.

Mr. Yeo: United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. is currently working on the estimated volumes of spoil to be removed in the construction of the planned deep disposal facility for intermediate and low level radioactive waste. I have arranged for the chairman of United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. to write to the hon. Gentleman. Some 7·5 million cubic metres have been excavated in building the channel tunnel.

Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the future of the Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment.

Mr. Gummer: The Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment was appointed for an initial two-year term in May 1991. It proved an extremely valuable forum for strategic dialogue between Government and industry in environmental issues, and produced a series of practical, action-orientated recommendations in its three progress reports.

In light of the importance of the committee's work, I am delighted to announce that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I have appointed a successor committee under the chairmanship of Derek Wanless, Group Chief Executive of National Westminster Bank. The reconstituted committee met for the first time yesterday. Its membership is as follows:

Name	*Position*	*Company*
Derek Wanless (Chair)	Group Chief Executive	National Westminster Bank plc
John Baker	Chief Executive	National Power PLC
Peter Bonfield CBE	Chairman and Chief Executive	ICL plc
Cedric Brown	Chief Executive	British Gas plc
Ann Burdus	Non-executive Director?	Dawsons International
Rodney Chase	Managing Director	British Petroleum Company plc
Mike Clasper	Managering Director and Vice-President	Procter and Gamble Europe
David Davies	Chairman	Johnson Matthey PLC
Peter Davies	Managing Director	DHL International (UK) Limited
Oliver Doubleday	—	Bax Farm
Richard Gamble	Group Chief Executive	Royal Insurance PLC
Ian Gibson CBE	Chief Executive and Managing Director	Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd
Christopher Haskins	Chairman and Chief Executive	Northern Foods plc
Roger Hewitt	Chief Executive	Shanks and McEwan Group plc
Derek Higgs	Deputy Chairman	S. G. Warburg & Co. Ltd
Ron Huggins	Managing Director	Kimberly-Clark Limited
Sir Gordon Jones	Chairman	Yorkshire Water plc
Martin Laing CBE	Chairman	John Laing PLC
Robert Lawton	—	Lawton Farms
David Malpas	Managing Director	Tesco PLC
Jean Parker CBE	Director	Vacu-Lung Traction Tyres Ltd
Robin Paul	Deputy-Chairman and Managing Director	Albright and Wilson Ltd
George Phillipson	Chairman	Redland Aggregates Ltd
Sir Antony Pilkington	Chairman	Pilkington plc
John Speirs	Managing Director	Norsk Hydro (UK) Ltd
Geoff Turnbull MBE	Chairman	GT Group Limited
Alan Smith	Managing Director	B&Q Plc

Development Plans

Mr. Forman To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice his Department has given to local authorities about how to carry out environmental appraisal of development plans.

Mr. Baldry: Planning Policy Guidance Note 12 asks local planning authorities to carry out an environmental appraisal of their development plan policies. In addition, the Department today published "Environmental Appraisal of Development Plans: A Good Practice Guide" which provides advice on a straightforward range of techniques and procedures. It clearly shows the benefits of environmental appraisal, and how it can be easily integrated into stage of the plan-making process. Environmental appraisal can be an important tool in helping to meet the wider goal of sustainable development. Local authorities should carry out plan appraisals to ensure that they contribute to this aim.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Hendry To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in how many cases he has taken statutory action against local authorities in relation to compulsory competitive tendering of council services.

Mr. Baldry: The table lists the number of such cases from January 1989 to the end of September 1993. It gives full details of the cases in the period July to September 1993, summary figures for the year to date, and the cumulative total from 1989.

I am publishing this information today and propose to issue regular up-date reports.

The table shows that in the period January to September 1993, the Secretary of State served 17 notices and 9 directions relating to anti-competitive tendering of council

services; and 80 notices and nine directions relating to the financial failure by local authorities' direct service organisations to achieve the required financial objectives.

Compulsory competitive tendering statutory action bulletin—England

3rd Quarter 1993 (July to September)		*3rd quarter 1993*	*Total for 1993 to date*	*Total from January 1989*
Notices served relating to anti-competitive behaviour		5	17	54
Adur DC	Other Cleaning			
Bradford MDC	Building Maintenance			
Langbaurgh on Tees BC	Street Lighting			
Leeds CC	Refuse Collection			
Osestry BC	Sport and Leisure			
Notices served relating to financial failure		20	80	188
Ashford BC	Ground Maintenance			
Ashford BC	Refuse Collection			
Barking and Dagenham LB	Refuse Collection			
Bedfordshire CC	Ground Maintenance			
Brighton BC	Other Catering			
Castle Point DC	Other Cleaning			
Castle Point DC	Ground Maintenance			
Colchester BC	Building Maintenance			
Corby DC	Vehicle Maintenance			
Harrow LB	Ground Maintenance			
Hillingdon LB	Other Catering			
Hillingdon LB	Building Cleaning			
Hillingdon LB	Welfare Catering			
Kingston upon Hull CC	Other Catering			
Kingston upon Thames LB	Other Cleaning			
Leicestershire CC	Ground Maintenance			
Northavon DC	Vehicle Maintenance			
Richmond upon Thames LB	Ground Maintenance			
Sefton MBC	Building Maintenance			
South Bedfordshire DC	Refuse Collection			
Directions given relating to anti-competitive behaviour		4	9	27
Birmingham CC	Building Maintenance			
Portsmouth CC	Building Maintenance			
South Tyneside BC	Ground Maintenance			
Stockton-on-Tees	Other Cleaning			
Directions given relating to financial failure		7	9	41
Camden LB	Vehicle Maintenance			
Camden LB	Highways and Sewers New Construction >£50k			
	New Construction <£50k			
Camden LB	Building Maintenance			
Hammersmith and Fulham LB	Highways and Sewers			
Hammersmith and Fulham LB	Building Maintenance			
Sefton MBC	Building Maintenance			
Waltham Forest LB	Ground Maintenance			

Oslo Commission

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the reasons for the transfer of responsibility for the Oslo Commission from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Yeo: Responsibility for policy on the questions covered by the Oslo Commission (principally relating to dumping of materials at sea) has not been transferred: this remains with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. What has been transferred is responsibility for the payment of the annual contribution to the commission's costs. This follows from the merger of the budgets of the Oslo Commission and the Paris Commission (for policy on which the Department of the Environment is responsible) in the run-up to the establishment of a single commission when the 1992 convention on the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic comes into force.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 26 November 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Small Claims

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were referred to the small claims procedure in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The number of cases which were dealt with using the small claims arbitration procedure in 1991-92 and 1992-93 was 66,090 and 89,104 respectively.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many small claims cases in 1991-92 and 1992-93 were *(a)* personal injury cases, *(b)* consumer goods cases and *(c)* debt reclamation;

(2) in how many small personal injury claims in the past year the defendant has been represented by a barrister;

(3) how many proceedings were issued in the county courts in 1991-92 and 1992-93 of *(a)* less than £1,000, *(b)* between £1,000 and £2,500 and *(c)* between £2,500 and £5,000;

(4) what proportion of county court cases in 1991-92 and 1992-93 in the value of *(a)* £1,000-£2,500 and *(b)* £2,500-£5,000 were (i) debt recoupment, (ii) personal injury and (iii) consumer goods cases;

(5) in how many small personal injury claims in the past year the defendant has been represented by a barrister.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Personal Injury Cases

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average level of costs charged for *(a)* legal expertise, *(b)* medical evidence, *(c)* ergonomics and engineering evidence, *(d)* police evidence and *(e)* witness evidence in county court personal injury cases in (i) 1990-91, (ii) 1991-92 and (iii) 1992-93.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Council

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will announce his conclusions on the Arts Council review.

Mr. Brooke: In my statement of 21 July, *Official Report*, columns 355-66, I set out a clearer framework for the Government's relationship with the Arts Council of England. As part of this, I asked the council to consider ways in which its accountability could be improved, and to review the scope for savings in its administrative costs. I am now in a position to announce my conclusions on this further work.

As I made clear in my earlier statement, the Government remain committed to the "arm's-length principle" for arts funding. This leaves the council to steer the general direction of artistic policy and to decide the allocation of resources. But with that degree of independence for the council in the use of taxpayers' money comes also the responsibility for explaining their decisions clearly and fully. Accordingly, I have explored with the chairman ways in which the council's accountability can be improved. Among the council's proposals are twice-yearly public seminars outside London; occasional or regular presentations to the National Heritage Select Committee, should the Committee agree; an annual Arts Council lecture by the chairman or a council member; annual policy seminars covering the different art forms, led by art form panel chairman and attended by the relevant art form constituency and specialist press; meetings with representative associations; and, subject to the agreement of the arts organisations concerned, publication of summaries of council appraisal reports. I welcome these proposals, and have asked the chairman to follow them up.

I have also explored with the chairman the scope for making savings in the council's administrative costs. At my request, the council has undertaken a full analysis of its activities in relation to the core functions identified in my earlier statement, including the opportunities for market testing, and assessed the scope for administrative reductions. In the light of this analysis, I am persuaded that there is scope for making savings in the council's administrative costs without damage to its core functions and while meeting the costs associated with increased accountability. I have therefore asked the council now to implement a reduction of 8 per cent. in its current gross administrative costs, equivalent to a saving approaching £600,000 in a full year. It will be for the council itself to determine the precise areas where these savings are to be achieved and to identify them in its business plan for next year.

In addition, the council is due shortly to complete its own review of staffing and structure in the regional arts boards, and some further administrative streamlining may be possible as a result. The council will also hold further discussions with the regional arts boards about delegation of projects and schemes activity, and aim to reach conclusions by the end of the current financial year.

The statement marks the end of the long series of reviews by the Government into the structures and staffing of the arts funding system. The effect has been to establish appropriate levels for decision making, to clarify accountability and to reduce bureaucracy. It is now for the council to settle the detailed framework within which those working in the arts community can operate. My Department will continue, as a regular part of discussions in the corporate and business planning context, to keep the administrative costs associated with the funding system under close scrutiny. Our aim will be to ensure that overheads are kept to a minimum and that as much as possible of the available resources is channelled directly to arts practitioners and to the artistic activity which must be the focus of all our endeavours.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Agency

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many visiting officers were available to his Department and the Benefits Agency in each administrative region in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years, together with the staff projections for the number of visiting officers that will be available in each region over the next three years.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Benefits Agency is a matter for its chief executive, Mr. Michael Bichard. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 25 November 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking, how many visiting officers were available to his Department and the Benefits Agency in each administrative region in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years, together with the staff projections for the number of visiting officers that will be available in each region over the next three years.

The overwhelming majority of visiting officers available to the Department of Social Security are associated with the administration of claims to Income Support and the Social Fund. Since 1 April 1991, the Benefits Agency has been solely responsible for that administration.

The Contributions Agency and Child Support Agency are also Executive Agencies of the Department and have some visiting staff available to them. However, the duties of those staff and their deployment throughout the United Kingdom are fundamentally different to those of Benefits Agency staff and I am advised by my colleagues in those Agencies that information relating specifically to visiting staff is not available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost. For these reasons I have excluded those staff from the figures I present to you.

The numbers of Income Support and Social Fund visiting staff for which resources were made available for each of the last four years are shown on the attached table. (Table attached.) However, local managers do have the authority to deploy their resources differently, using their knowledge of local needs and circumstances.

I am afraid that comparative information for the financial year 1989-90 is not available.

Staffing projections for this work area are currently part of the PES negotiations. These projections take account of current requirements, as well as unemployment and other demographic factors which arise influencing benefit take up and activity. I may say that at this stage significant changes to current requirements are not anticipated.

Finally may I assure you that the Benefits Agency is fully committed to maintain the home visiting service as a key element of its "customer service programme."

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Analysis of Visiting Staff Allocated by Regional & Area Directorates 1989 to 1994.

Region	*89-90*	*90-91*	*Areas*	*91-92*	*92-93*	*93-94*
Midlands	N/A	181·41	South 1	51·8	74·1	67·50
Wales & South West	N/A	166·18	South 2	49·2	85·3	95·43
Scotland	N/A	114·92	South 3	76·4	101·1	124·50
North West	N/A	151·14	South 4	77·5	98·1	98·31
North East	N/A	184·34	South 5	46	51·5	53·80
London North	N/A	210·44	South 6	49·8	71·8	72·29
London South	N/A	207·51	South 7	49·3	69·4	62·08
TOTAL	N/A	1,215·9	TOTAL	400	551·3	573·91
			WCE1	42·5	59·2	58·78
			WCE2	44·1	61·5	63·99
			WCE3	52·7	71·5	76·35
			WCE4	52·3	63·6	64·17
			WCE5	35	50·3	44·23
			WCE6	40·8	59	58·17
			WCE7	48·6	68·6	67·34
			TOTAL	316	433·7	433·03
			SNE1	51·6	64·6	67·27
			SNE2	49·9	69	77·27
			SNE3	46·5	58·7	61·92
			SNE4	23·1	28·6	48·00
			SNE5	30·7	44·8	33·91
			SNE6	31·7	36·9	34·19
						0·00
			TOTAL	233·5	302·6	322·56
NATIONAL		1,215·9	NATIONAL	949·5	1,287·6	1,329·5

N.B. Area Directorates replaced the former regional organisations April 1991.
South=Southern Territorial Directorate.
WCE=Wales and Central England Territorial Directorate
SNE=Scotland and Northern England Territorial Directorate

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which parts of the United Kingdom cold weather payments have been triggered during the very cold weather during November; and if he will outline the main conditions to be met before cold weather payments are triggered.

Mr. Scott: The administration of cold weather payments is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. Bichard to Mr. David Winnick, dated 25 November 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking, in which parts of the United Kingdom cold weather payments have been triggered during the very cold weather in November, and if he will outline the main conditions to be met before cold weather payments are triggered.

A period of cold weather is classed as seven consecutive days during which the average mean daily temperature is, or is forecast to be 0 degrees Centigrade or less. A forecast is based on information received daily, by the Agency, from the Met. Office.

As of 25 November cold weather had been triggered or forecast for areas covered by 43 Benefits Agency (BA) Districts which are listed in the attached appendix.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

BA districts which have triggered or been forecast for a period of cold weather as of 25 November 1993.

Barnsley
Berkshire
Blackburn and Accrington
Bradford
Buckinghamshire
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale
Central Derbyshire
Central Staffordshire
Clyde Valley[1]
East Lowlands[1]
Gloucester
Grampian and Shetland[1]
Gwyneddigion
Hampshire North
Hereford and Worcester
Highlands and Islands[1]
Leeds, Aire and Wharfe
London Central
Mid Wales and Maelor
North Cumbria[1]
North Derbyshire
North Gwent and Brecon
North Staffordshire
North Wales Coast
North Worcestershire
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Sale/East Cheshire
Sheffield West
Shropshire
South Cheshire
South Derbyshire
South and East Hampshire and Wight
South West Scotland[1]
Stockport
Surrey Downs
Tameside
Tayside[1]
Warwickshire
West Pennine
Wiltshire
Wolverhampton
Yorkshire Pennine

[1]Indicates a forecast.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of national average earnings the basic state pension for a single person amounted to in *(a)* 1960, *(b)* 1970, *(c)* 1980 and *(d)* 1990.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available for 1960. The Employment Department's new earnings survey, on which the figures are based, did not start until 1970. The basic state pension for a single person as a percentage of national average earnings amounted to *(a)* 19·3 per cent. at April 1970, *(b)* 22·6 per cent. at November 1980, and *(c)* 17·8 per cent. at April 1990.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals were put forward by EU member states at the Social Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on 23 November.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 24 November 1993, *Official Report*, column 72.

EDUCATION

Voluntary-aided Schools

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many applications have been received from local education authorities, diocesan boards or currently operating private schools for voluntary-aided status for *(a)* Protestant, *(b)* Catholic, *(c)* Hindu, *(d)* Jewish and *(e)* Muslim schools since 1983; and how many applications by each denomination have been successful.

Mr. Robin Squire: Full information dating back to 1983 is not readily available. However, in the last five years since November 1988, 23 applications have been received to establish new voluntary-aided schools. These include six Church of England schools, two Interchurch CE/Methodist and one Interchurch CE/RC, seven Catholic, five Jewish and two Muslim schools. Ten applications were successful: Two Church of England, one Interchurch CE/Methodist and one Interchurch CE/RC, four Catholic and two Jewish schools.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Patten: I have made one official trip overseas in 1993. Between 7 November and 9 November, I and two officials visited Slovakia. During the visit, I met the Slovakian Education Minister and other representatives of the Slovakian Government, and visited four universities, one of which is developing close links with the Open university.

The cost of the visit was approximately £2,250.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools have to date (i) applied for and (ii) received approval for grant-maintained status from his Department in each of the London boroughs; and what percentage these represent of the total number of schools in each borough.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is set out in the tables.

London boroughs: Primary schools applications and approvals for self-governing status

LEA	A Total schools	B Applications	C Percentage	D Approvals	E Percentage	F Decision pending
Corporation of London	1	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Camden	41	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Greenwich	77	1	1·3	—	0·0	1
Hackney	70	1	1·4	—	0·0	1
Hammersmith	39	1	2·6	—	0·0	—
Islington	57	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Kensington	27	2	7·4	1	3·7	1
Lambeth	78	5	6·4	4	5·1	1
Lewisham	74	1	1·4	1	1·4	—
Southwark	77	5	6·5	4	5·2	1
Tower Hamlets	73	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Wandsworth	70	3	4·3	2	2·9	—
Westminster	42	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Barking	54	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Barnet	89	2	2·2	2	2·2	—
Bexley	67	2	3·0	2	3·0	—
Brent	65	2	3·1	1	1·5	—
Bromley	78	2	2·6	2	2·6	—
Croydon	99	2	2·0	2	2·0	—
Ealing	92	4	4·3	4	4·3	—
Enfield	69	1	1·4	—	0·0	1
Haringey	77	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Harrow	53	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Havering	74	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Hillingdon	73	11	15·1	11	15·1	—
Hounslow	63	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Kingston	36	1	2·8	1	2·8	—
Merton	49	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Newham	67	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Redbridge	56	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Richmond	40	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Sutton	42	3	7·1	1	2·4	2
Waltham Forest	61	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Totals	2,030	49	2·4	38	1·9	8

Notes:
A) Total number of maintained primary schools.
B) Number of schools which have applied for self-governing status to date.
C) Schools which have made applications as a percentage of total schools.
D) Number of schools approved for self-governing status.
E) Schools approved for self-governing status as a percentage of total schools.
F) Schools which have made applications which are still under consideration.

London boroughs: Secondary schools applications and approvals for self-governing status

LEA	A Total schools	B Applications	C Percentage	D Approvals	E Percentage	F Decision pending
Corporation of London	0	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Camden	11	2	18·2	2	18·2	—
Greenwich	15	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Hackney	10	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Hammersmith	9	1	11·1	1	11·1	—
Islington	9	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Kensington	4	1	25·0	1	25·0	—
Lambeth	10	5	50·0	5	50·0	—
Lewisham	14	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Southwark	15	5	33·3	5	33·3	—
Tower Hamlets	14	1	7·1	1	7·1	—
Wandsworth	10	7	70·0	6	60·0	—
Westminster	8	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Barking	8	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Barnet	20	10	50·0	8	40·0	2
Bexley	17	4	23·5	4	23·5	—
Brent	14	9	64·3	8	57·1	—
Bromley	17	13	76·5	11	64·7	1
Croydon	20	6	30·0	6	30·0	—
Ealing	13	6	46·2	5	38·5	—
Enfield	17	5	29·4	4	23·5	1
Haringey	9	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Harrow	10	1	10·0	1	10·0	—
Havering	18	4	22·2	4	22·2	—
Hillingdon	17	14	82·4	11	64·7	1
Hounslow	14	2	14·3	2	14·3	—
Kingston	10	4	40·0	4	40·0	—

LEA	A Total schools	B Applications	C Percentage	D Approvals	E Percentage	F Decision pending
Merton	11	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Newham	14	1	7·1	1	7·1	—
Redbridge	14	1	7·1	1	7·1	—
Richmond	8	—	0·0	—	0·0	—
Sutton	14	8	57·1	8	57·1	—
Waltham Forest	16	2	12·5	2	12·5	—
Totals	410	112	27·3	101	24·6	5

Notes:
A) Total number of maintained secondary schools.
B) Number of schools which have applied for self-governing status to date.
C) Schools which have made applications as a percentage of total schools.
D) Number of schools approved for self-governing status.
E) Schools approved for self-governing status as a percentage of total schools.
F) Schools which have made applications which are still under consideration.

School Starting Dates

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list those local education authorities which have a single annual starting date for children starting school at age five years.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not collected centrally.

VAT (Books)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate he has made of the amount of VAT which would be payable in the next financial year by schools if the tax were extended to books and periodicals, assuming unchanged patterns of expenditure.

Mr. Robin Squire: None. I cannot comment on speculation about possible Budget measures. But local education authority schools are able to claim refunds of the VAT costs they incur on their purchases. Self-governing schools receive a special purpose grant to compensate them for their VAT costs on leaving the LEA sector.

Sex Education

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will issue guidelines to schools incorporating the policies set out in the Sex Education Forum's recent publication, "A Framework for School Sex Education"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The statutory requirements for sex education in schools have changed since the publication by the independent Sex Education Forum of "A Framework for School Sex Education" in 1992. We intend to consult shortly on draft guidance to schools on the new arrangements for sex education introduced under section 241 of the Education Act 1993. Following consultation, we plan to issue it to schools next spring, to help them to develop and implement appropriate policies and programmes of sex education.

English

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the actual statistics of the responses received to the questions in section G of the revised order for national curriculum English referred to in paragraph 2.5 of the National Curriculum Council consultation report.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) on 23 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *24*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Environmental Problems

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commercial Affairs what support the Government are giving to developing countries in their efforts to tackle national and global environmental problems.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have committed substantial resources to help developing countries with their national environmental issues including £40 million to support biodiversity projects, £150 million to about 200 forestry projects, and £86 million for energy efficiency programmes in India.

We have also committeed over £40 million to the global environment facility, and $13·8 million to the Montreal protrocol multilateral fund, to meet the incremental cost to developing countries of action on the global environment to protect the climate system, biodiversity, international waters and the ozone layer. We will be contributing to the replenishments of the global environment facility and the Montreal protocol multilateral fund.

Tanzania

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about the port of Tanga, Tanzania.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Tanzanian Harbours Authority has recently advised us of revisions to the tariffs to be charged at Tanga port from 1 December. The potential effect of these changes on future traffic at the port is being examined by the consultants we engaged to review the justification for the project as orginally envisaged, about which my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development wrote to my hon. Friend on 2 November. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

Desertification

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make statement on progress made to date in the intergovernmental negotiating committee for desertification; how many

sessions of the Committee have been held; how the United Kingdom is represented; and what are the Overseas Development Administration's policies to mitigate desertification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The intergovernmental negotiating committee has held one preparatory and two substantive sessions. The United Kingdom is represented by a delegation led by the Overseas Development Administration and including officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of the Environment. Negotiations to date have been concerned with the general scope of the convention, and will now proceed to negotiation of text.

We support national plans of action of desertification, drawn up by affected developing countries. We are providing substantial support to efforts to mitigate desertification through bilateral projects, support to non-government organisations and research, and through our contributions to multilateral institutions.

African Elephants

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on funding birth control schemes for African elephants.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have not been asked to fund birth control schemes for African elephants.

TRANSPORT

Roads (Contracts)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to ensure a procedure exists to investigate circumstances which suggest impropriety amongst contractors or subcontractors in respect of contracting for roads.

Mr. Key: All tenders for road works are routinely examined for evidence of corrupt practice, and the Department's staff are regularly reminded of the need to be vigilant in reporting any suspected cases of contractual impropriety. Close links are maintained with the Office of Fair Trading.

M40

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations underlie the absence of provision of service stations or rest areas along the M40 motorway; what proposals he has for providing such facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: My Department proposed three motorway service areas (MSAs) for the M40, intending to open them at about the same time as the road. All three schemes, however, provoked objections which led to lengthy public inquiries and substantial delays in provision. Planning clearance was eventually refused for one of the sites, but it was granted for the other two and construction is now under way; both are due to open next year. In the meantime temporary facilities, open 24 hours a day, are signposted from the motorway at junction 10 and between junctions 13 and 15.

Following a commitment in the citizens charter, future MSAs will be promoted by the private sector rather than the Department. I understand that at least three planning applications for further MSAs on the M40 are currently under consideration.

Transpennine Study

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many officials in his Department are currently working on the issues raised by the transpennine study.

Mr. Key: No staff are working exclusively on this project. Officials from five regional offices, as well as headquarters, have been involved in the study and assessing consultation responses.

Colne-Foulridge Bypass

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has a view on whether the proposed Colne-Foulridge bypass should be single or dual carriageway.

Mr. Key: This is a Lancashire county council proposal and its design standards are for them to decide.

M65

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the cost of extending the M65 to join the motorway network east of the Pennines.

Mr. Key: None. The transpennine study report included a broad estimate of £120 million to £140 million for an improved route from the M65 towards the A1 via Skipton.

Royal Train

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions are being made for the future running of the royal train.

Mr. MacGregor: From 1 April 1994, responsibility for the royal train will pass from BR to Railtrack. Railtrack will be responsible for the running of the royal train, including the provision and upkeep of coaches and locomotives.

Director of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated expenditure that will be incurred in running the new office of the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising established by the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. MacGregor: Parliamentary approval to the administrative and other expenditure of the director and his Office will be sought in a new estimate to establish a passenger rail services vote—class VI, vote 7. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £350,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

School Minibuses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates he has made of the number of school minibuses in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Lancashire which are not fitted with seat belts.

Mr. Key: None. This information is not available.

West End-Bisley-Knaphill Bypass

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the orders required for the fixing of a date for the public inquiry into the proposed route of the West End, Bisley and Knaphill bypass.

Mr. Key: A date for a public inquiry into this scheme cannot be fixed until the council has submitted revised orders occasioned by the deficiencies found in its original application.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle (Tuberculosis)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest figures for the numbers of cattle infected with tuberculosis shown by county, and the figures for six months, one year and 18 months ago; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Information on the number of cattle found to be infected with tuberculosis is not available in the form requested. Such information is collected quarterly from each animal health office and relates to herds in administrative areas which may cover an area greater than one county.

The numbers of confirmed cases in each animal health office administrative area were as follows:

	6 months to 31 March 1992	*6 months to 30 September 1992*	*6 months to 31 March 1993*	*6 months to 30 September 1993*
South West England				
Cornwall	61	63	64	72
Devon	44	60	23	16
Dorset	3	5	6	9
Gloucester/Avon	27	81	54	40
Somerset	0	0	0	34
Wiltshire	35	26	23	27
Elsewhere in England				
Cumbria	0	1	11	1
Durham/Tyne and Wear/Cleveland/Northumberland	0	1	1	0
Hereford/Worcestershire	0	0	1	1
Humberside	0	0	1	0
Kent/East Sussex	2	0	0	0
Leicestershire	0	1	1	0
Lancashire/Greater Manchester/Greater Merseyside	0	1	1	0
North Yorkshire	2	2	1	0
Staffordshire	0	0	5	0
Warwickshire/West Midlands	3	0	0	0
Wales				
Dyfed	15	22	28	14
Glamorgan Gwent	4	2	0	16
Powys	0	3	0	0
Scotland				
Ayr	0	0	0	51
Elgin	0	2	0	0
Galashiels	0	0	2	0
Stirling	0	1	0	0

In the light of the worsening disease situation in the south-west of England we are reviewing the current badger control strategy and hope to make an announcement shortly after careful consideration of the views expressed by the consultative panel on badgers and bovine tuberculosis at its meeting on 18 November.

Organic Farming

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received on the level and scope of funding for organic farming in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Since the Minister made her announcement of the proposed organic aid scheme, she has received 244 letters on the level and scope of funding of organic farming. The vast majority of these were from producers who said that they already followed organic methods. The Minister also had a meeting on 15 November with representatives of the organic movement, and agreed that there would be further discussions with officials and another meeting with the Minister in the spring. This meeting would be to discuss the role of organic farming in relation to common agricultural policy reform.

Potato Marketing

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she has reached a decision concerning the future of the potato marketing scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have now completed my consultations with the various interests concerned, and am consulting colleagues on our response. I hope to make an announcement soon.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many confirmed cases of BSE were reported between 1 January and 30 September 1993, from each county in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Soames: The numbers of suspected cases of BSE which were reported and placed under movement restrictions during the period 1 January to 30 September, and which have since been confirmed, are set out. These figures are correct up to 24 November but will change as further cases reported in that period are confirmed by laboratory examination.

County	*Number*
England, Scotland and Wales	
Avon	436
Bedfordshire	56
Berkshire	102
Borders	106
Buckinghamshire	216
Cambridgeshire	82
Central	49
Cheshire	1,060
Cleveland	43
Clwyd	427
Cornwall	1,507
Cumbria	891
Derbyshire	640
Devon	2,140
Dorset	1,270
Dumfries	452
Durham	117
Dyfed	1,328
Essex	130
Fife	69
Glammorgan Mid	36
Glamorgan South	76
Glamorgan West	22
Gloucestershire	424
Grampian	271
Gwent	178
Gwynedd	119
Hampshire	524
Hereford and Worcestershire	441
Hertfordshire	102
Highland	61
Humberside	152
Isle of Wight	99
Kent	304
Lancashire	956
Leicestershire	460
Lincolnshire	177
London	24
Lothian	51
Manchester	74
Merseyside	19
Norfolk	634
Northamptonshire	174
Northumberland	192
Nottinghamshire	160
Orkney	24
Oxfordshire	300
Powys	409
Shropshire	672
Somerset	1,800
Staffordshire	720
Strathclyde	327
Suffolk	299
Surrey	175
Sussex East	250
Sussex West	450
Tayside	96
Tyne and Wear	9
West Midlands	23
Warwickshire	256
Wiltshire	926
Yorkshire North	1,183
Yorkshire South	110
Yorkshire West	176
Northern Ireland	
Antrim	79
Armagh	23
Down	45
Fermanagh	22
Londonderry	72
Tyrone	65

Wine and Whisky

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total value of wine imports into Britain in 1992 and the total value of exports of Scotch whisky in 1992.

Mr. Jack: Wine imports into the United Kingdom in 1992 were valued at £997·4 million. Scotch Whisky Association statistics show that in 1992, Scotch whisky exports—which include one Northern Irish distillery—were £1,958·9 million.

Acid Rain

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what requests she has received from her counterparts in the European Union regarding the effect of acid rainfall on continental Europe arising from discharges of sulphur dioxide from British plants.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have received one representation from the Environment Minister of the Netherlands requesting further reductions in the United Kingdom's total sulphur emissions, in the context of the negotiations for a second sulphur protocol currently being discussed within the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

SCOTLAND

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he will spend in the lead-up to the European and local elections next year on promoting the use of postal and proxy votes by sick, disabled and absent voters; what arrangements are in place for this exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Provision has been made in the planning of expenditure for 1994-95 to cover the cost of a publicity campaign in Scotland to inform electors who cannot vote in person at the 1994 European parliamentary elections of how they may apply for postal or proxy votes. The precise figure has still to be determined. Arrangements for the campaign have not yet been finalised but it is likely to involve advertising in the press.

In accordance with past practice, the Scottish Office intends to issue a news release to the national press drawing the public's attention to the need to apply early for absent voting facilities at the 1994 regional elections.

Rolling Stock, Strathclyde

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what date he expects financial guarantees to be in place which will allow the order for rolling stock placed by Strathclyde passenger transport authority with Hunslet TPL to proceed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Financial arrangements to allow the Strathclyde passenger transport executive rolling stock order to proceed are a matter for Strathclyde regional council, in conjunction with the parties to any financing agreement.

Traffic, Prestonpans

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the volume of local traffic making journeys of 25 miles or less on the B1348 and B1361 roads west of Prestonpans; and what proportion of the total traffic at those points is represented by such local traffic.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* This information is not held centrally.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Students

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost to each education and library board and to his Department of third level students from Northern Ireland studying in Great Britain.

Mr. Ancram: The estimated cost to the Department of Education and to each of the five education and library boards of third-level students from Northern Ireland studying in Great Britain for the financial year 1992-93 is as follows:

	£ million
Department of Education	2·297
Education and Library boards	
Belfast	6·063
North Eastern	10·627
South Eastern	8·796
Southern	9·611
Western	8·168

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table indicating for each education and library board in Northern Ireland the total sums expended in each of the last three years and the current year on discretionary grants for students and the sums paid in discretionary grants to students from each EC country for each of those years; and in each such category; and if he will show the number of students and the total sums for each EC country.

Mr. Ancram: The table shows the total cost incurred by the five Northern Ireland education and library boards over the period 1990-91 to 1993-94.

Financial year	*Belfast £ million*	*North-Eastern £ million*	*South-Eastern £ million*	*Southern £ million*	*Western £ million*
1990-91	0·771	0·977	0·766	1·024	0·866
1991-92	0·954	1·131	0·934	1·264	1·047
1992-93	1·014	1·233	1·009	1·362	1·166
1993-94[1]	1·008	1·284	1·068	1·654	1·234

[1] Provisional.

Information is not readily available on the sums paid in discretionary awards to students from the EC, by individual country and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost to *(a)* his Department, *(b)* Northern Ireland education and library boards and *(c)* other United Kingdom education authorities of those students from (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) Great Britain, (iii) the Republic of Ireland and (iv) other EC countries.

Mr. Ancram: The total costs of making provision for students is not available in the form requested.

The table shows the estimated costs of student awards held by all Northern Ireland students and the cost of tuition fees for students from EC countries at Northern Ireland institutions during the financial year 1992-93.

	Northern Ireland Students £ million	*EC Students £ million*
Department of Education	5·550	0·053
Education and Library Boards		
Belfast	15·320	1·163
North Eastern	25·357	3·126
South Eastern	23·562	—
Southern	21·000	0·007
Western	21·873	0·237

Note: It is estimated that 95 per cent. of the cost of the support given to all EC students is for students from the Republic.

There is no cost to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland or any of the education and library boards arising from awards for students ordinarily resident in Great Britain who are attending institutions in Northern Ireland.

The cost to other United Kingdom education authorities of students from Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland and other EC countries could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Maternity Units

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action is being taken to encourage health boards to offer midwife-only beds and midwife-only care to low risk pregnant women in all maternity units.

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Health and Social Services would wish to encourage health and social services boards to make full use of the skills and expertise which the midwifery profession can offer. It will be considering the implications for Northern Ireland on how best the role played by midwives in the care of low risk pregnant women can be enhanced. The Department has also recently established its own study group to consider the scope for developing maternity units led by midwives and/or general practitioners.

Loyalist Paramilitaries

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons killed since January 1988 by loyalist paramilitaries using weapons smuggled into Northern Ireland with the knowledge of the military intelligence officer Brian Nelson have been compensated by Her Majesty's Government.

Sir John Wheeler: It is not possible to determine that anyone has been killed under the circumstances described.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Welford Road Prison

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to visit HMP Welford Road, Leicester.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to visit HM prison, Welford Road, Leicester.

Prison Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons he has visited since his appointment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend visited four prisons and one young offender institution since becoming Home Secretary.

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much he will spend in the lead-up to the European and local elections next year on promoting the use of postal and proxy votes by sick, disabled and absent voters; what arrangements are in place for this exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We provide posters and leaflets to let elderly and disabled people know about their right to vote by post or by proxy. It is our practice before a general election to undertake a publicity campaign to tell people how to apply for an absent vote and to let them know the closing date. We do not undertake a similar campaign for local government or European parliamentary elections where the timetable is known well in advance.

Mr. Amanullah Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times to date since May 1990, Mr. Amanullah Khan, a Pakistani national, has been interviewed by immigration officials, police, or representatives of other United Kingdom agencies within United Kingdom jurisdiction; on which such occasions Mr. Khan was *(a)* detained and *(b)* allowed as a transit passenger to continue his journey outside United Kingdom jurisdiction; and what action United Kingdom authorities took to notify other countries of Mr. Khan's travel arrangements.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Mr. Khan arrived at Manchester international airport on 15 October 1993 while in transit from Islamabad to Amsterdam. He was spoken to by police officers in the normal course of their port duties. As a transit passenger, he had no contact with any immigration officials or with any other United Kingdom agency. He was not detained and was allowed to proceed with his journey. The Dutch and Belgian authorities were aware of Mr. Khan's arrival on their territory. This is the only occasion since May 1990 on which Mr. Khan is known to have been within United Kingdom jurisdiction.

Theft

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes recorded by the Metropolitan police within each borough in the category of theft and handling stolen goods were recorded as *(a)* theft of a motor vehicle, *(b)* theft from a motor vehicle, *(c)* theft of a pedal cycle, *(d)* shoplifting, *(e)* handling stolen goods and *(f)* any other major categories, in the year ended June.

Mr. Maclean: The latest available information relates to the 12 months ending March 1993 and is given in the table:

Notifiable offences of theft and handling stolen goods recorded by the police—12 months ending March 1993

Metropolitan police district — *Number of offences*

Borough/District	*Theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle*	*Theft from a motor vehicle*	*Theft of pedal cycle*	*Theft from shops*	*Handling stolen goods*	*Total theft and handling*
Broxbourne	565	937	230	267	36	2,758
Enfield	2,016	3,615	506	546	250	10,389
Epping Forest	894	1,143	141	127	62	3,313
Haringey	2,594	4,599	485	1,019	299	12,098
Islington	2,438	5,340	899	582	223	14,913
Redbridge	3,247	3,025	486	979	169	10,536
Waltham Forest	2,909	3,555	491	771	294	11,301
Welwyn Hatfield	4	32	0	0	0	45
Barking	2,167	2,811	386	518	139	7,688

Borough/District	Theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle	Theft from a motor vehicle	Theft of pedal cycle	Theft from shops	Handling stolen goods	Total theft and handling
Hackney	3,126	5,240	576	431	263	13,896
Havering	2,871	3,427	553	1,073	166	10,682
Newham	3,835	4,454	478	797	212	13,373
Tower Hamlets	2,832	5,996	643	403	224	14,649
Thames	1	1	0	0	1	95
Bexley	2,358	3,161	463	328	118	9,583
Bromley	3,144	5,228	689	1,248	151	14,229
Greenwich	3,708	5,771	538	884	210	15,322
Lewisham	3,348	4,300	491	936	190	13,571
Southwark	3,503	7,799	845	1,026	299	19,753
Croydon	3,360	5,877	674	1,211	170	16,644
Epsom Ewell	348	855	300	193	19	2,545
Lambeth	3,533	7,185	939	873	375	20,134
Merton	1,190	3,232	729	516	87	8,650
Reigate Banstead	231	533	51	37	4	1,269
Sutton	1,528	2,368	554	719	80	7,965
Elmbridge	193	898	236	62	13	2,039
Hounslow	1,952	4,505	1,192	1,025	209	12,491
Kingston	727	2,107	1,240	1,008	119	7,515
Richmond	707	2,926	1,191	504	81	7,822
Spelthorne	578	1,850	507	271	56	4,432
Wandsworth	2,529	6,767	1,067	1,153	164	16,357
Ealing	2,763	5,289	651	990	239	14,298
Hammersmith	1,598	6,199	1,292	713	179	13,785
Hillingdon	2,063	4,218	723	594	153	10,745
Kensington Chelsea	1,393	6,905	1,264	1,561	229	20,128
Heathrow	108	715	38	104	40	3,081
Barnet	2,026	4,658	409	1,218	145	12,282
Brent	2,077	4,026	533	585	165	11,379
Camden	2,171	7,240	1,304	1,224	227	22,220
Harrow	886	2,641	424	571	86	6,558
Hertsmere	466	1,311	152	106	19	3,061
Westminster	1,748	8,333	1,141	5,308	354	41,036
MPD Total	79,736	161,072	25,511	32,681	6,523	464,689

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes recorded in the year ended June 1993 in each police force area in England and Wales in the category of theft and handling stolen goods were recorded as *(a)* theft of a motor vehicle, *(b)* theft from a motor vehicle, *(c)* theft of a pedal cycle, *(d)* shoplifting, *(e)* handling stolen goods and *(f)* any other major categories.

Mr. Maclean: The requested information is given in the table.

Notifiable offences of theft and handling stolen goods recorded by the police by police force area
Twelve months ending June 1993

Police force area	Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	Theft from vehicle	Theft from pedal cycle	Theft from shops	Handling stolen goods	Other theft
Avon and Somerset	27,665	39,896	8,401	6,718	1,236	21,068
Bedfordshire	8,906	11,954	2,227	2,966	457	5,337
Cambridgeshire	6,652	12,538	7,961	4,903	441	7,761
Cheshire	9,548	14,247	4,014	4,694	811	7,280
Cleveland	13,321	10,632	3,639	2,964	456	11,777
Cumbria	3,277	9,033	1,410	3,557	466	5,617
Derbyshire	9,753	17,358	3,040	3,648	689	10,879
Devon and Cornwall	8,815	24,483	4,197	7,117	1,529	19,105
Dorset	3,848	8,893	3,496	3,059	800	10,228
Durham	9,361	9,341	2,607	2,530	893	10,568
Essex	11,457	20,092	5,144	11,193	1,291	12,832
Gloucestershire	4,567	14,916	3,401	3,419	969	6,297
Greater Manchester	59,186	59,865	12,277	15,593	3,516	39,201
Hampshire	10,796	29,566	8,580	9,611	1,835	21,202
Hertfordshire	6,395	12,476	2,848	3,542	444	6,108
Humberside	11,217	21,207	8,548	7,445	1,128	13,502
Kent	19,657	26,001	5,524	12,058	1,456	26,007
Lancashire	13,538	24,430	7,049	6,086	1,351	20,574
Leicestershire	12,070	18,439	5,033	3,645	838	13,448
Lincolnshire	3,756	7,354	3,210	3,701	514	8,727
City of London	135	888	173	294	101	2,566
Merseyside	16,325	18,252	4,378	9,782	1,513	20,106
Metroplitan Police District	79,568	163,650	24,895	2,341	6,503	159,126
Norfolk	4,896	13,559	4,666	4,756	653	7,767

Police force area	Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	Theft from vehicle	Theft from pedal cycle	Theft from shops	Handling stolen goods	Other theft
Northamptonshire	6,693	9,085	2,620	2,802	594	7,622
Northumbria	30,413	26,125	4,619	10,223	1,289	19,004
North Yorkshire	4,744	9,342	3,660	5,633	607	6,486
Nottinghamshire	17,335	26,331	6,265	9,048	1,378	24,320
South Yorkshire	20,788	24,101	3,522	6,790	1,144	12,949
Staffordshire	12,075	17,436	3,184	4,667	496	9,196
Suffolk	2,666	6,528	2,131	4,289	744	6,398
Surrey	4,898	10,614	2,705	2,638	430	7,603
Sussex	8,801	22,855	5,631	8,557	1,265	16,980
Thames Valley	23,027	41,793	11,035	10,564	1,894	24,314
Warwickshire	5,235	9,200	1,988	1,981	280	4,883
West Mercia	8,465	14,176	3,458	5,299	576	14,516
West Midlands	41,359	55,530	7,551	13,482	2,249	31,154
West Yorkshire	38,242	51,204	6,449	10,453	2,180	36,867
Wiltshire	2,958	7,026	2,194	3,454	528	6,110
Dyfed-Powys	1,368	3,098	554	1,914	396	5,099
Gwent	3,829	6,563	1,367	2,750	1,109	6,073
North Wales	3,620	9,002	1,481	2,451	497	7,572
South Wales	23,335	30,796	4,164	7,620	1,204	14,677
TOTAL	614,560	969,875	211,296	280,237	48,750	728,906

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to keep information on the numbers of overseas domestic workers who change their employers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No. Overseas domestic workers are not normally permitted to change job.

Burglaries

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes of burglary in each police force area were recorded as *(a)* of a dwelling and *(b)* of a building not a dwelling in the year ended June.

Mr. Maclean: The requested information is given in the table.

Notifiable offences of burglary recorded by the police. Twelve months ending June 1993

Police force area	Burglary in a dwelling	Burglary not in a dwelling
Avon and Somerset	24,095	21,293
Bedfordshire	7,256	8,806
Cambridgeshire	7,571	8,706
Cheshire	10,929	12,231
Cleveland	12,426	7,159
Cumbria	4,922	7,032
Derbyshire	9,456	15,212
Devon and Cornwall	14,608	16,689
Dorset	5,859	4,390
Durham	7,618	6,422
Essex	10,325	16,809
Gloucestershire	8,936	8,861
Greater Manchester	66,263	38,361
Hampshire	16,865	18,854
Hertfordshire	5,627	7,788
Humberside	18,789	27,636
Kent	19,423	12,288
Lancashire	18,823	11,526
Leicestershire	14,046	11,324
Lincolnshire	6,697	5,535
City of London	33	803
Merseyside	23,018	12,395
Metropolitan Police District	124,732	63,063
Norfolk	6,340	12,178
Northamptonshire	6,788	6,670
Northumbria	31,652	32,833
North Yorkshire	7,551	9,047
Nottinghamshire	22,322	17,760
South Yorkshire	23,274	25,594
Staffordshire	13,562	17,257
Suffolk	3,879	5,615
Surrey	6,025	7,322
Sussex	15,849	14,054
Thames Valley	21,520	17,928
Warwickshire	4,417	8,794
West Mercia	8,340	9,847
West Midlands	53,960	50,717
West Yorkshire	56,624	37,812
Wiltshire	4,492	4,832
Dyfed-Powys	1,584	3,297
Gwent	3,639	4,083
North Wales	4,210	8,270
South Wales	14,844	24,726
Total	749,189	661,829

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes of burglary were recorded by the Metropolitan police within each borough as *(a)* of a dwelling and *(b)* of a building not a dwelling in the year ended June.

Mr. Maclean: The latest information relates to the 12 months ending March 1993 and is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police—12 months ending March 1993

Metropolitan Police District Borough/District	Number of offences: Burglary in a dwelling	Number of offences: Burglary in other buildings
Broxbourne	377	352
Enfield	2,835	1,761
Epping Forest	564	452
Haringey	4,535	1,520
Islington	3,489	2,027
Redbridge	3,367	1,550
Waltham Forest	3,191	1,473
Welwyn Hatfield	13	4

Metropolitan Police District Borough/District	Number of offences Burglary in a dwelling	Burglary in other buildings
Barking	2,341	1,619
Hackney	5,920	2,335
Havering	2,416	1,613
Newham	4,413	2,557
Tower Hamlets	2,871	2,784
Thames	1	0
Bexley	2,010	1,348
Bromley	3,808	2,339
Greenwich	4,572	2,236
Lewisham	6,485	2,304
Southwark	6,233	2,681
Croydon	4,423	2,223
Epsom Ewell	664	452
Lambeth	8,681	2,043
Merton	2,634	1,060
Reigate Banstead	373	154
Sutton	1,570	1,284
Elmbridge	432	388
Hounslow	3,116	1,447
Kingston	1,390	1,361
Richmond	1,760	1,034
Spelthorne	521	583
Wandsworth	4,288	1,897
Ealing	4,510	1,801
Hammersmith	3,022	1,281
Hillingdon	2,286	1,419
Kensington Chelsea	4,366	1,414
Heathrow	2	36
Barnet	4,441	1,826
Brent	5,639	1,906
Camden	5,190	3,460
Harrow	2,852	951
Hertsmere	548	471
Westminster	5,162	4,494
MPD Total	127,611	63,940

Crime Statistics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded by the Metropolitan police within each borough for each category of crime in the year ended June.

Mr. Maclean: The requested information is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police
12 months ending June 1993

Metropolitan Police District — *Number of offences*

Borough/District	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary and going equipped	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Other notifiable offences	Total notifiable offences
Broxbourne	265	23	23	829	3,019	150	1,390	17	5,716
Enfield	1,037	148	390	4,561	10,959	765	5,073	102	23,035
Epping Forest	306	24	31	1,047	3,213	288	1,371	36	6,316
Haringey	1,105	161	1,007	5,902	11,115	1,167	4,496	131	25,084
Islington	1,203	158	936	5,581	14,752	729	5,677	348	29,384
Redbridge	866	139	323	4,679	11,086	963	3,921	75	22,052
Waltham Forest	992	102	732	4,117	11,160	995	4,432	104	22,634
Welwyn Hatfield	1	1	0	21	46	1	23	0	93
Barking	636	243	192	3,884	7,475	553	3,263	90	16,336
Hackney	1,442	308	2,032	8,492	14,371	1,125	5,607	241	33,618
Havering	553	97	164	3,872	11,005	966	3,555	78	20,290
Newham	1,935	313	810	6,807	13,187	1,114	5,474	208	29,848
Tower Hamlets	1,315	177	625	5,914	14,828	782	5,235	178	29,054
Thames	0	0	0	1	96	0	18	0	115
Bexley	529	131	131	3,322	9,404	663	4,705	64	18,949
Bromley	852	128	259	6,097	14,400	1,148	6,121	71	29,076
Greenwich	1,442	288	496	6,661	15,262	964	8,116	181	33,410
Lewisham	1,336	240	1,120	8,710	13,673	1,353	4,988	159	31,579
Southwark	2,159	268	1,707	8,797	19,714	1,334	7,985	280	42,244
Croydon	1,618	259	717	6,708	16,746	1,521	7,280	164	35,013
Epsom Ewell	296	56	41	1,149	2,597	342	1,081	19	5,581
Lambeth	3,462	407	2,849	10,628	20,120	1,965	7,862	566	47,859
Merton	8	118	225	3,740	8,952	748	3,825	89	18,502
Reigate Banstead	90	12	13	542	1,334	163	521	9	2,684
Sutton	832	85	146	3,312	8,147	583	3,373	53	16,531
Elmbridge	75	22	14	874	2,046	97	853	13	3,994
Hounslow	930	176	275	4,443	12,307	1,028	5,531	125	24,815
Kingston	367	82	126	2,903	7,616	584	2,631	38	14,347
Richmond	462	77	149	2,700	8,129	431	2,844	58	14,850
Spelthorne	225	85	38	1,272	4,516	288	1,933	17	8,374
Wandsworth	1,117	297	1,464	6,443	16,706	1,294	6,787	128	34,236
Ealing	1,387	207	748	5,945	14,354	1,212	7,339	133	31,325
Hammersmith	1,082	133	672	4,248	13,684	990	4,826	147	25,782
Hillingdon	649	113	155	3,568	10,596	768	5,420	64	21,333
Kensington Chelsea	987	122	635	5,227	19,750	1,237	4,332	135	32,425
Heathrow	26	3	5	56	3,009	281	262	191	3,833
Barnet	881	221	386	6,132	12,170	1,089	5,781	97	26,757
Brent	1,420	171	1,850	7,102	11,132	1,297	5,683	242	28,897
Camden	1,229	185	1,101	8,610	22,255	1,574	5,811	169	40,934
Harrow	691	83	248	3,642	6,620	551	3,500	57	15,392
Hertsmere	164	28	35	972	2,990	230	1,433	15	5,867
Westminster	1,685	342	1,367	9,435	41,182	3,190	5,618	370	63,189
MPD Total	38,454	6,233	24,237	188,945	465,723	36,523	175,976	5,262	941,353

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded by the police within each police force area in England and Wales for each category of crime in the year ended June.

Mr. Maclean: The information requested is given in the table.

Notifiable offences recorded by police force area and offence group
Twelve months ending June 1993

Police force area	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Theft and handling*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Criminal damage*	*Other offences*	*Total*
Avon and Somerset	5,264	626	1,600	45,388	104,984	5,671	19,832	629	183,994
Bedfordshire	2,045	335	632	16,062	31,847	2,240	7,755	278	61,194
Cambridgeshire	2,797	385	314	16,277	40,256	1,882	7,680	433	70,024
Cheshire	2,953	380	324	23,170	40,594	2,472	11,824	1,241	82,958
Cleveland	2,447	217	286	19,585	42,789	1,574	13,809	299	81,006
Cumbria	2,051	235	94	11,954	23,360	878	7,939	343	46,854
Derbyshire	4,147	448	368	24,668	45,367	1,500	15,586	638	92,722
Devon and Cornwall	4,241	820	406	31,297	65,246	3,929	17,651	1,009	124,599
Dorset	1,659	335	159	10,249	30,324	3,842	5,861	817	53,246
Durham	2,451	426	160	14,040	35,300	2,710	12,178	638	67,903
Essex	4,210	697	506	27,134	62,009	3,333	17,256	750	115,895
Gloucestershire	1,674	251	298	17,797	33,569	2,111	5,137	401	61,238
Greater Manchester	10,136	1,397	4,948	104,624	189,638	10,970	66,516	2,633	390,862
Hampshire	5,298	1,140	640	35,719	81,590	5,409	22,236	1,270	153,302
Hertfordshire	1,856	247	351	13,415	31,813	1,578	9,526	409	59,195
Humberside	4,953	765	517	46,425	63,047	3,641	20,043	419	139,810
Kent	6,016	855	685	31,711	90,703	4,423	27,551	1,285	163,229
Lancashire	3,171	405	590	30,349	73,028	3,602	25,816	996	137,957
Leicestershire	3,654	554	997	25,370	53,473	3,381	14,394	528	102,351
Lincolnshire	2,351	330	150	12,232	27,262	1,305	8,106	649	52,385
City of London	197	26	56	836	4,157	505	341	64	6,182
Merseyside	7,292	702	2,046	35,413	70,356	5,109	23,356	1,658	145,932
Metropolitan Police District	38,452	6,233	24,237	187,795	466,083	36,789	175,996	6,415	942,000
Norfolk	1,942	340	226	18,518	36,297	1,649	7,949	452	67,373
Northamptonshire	2,658	305	312	13,458	29,416	1,678	12,346	403	60,576
Northumbria	6,355	723	1,145	64,485	91,673	3,305	53,274	832	221,792
North Yorkshire	1,901	233	111	16,598	30,472	1,077	6,403	397	57,192
Nottinghamshire	7,931	1,128	1,165	40,082	84,677	4,225	26,022	633	165,863
South Yorkshire	4,979	593	854	48,868	69,294	2,141	21,739	1,113	149,581
Staffordshire	5,390	468	406	30,819	47,054	2,330	14,648	427	101,542
Suffolk	2,165	347	147	9,494	22,756	1,877	6,792	531	44,109
Surrey	2,051	331	244	13,347	28,888	2,040	7,007	399	54,307
Sussex	3,182	806	555	29,903	64,089	3,599	16,011	1,247	119,392
Thames Valley	4,619	767	956	39,448	112,627	7,623	32,482	1,203	199,725
Warwickshire	1,318	298	133	13,211	23,567	1,308	6,679	274	46,788
West Mercia	3,444	428	259	18,187	46,490	1,472	11,638	453	82,371
West Midlands	11,207	1,588	5,517	104,677	151,325	9,095	50,430	1,824	335,663
West Yorkshire	9,337	1,327	3,139	94,436	145,395	6,125	43,853	2,067	305,679
Wiltshire	2,582	459	145	9,324	22,270	1,551	6,087	453	42,871
Dyfed-Powys	2,057	453	41	4,881	12,429	795	5,140	291	26,087
Gwent	2,365	332	104	7,722	21,691	1,070	6,634	399	40,317
North Wales	2,559	326	126	12,480	24,623	1,305	8,047	377	49,843
South Wales	5,847	557	421	39,570	81,796	4,085	37,587	958	170,821
Total	203,204	29,618	56,370	1,411,018	2,853,624	167,204	917,157	38,535	5,676,730

Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in respect of Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Since the original decision to deport Mr. Chahal was made in August 1990, representations have been made by 51 hon. Members; four Members of the European Parliament; Amnesty International and several other organisations; and over 2,000 members of the public in this country and overseas. Most of these representations have supported Mr. Chahal's request to be granted asylum in the United Kingdom; some have called for his early removal to India.

The decision to deport Mr. Chahal was taken on the ground that his presence is not conducive to the public good for reasons of national security and for other reasons of a political nature, namely the international fight against terrorism. On 22 October 1993, the Court of Appeal held that my predecessor's decisions to refuse Mr. Chahal's application for asylum and to deport him were both reasonable and lawful. Subject to any further legal challenges to that decision arrangements for Mr. Chahal's deportation will proceed.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek power to enable him to issue an exemption certificate to owners of a dog or dogs who were

unable to meet the requirements of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 for valid reasons which existed on or before 30 November 1991.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer to the reply that I gave the hon. Member on 25 November at column *171*.

Market Testing

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce the result of the market test of statistics collection in his Department.

Mr. Howard: The market test of statistics collection in my Department has now been concluded and it has been decided to award a service level agreement to the in-house team whose tender was judged to have represented the best value for money.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the proposed visitors' waiting centre will be built and opened at Wandsworth prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, undated:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the new visitor's centre at Wandsworth prison.

Work on converting an existing quarter adjacent to the prison gate to a visitor's centre was completed in September, at a cost of £35,000. A Centre Co-ordinator has recently been appointed and the centre is expected to come into use early in the New Year.

DEFENCE

Tornado-Helicopter Accident

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made in the investigation of the accident involving a civil helicopter and an RAF Tornado on 23 June; what is the expected date of completion of the military accident investigation; and what is the expected date of publication of the military aircraft accident summary.

Mr. Hanley: The board of inquiry has completed its investigation and the findings are now being considered. This process should be completed by January 1994. Publication of the military aircraft accident summary will follow shortly thereafter.

Orders

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to continue placing orders with *(a)* Fratelli Borletti, *(b)* Gebruder Junghans and *(c)* AS Raufoss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: We will not be placing new contracts with these three firms until all the facts relating to the recent conviction of Gordon Foxley have been fully investigated.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the directors of *(a)* Fratelli Borletti, *(b)* Gebruder Junghans and *(c)* AS Raufoss; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no such discussions.

Mr. Gordon Foxley

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the duties and responsibilities of Mr. Gordon Foxley when he was employed by the Ministry of Defence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

HEALTH

Complaints Procedures

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times the Wilson Review Committee on NHS Complaints Procedures has met; and how many further meetings are planned prior to publication of the committee's report.

Dr. Mawhinney: We understand that the complaints review committee has met four times and that Professor Wilson and his colleagues plan further meetings before they submit their report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the report of the Review Committee on NHS Complaints Procedures; and what will be the status of that report.

Dr. Mawhinney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked Professor Wilson and his independent review committee to make recommendations at the turn of the year. The recommendations and publication will be considered at that time.

Cigarettes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to discuss with tobacco companies the dangers arising from continued production of fire-prone cigarettes;

(2) what consultations she has had with medical organisations on fire injuries from fire prone cigarettes and the need to introduce fire safe cigarettes.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to compile data on the direct financial costs of property damage resulting from fires caused by cigarettes.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to do so.

Consultants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers and locations of women consultants *(a)* currently in practice in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in each hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The available information will be placed in the Library. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Resources Distribution

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions have been issued to regional health authorities to ensure fair distribution of resources within the regions based on weighted capitation.

Mr. Sackville: The planning guidance for 1992-93 gave regional health authorities discretion to use their judgment about the precise distribution of funds which suits their districts' needs, based on their analysis of local information. The guidance for 1993-94 was published in FDL(92)113 which states

"Regions will therefore be asked to report on their planned deployment of the 1993-94 allocation and in particular to demonstrate clear progress towards equalisation. The pace of such progress and whether it should be achieved by reducing resources allocated to districts above their capitation share is a matter for invidual regions to judge in the light of local circumstances."

Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Steroids

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement concerning the result of investigations carried out by the Medicines Control Agency into illegal advertising of anabolic steroids.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency has recently completed inquiries into the extent to which illegal advertising of anabolic steroids takes place. The results of the inquiries will be made available shortly.

GP Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the extent of the over or under-spending, on general practitioner fund holder budgets in each national health service region and family health services authority area; and what were the sums returned and/or retained by general practitioner fund holders in each case.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on 1992-93 outturn will not be available centrally before the end of November.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systematic accounting systems and records of activity she has laid down for general practitioner fund-holding practices.

Dr. Mawhinney: The general practitioner fund holders' manual of accounts contains guidance on accountancy matters relating to, and the financial management of, the general practice fund. In addition, GP fund holders must have computer software to assist in managing a fund. The GP fund-holding software specification sets down the software requirements for this. Copies of both these documents are available in the Library.

Elective Surgery

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money in the most recent period for which data are available was spent by fund-holding general practitioner practices on purchasing elective surgery for their patients from *(a)* national health service trusts and directly managed hospitals and *(b)* private practitioners.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Organograms

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will construct and place in the Library organograms of the national health service to district health authority level as it existed in April 1983; and how it will be consequent on her proposals in April 1994.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information will be placed in the Library.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cot deaths there have been in the United Kingdom *(a)* per region and *(b)* per hospital; and what percentage they have been of live births over the past 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The available information will be placed in the Library. Information on cot deaths by hospital of occurrence for the years 1983-1992 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys is examining plans to include infant mortality statistics by district health authority of occurrence in its future routine publications.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Research Units

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the 13 research units currently subject to peer review *(a)* the name of the unit director or, if the post is currently vacant, the name of the previous director and date of resignation, *(b)* the date of the site visit, *(c)* the date on which the report of the review was made public and *(d)* the timetable for making decisions about the future of each unit; and if she will place a copy in the Libary of each review report which has been completed.

Dr. Mawhinney: The names of unit directors and the dates of site visits are shown in the table. In accordance with the Department's preferred practices for the commissioning and management of all research and development, expert peer review of long-term research contracts is well established and reports are discussed fully with unit directors. Once finalised, these reports take the form of advice to the department's director of research and development and are not published. With the agreement of unit directors, we are arranging to place in the Library copies of the reports they have prepared for site visits, together with the conclusions of the site visit team. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 29 June 1993 at column *421*, which stated that decisions about the future of units will be announced once the series of site visits has been completed and following due discussion and full consideration. Earlier decisions may be required, depending on the particular circumstances of the unit and we are pleased to announce that the director of research and development has now invited Oxford university to provide proposals on terms and conditions so that the post of director of the national perinatal epidemiology unit can be filled.

Research Unit	Director	Site visit date (most recent or planned)
Childhood Cancer Research Group	Dr. G. J. Draper	October 1991
Medical Care Research Unit	Professor B. T. Williams	October 1992
National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit	Vacancy	June 1993
Previous director, Dr. I Chalmers, resigned September 1992. Interim management arrangements were agreed with the unit's steering committee and involve a rotating post of acting director.		
Social Medicine and Health Services Research Unit	Professor W. W. Holland	July 1993
Cancer for Primary Care Research	Dr. D. Wilkin	July 1993
Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit	Professor J. Chamberlain	October 1993
National Institute for Social Work	Dr. J. Pahl	October 1993
Clinical Operational Research Unit	Professor R. R. P. Jackson	November 1993
Social Policy Research Unit	Professor S. Baldwin	Planned for January 1994
Site visit dates for the following units are in planning for early 1994.		
Personal Social Services Research Unit	Professor B. Davies	
Centre for Health Economics	Professor A. K. Maynard	
Dartington Social Research Unit	Professor S. Millham	
Thomas Coram Research Unit	Professor H. McGurk	

HIV

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards the provision of free counselling for patients diagnosed as HIV positive.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1985 it has been the Department of Health's policy that advice, counselling and HIV testing should be available for any person who might have been at risk of HIV infection or wishes to have a test. Counselling provided free through the national health service includes advice for those diagnosed HIV positive, on management of HIV-related disease and on how to avoid transmission of HIV infection.

Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of patients diagnosed as having cancer see a specialist in cancer.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits abroad she has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds of each visit and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on 3 November at columns *222-24*.

Patient Deaths

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has on how many patients die en route to other hospitals because their local hospital does not have sufficient intensive or coronary care unit beds.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the diversion of intensive or coronary care cases is not available centrally. We are aware of the three tragic deaths of Manchester patients and understand that North Western regional health authority is holding discussions with district health authorities to examine whether the level of intensive care provision in Manchester is set at an appropriate level.

The Government are currently funding a study by the Royal College of Anaesthetists into access to intensive care nationally.

Health Expenditure

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the expenditure on health expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product in each EC country.

Dr. Mawhinney: Total health service expenditure in the United Kingdom as a percentage of gross domestic product was 6·1 per cent. in 1992-93 which compares with 4·7 per cent. in 1978-79. Figures for other European Community countries are not available on a comparable basis.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS patients waiting for admission had waited more than six months at March, June, September and December 1992 and March, June and September 1993.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on the number of patients waiting for admission to hospital is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", which is published twice yearly for March and September. Copies are available in the Library. The most recent information is for March 1993, which shows that 27·4 per cent. of patients had waited more than six months for treatment. This compares with 30·5 per cent. in September 1992 and 29·5 per cent. in March 1992.

Hospital Closures

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the name of each hospital closed in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Jonathan Zito

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the inquiry by South and North East Thames regional health authorities into the death of Jonathan Zito is likely to be completed; and if its report will be published.

Mr. Bowis: I understand the chairmen of the North East and South East Thames regional health authorities expect to receive the report of the inquiry chaired by Jean Ritchie QC in February. The report will be published.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare national health service trust is presently making payments to staff to cover *(a)* work in unsocial hours and *(b)* expenses incurred in attending training courses.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Tom Pindar, chairman of the trust, for details.

Benzodiazepines

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued for each benzodiazepine by community pharmacists in England in 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table. From 1992, the data include prescriptions dispensed by dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by doctors for items administered personally as well as those dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors. When 1991 data are recalculated on the same basis, they show an encouraging fall of about 15 per cent. in the level of benzodiazepine dispensing between 1991 and 1992.

Benzodiazepine prescription items

England 1992

Drug group	*Number of prescription items (thousands)*
Temazepam	6,914
Diazepam	3,225
Nitrazepam	3,074
Lorazepam	1,018
Chlordiazepoxide	503
Oxazepam	352
Loprazolam	239
Lormetazepam	215
Clonazepam	144
Clobazam	67
Total	15,751

Note:

The data cover all prescription items dispensed by community pharmacists appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration.

Drug Companies (Payments to Doctors)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist on payments by drug companies to doctors to promote their drugs; and what plans there are to tighten these guidelines.

Mr. Sackville: Guidelines on the promotion of medicines are contained in the code of practice for the pharmaceutical industry administered by the Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority, a copy of which is available in the Library. We are proposing to introduce legislation under the Medicines Act 1968 next month to control hospitality offered by drug companies.

WALES

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Redwood: The total number of persons employed by my Department are:

Grade	*Total number of staff within the grade*	*Total number of female staff within the grade*
G1 and equivalents	1	0
G2 and equivalents	2	0
G3 and equivalents	12	1
G4 and equivalents	5	1
G5 and equivalents	53	9
G6 and equivalents	28	3
G7 and equivalents	189	50
SEO and equivalents	144	25
Administration fast streamers	13	8
HEO and equivalents	308	109
EO and equivalents	488	285
AO and equivalents	643	465
AA and equivalents	609	325
Total number of staff		2,495
Total number of female staff		1,281

Acid Rain

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on initiatives taken to protect agricultural land and inland waterways and lakes from acid rain in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: A wide range of measures are being taken throughout the United Kingdom to reduce the emissions which cause acid rain. These include significant action to reduce emissions from the power industry, the fitting of catalytic converters to all new cars and the implementation of the pollution control systems under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In addition, the Welsh Office in conjunction with the National Rivers Authority and the Countryside Council for Wales is promoting research and monitoring on the environmental impact of acid deposition in Wales. Action is also in hand to evaluate the effectiveness of liming on agricultural land and waterways in Wales affected by acid deposition.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the findings of his Department's joint report with the Department of the Environment reviewing the performance at 25 local authorities in meeting the targets set in part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; when the report was forwarded to *(a)* the Local Authority Enforcement Liaison Committee and *(b)* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; and to which other bodies it has been distributed.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the

Environment and Countryside to the hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) on 3 November, *Official Report*, column *207*. Of the 25 local authorities included in the review, three are in Wales.

The local authority associations and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution are represented on the inspectorate of pollution/Local Authority Enforcement Liaison Committee. That committee approved the Department of the Environment/Welsh Office review report on 29 September. Copies of the report have since been provided to all relevant local authorities in England and Wales and to certain trade associations.

Council Houses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses were built in 1992; and how many are under construction currently.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number built in 1992 has been published in table 2.3 of "Welsh Housing Statistics No. 13 1993", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Leaving aside the substantial social housing programme funded by Housing for Wales, there were 240 local authority dwellings under construction on 31 August 1993.

Environment Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what contribution his Department made in terms of resources or papers delivered to the conference on research and education in environmental management held in Swansea on 11 November.

Mr. Redwood: The conference was organised by the Welsh Office at a cost of some £32,700. The Welsh Office contributed to a paper on waste management.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent upheavals in Burundi on the stability of the wider east and central Africa region.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The recent tragic events in Burundi have resulted in the movement of over 700,000 refugees into neighbouring countries with particularly severe consequences for Zaire, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest multilateral and regional efforts to restore peace and stability to Burundi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Statement by the President of the United Nations Security Council issued on 16 November encouraged the Secretary-General to send his Special Representative on Burundi, Mr. Ould Abdallah, to Bujumbura with a United Nations team, to assist the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in its efforts to restore democratic institutions, rebuild confidence and stabilise the situation. The Secretary-General has been asked urgently to report on this mission and on his recommendations for the creation of a voluntary fund to assist in the despatch of an OAU mission.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to encourage the sending of a UN representative to Burundi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my written reply to his question of 25 November. The United Kingdom fully supports this United Nations initiative.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list each United Kingdom non-governmental organisation that has either category I, category II or roster status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not available in the format requested.

The United Nations does not list non-governmental organisations by country of origin. Non-governmental organisations with consultative or roster status are all international in character. I am making available to the Library of the House the current list of NGOs with category I, category II and roster status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

Vessel Seizures, Danube

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the seizure of vessels by Serbian pirates, where the Danube passes through the Krajin; what commitment has been made by the Western European Union to controlled passage through the Danube; and what action is proposed.

Mr. Heathcote-Amory: We have no such information, though we are aware a recent blocking of the Danube in the vicinity of Belgrade by two unofficial Serbian organisations for which the Serbian Government disclaim responsibility. We do not accept that there is nothing the Serbian Government can do to curtail these activities.

The President of the United Nations Security Council made a statement on 13 October 1993 condemning this action and reminding the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) authorities of their international obligations to ensure free movement of international traffic on the Danube.

The Western European Union sanctions enforcement operation on the Danube is directed at preventing the passage of unauthorised materials to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is not tasked with enforcing the passage of shipping throughout the length of the Danube.

Miltary Equipment Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to make it a condition of granting an export licence for any application for arms or military equipment that the recipient country provide complete details of all its military imports and exports to the United Nations register of arms transfers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The United Nations register of conventional arms is a voluntary confidence-building measure with which we encourage all United Nations member states to comply. We do not consider that it constitutes an adequate basis on which to assess export licence applications for military goods.

European Committee of the Regions

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which body will pay the travelling expenses of the United Kingdom members of the European Committee of the Regions; and what will be the rights of *(a)* members and *(b)* alternate members.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The travelling expenses of members of the EC Committee of the Regions will be paid from funds allocated to the Committee in the EC budget. The Committee of the Regions is an advisory body of the Communities. Under article 11 of the protocol on the privileges and immunities of the European Communities, members and alternate members will therefore, in the performance of their duties and during their travel to and from the place of meeting, enjoy the customary privileges, immunities and facilities.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds of each visit and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has made 50 overseas visits involving 68 countries during 1993. The cost and purpose of each visit was as follows:

Official visits overseas by the Secretary of State
1993

Destination	*Dates*	*Purpose*	*Cost* £
Ghana	3–4 January 1993	Bilateral	
Nigeria	4–5 January 1993	Bilateral	172,023·00
Argentina	6–10 January 1993	Bilateral	
Chile	10–11 January 1993	Bilateral	
France (Paris)	13–14 January 1993	Bilateral	3,000·00
Netherlands (The Hague)	20 January 1993	Bilateral	1,420·00
Belgium (Brussels)	25 January 1993	Bilateral	3,390·00
Switzerland (Davos)	29–31 January 1993	World Economic Forum	4,752·00
Belgium (Brussels)	31 January–2 February 1993	Foreign Affairs Council	6,572·00
France (Strasbourg)	2 February 1993	Council of Europe	3,000·00
Germany (Munich)	5–6 February 1993	30th Munich (Wehrkunde) Conference on Security Policy	5,371·00
Germany (Bonn)	17 February 1993	Bilateral	2,700·00
France (Paris)	24 February 1993	Bilateral	2,446·00
Belgium (Brussels)	25–26 February 1993	North Atlantic Council Ministerial Meeting	3,396·00
Spain (Madrid)	28 February–1 March 1993	Anglo/Spanish Talks on Gibraltar	6,070·00
United States of America (New York)	3 March 1993	United Nations	18,452·00
Belgium (Brussels)	7–8 March 1993	Foreign Affairs Council	5,373·00
United States of America (Washington)	24–25 March 1993	Bilateral	26,631·00
Germany (Bonn)	29 March 1993	Address the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	2,701·00
France (Paris)	1 April 1993	Bilateral	
Russia (Moscow)	2 April 1993	Bilateral	
Indonesia	3–5 April 1993	Bilateral	192,780·00
Japan	6–7 April 1993	Bilateral	
Korea	7–9 April 1993	Bilateral	
Japan (Tokyo)	12–15 April 1993	Joint Ministerial G7 meeting	78,040·00
Denmark (Hindsgval Slot)	24–25 April 1993	EC Foreign Ministers informal weekend	24,618·00
Finland (Helsinki and Ivalo)	25–26 April 1993	Bilateral	
Sweden (Stockholm)	26–27 April 1993	Bilateral	
Ireland (Dublin)	30 April 1993	Bilateral	2,039·00
Hungary	6–7 May 1993	In attendance upon Her Majesty the Queen	4,654·70
Belgium (Brussels)	9–10 May 1993	Foreign Affairs Council	6,052·00
France (Strasbourg)	13–14 May 1993	Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly	6,312·00
Italy (Rome)	19 May 1993	Western European Union	6,777·00
United States of America (Washington)	21–22 May 1993	Bilateral	38,891·00
Denmark (Copenhagen)	24 May 1993	EC Foreign Ministers troika with Turkey	5,176·00
Belgium (Brussels)	24 May 1993	Bilateral	3,400·00
France (Paris)	1 June 1993	Bilateral	2,500·00
Romania	1–3 June 1993	Bilateral	
Bulgaria	3–4 June 1993	Bilateral	41,453·00
Macadonia	4 June 1993	Bilateral	
Luxembourg	7–9 June 1993	Foreign Affairs Council	11,494·00
Greece (Athens)	9–11 June 1993	Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council	18,346·00
Denmark (Copenhagen)	21–22 June 1993	European Council	[1]11,690·00

Destination	Dates	Purpose	Cost £
Singapore	5–6 July 1993	Bilateral	[2]78,050·00
Japan	7–8 July 1993	G7 Economic Summit	
China	8–9 July 1993	Bilateral	
Hong Kong	9 July 1993	Official talks	
Brussels	19 July 1993	FAC	6,000·00
Salzburg/Germany	24–26 July 1993	Bayreuth festival	5,500·00
UAE/Saudi Arabia	6–8 September 1993	Bilateral	64,267·00
Bonn	10 September 1993	Bilateral	Not yet available
Belgium	11–12 September 1993	EC Foreign Minister's informal weekend	Not yet available
Australia/New Zealand	13–19 September 1993	Bilateral	113,900·00
Washington	21–22 September 1993	Bilateral	
Brussels	20 September 1993	Joint Foreign Affairs/Agriculture Council	Not yet available
United States of America (New York)	27 September–1 October 1993	United Nations General Assembly	86,284·00
Luxembourg	3–4 October 1993	FAC	10,468·00
Italy (Rome)	18 October 1993	Bilateral	Not yet available
Cyprus (Limmasol)	18–22 October 1993	CHOGM	
Syria (Damascus)	22–24 October 1993	Bilateral	Not yet available
Luxembourg	26 October 1993	Special FAC	7,985·00
Belgium (Brussels)	28–29 October 1993	Special EC Summit	Not yet available
Belgium (Brussels)	8 November 1993	FAC	5,570·00
India (New Delhi, Bombay)	14–17 November 1993	Bilateral	Not yet available
Luxembourg	21–22 November 1993	Western European Union	Not yet available
Germany (Bonn)	25 November 1993	Anglo/German Summit	Not yet available
Italy (Bologna, Rome)	29–30 November 1993	Bilateral	Not yet available

[1] Costs also include those of the Prime Minister.
[2] Costs also include those of the Prime Minister (G7 Summit only).

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Seceretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place since June with the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food respectively, in regard to representations received from abroad on the international and proliferation implications of extending reprocessing at Sellafield with THORP.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I discuss a range of issues with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. These naturally include. THORP from time to time. Any representations from overseas on THORP have been sent direct to the Ministers conducting the public consultations on the Sellafield authorisations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Industry Council

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Industry Council of 18 November.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Council was dominated by lengthy discussion of six requests for derogations from the steel state aids code for Sidenor and CSI, Spain: Freital and Ekostahl, Germany: Ilva, Italy; and Siderurgia Nacional, Portugal. At its September meeting, the Council confirmed the obligation to apply the state aids code, and made particular reference to eliminating operating cost subsidies. Certain of the cases before the November Council did not meet these criteria. Agreement was not reached, and the Council is likely to meet on 17 December to consider the cases further.

There was insufficient time to discuss the other items on the agenda—EC industry policy; the Commission's 22nd competition policy report and the Maritime Industries Forum.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to which countries in the middle east his Department has authorised the licensing of depleted uranium exports since 1979.

Mr. Needham: The answer to this question could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Anthrax Vaccine

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether anthrax vaccine exports require export licences; and how many such licences were issued during the years 1987 onward.

Mr. Needham: Anthrax vaccine was made specifically licensable in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992, which came into force on 31 December 1992. Prior to that it was controlled under a general military heading—ML7—relating to defence against biological agents. For the

period in question, the total number of licences issued specifically for anthrax vaccine could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Frogs Legs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to ban the import of frogs' legs.

Mr. Needham: No.

Redundant Steelworkers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how may redundant steelworkers have retrained for alternative occupations through ISERBS—iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme—support during the last 10 years.

Mr. Sainsbury: Detailed figures for all of the last 10 years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, since 1 January 1989, 8,390 redundant steel workers have been eligible for ISERBS benefits, of which 4,183 have retrained.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the relative position of steelworkers entering redundancy with and without the benefit of ISERBS—iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme—support; and what assessment he has made of the employment consequences of termination of this scheme.

Mr. Sainsbury: A full evaluation was conducted in 1992. A copy of the report was placed in the House of Commons Library on 29 October 1993.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what total sums have been paid to redundant steelworkers in the United Kingdom through the iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme—arrangements in each of the last 10 years; and what proportion of these sums have been provided by the European Commission.

Mr. Sainsbury: The figures requested, at 1992-93 prices, are as follows:

Financial Year	*Total ISERBS payments £m*	*Commission contribution £m*
1983-84	80·3	54·7
1984-85	50·9	27·1
1985-86	33·5	20·6
1986-87	28·9	12·7
1987-88	24·6	8·2
1988-89	7·4	8·0
1989-90	6·8	5·6
1990-91	18·9	0·6
1991-92	30·0	3·6
1992-93	50·1	5·4

There is a time lag between ISERBS payments being made and receipt of the contribution from the European Commission.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date he proposes to end the ISERBS arrangements to assist redundant steelworkers to retrain or to relocate and to reduce the unemployment effect of contraction in that industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 29 October 1993, *Official Report*, column *804*.

Steel Exports

Mr. Ward: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support he is giving to United Kingdom steel suppliers to increase their exports to the EC.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* My Department, jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides a wide range of high-quality advice and support to exporters which is available to all sectors of United Kingdom industry.

Energy Advisory Panel

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will report on the first meeting of the energy advisory panel giving *(a)* details of its planned agenda and *(b)* how his Department plans to respond to any recommendations.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The panel met for the first time on 23 November. It was a constructive meeting, in which members considered a programme of work towards the production of the first annual energy report. As is generally the case with such bodies, the advice of the panel and details of its meeting and discussion are confidential.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the likely success of the current round of GATT negotiations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Conclusion of the Uruguay round by the agreed deadline of 15 December is currently the Government's top trade priority. The vote last week by the United States Congress for the north America free trade agreement was a vote for free trade. This and recent progress in Geneva makes successful completion of the round more likely than ever.

ENVIRONMENT

New Homes

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total number of new homes completed by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private developers in each of the London boroughs in each year since 1979; and what is his estimate for completions in 1993.

Sir George Young: Estimates of housebuilding completions by sector for each local authority area in Greater London are shown in the publications "Local Housing Statistics" and also "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas, 1980-1989" for some earlier years.

Figures for 1979 are in table 4(b) of the November 1981 edition—issue No. 59—of "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1980 to 1984 are in "Housebuilding in England by Local Authority Areas", tables 1.1 to 1.5. Figures for

1985 to 1990 are in tables 1(a) to 1(f) of the October 1992 edition—issue No. 103—of "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1991 and 1992 are in table 1 of issue No. 105 of "Local Housing Statistics". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

The Department does not prepare forecasts of housebuilding activity.

Air Quality

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the proposals set out in his joint consultation paper on the future of air quality monitoring networks in the United Kingdom; and what is the closing date for submissions.

Mr. Yeo: My Department issued the paper "The Future of Air Quality Monitoring Networks in the United Kingdom" for consultation on 2 November 1993. This fulfils the Government's commitment made in the second anniversary report of the 1990 White Paper "This Common Inheritance" to examine the possibilities of better integration of national and local ambient air quality monitoring and greater uniformity of practice. The closing date for submissions is 10 December 1993.

The paper sets out proposals on ways in which local and national monitoring can be brought together to produce one coherent quality-assured network and seeks views on ways this can best be achieved. The proposals include the development of a central and accessible pool of national and local data of broadly common format and standards, which would be subject to effective quality control and be freely available to the public.

Temporary Accommodation

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the average annual cost of *(a)* bed-and-breakfast accommodation and *(b)* other temporary accommodation, including privately leased properties, provided by local authorities for homeless households in (i) the Greater London area and (ii) England.

Sir George Young: My Department has no estimates of the average annual costs to local authorities of housing homeless households in temporary accommodation.

Data on the annual costs and use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation from which average annual costs can be derived, are, however, published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in "Homelessness Statistics 1991-92 Actuals", a copy of which is in the Library.

The CIPFA publication contains insufficient information to derive average annual costs for other types of temporary accommodation.

Industry (Costs)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has that the principle of best available techniques not entailing excessive cost is not causing excessive costs to British industry where it is applicable.

Mr. Yeo: The BATNEEC principle—best available techniques not entailing excessive cost—is designed to ensure that the environment is adequately protected from potential pollution, while not placing an unacceptable burden on industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—HMIP—issue guidance respectively on BATNEEC for different sectors coming under local authority air pollution control—LAAPC—and integrated pollution control—IPC—and consult widely with industry and other interested parties in doing so. Furthermore, an operator is able to appeal against the conditions of an IPC or LAAPC authorisation if he feels BATNEEC has not been properly applied.

Although it is not possible at this stage in the progressive implementation of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to determine the final costs to industry of meeting the requirements, I have no reason to believe that this will be disproportionate. I attach considerable importance to ensuring that unnecessary burdens are not imposed on industry and both IPC and LAAPC have been reviewed as part of the Government's deregulation initiative.

On 10 June, I held a seminar with representatives from industry at which we discussed the implementation of IPC and my officials have this month held a similar meeting on LAAPC.

City Challenge

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the names of the chief executives of city challenge schemes, their current salaries and their previous occupations.

Mr. Baldry: The chief executives of the 31 city challenge partnerships are:

Chief executives	
Mr. K. Beaumont	Leicester
Mr. J. Blackie	Newcastle
Mrs. J. Bradbury	Blackburn
Mr. A. Burton	Kensington and Chelsea
Mr. P. Coffey	Wirral
Mr. G. Davis	Harlesden
Mr. D. Dawson	Derby
Mr. C. Dutton	Sandwell
Mr. G. Fitzhenry	Bolton
Mr. J. Flamson	Liverpool
Dr. T. Flanagan	Batley
Mr. C. Freegard	Nottingham
Mr. J. Gillis	Dearne Valley
Ms. S. Healy	Walsall
Mr. S. Jacobs	Stratford
Mr. C. Khamis	Wolverhampton
Ms. L. Klein	Bethnal Green
Mr. R. Lawrence	North Tyneside
Ms B Marjoram	Brixton
Mr. M. McCloskey	Birmingham
Mr. J. Montgomery	Deptford
Mr. P. Moss	Barnsley
Mr. C. Oldershaw	Stockton
Mr. M. Orrick	Sunderland
Mr. R. Pointing	Wigan
Mr. R. Simmons	Hackney
Mr. L. Southerton	Middlesbrough
Mrs. C. Teesdale	Hartlepool
Mr. J. Watson	Bradford
Mrs. L. Whitehouse	Hulme
Mr. D. Yeates	Sefton

Of these, about two thirds came from local government or other public sector employment, and about a third from the private sector. The salary of the chief executive is a matter for each individual partnership.

Committee of the Regions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representatives he has received following his appointments to the Committee of the Regions.

Mr. Baldry: Seven.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to how many and which organisations he is able to make appointments; and what are the salary levels of these appointments.

Mr. Gummer: Information about the number, and levels of remuneration, of people appointed to public bodies for which I am responsible is given in the annual HMSO publication "Public Bodies". A copy of the current issue is held at the House of Commons Library and "Public Bodies 1993" will be published shortly. Additionally, and excluding departmental committees, of which no central record is maintained, I make appointments to the following bodies:

Executive Agencies

Agency	*Appointment*	*Annual Salary*
Ordnance Survey	Director General	see note[1]
	Management Board non-executives[3]	£5,262
Planning Inspectorate	Chief Planning Inspector	see note[1]
	Members of Advisory Board[4]	unpaid
Building Research Establishment	Chief Executive	see note[1]
QE II Conference Centre	Chief Executive	see note[2]
Buying Agency	Chief Executive	see note[2]
Security Facilities Executive	Chief Executive	see note[2]

Other Bodies

Name of Body	*Appointment*	*Annual Salary*
Office of Water Resources (OFWAT)	Director General	see note[3]
7 National Park Authorities (England)	Third of Members	unpaid
Broads Authority	9 of the 35 Members	unpaid
Sutton Housing Trust	4 of the 7 Trustees	£2,120

[1]Civil Service Grade 3
[2]Civil Service Grade 5
[3]Civil Service Grade 2

Chemical Degradation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the report commissioned by his Department from WRC Consultants on degradation of chemicals; how many copies of the report have been printed; to whom it has been circulated; and what response he has made to its recommendations.

Mr. Yeo: The report was received in the Department of the Environment on 1 November 1993. In all, 18 copies of the report have been printed, 13 of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. A copy is also available in the Department's library for public reference. The remaining copies were circulated to staff within the Department who will use the results in the assessment of chemicals. Further copies can be made available on request.

Canada Geese

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the members of the Canada geese working group; and what organisations or sector each of them represents.

Mr. Yeo: The list is as follows:

R. J. Groombridge—Chairman, Department of the Environment.
C. Booty—Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.
Dr. J. Kirby—Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.
G. Macniven—London Borough of Wandsworth.
Miss S. Davies—Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
P. Clement—English Nature.
Mrs. J. Adams—Central Royal Parks.
Dr. C. Feare—Central Science Laboratory.
Dr. N. Reynolds—British Association for Shooting and Conservation.
Dr. S. Smith—National Farmers Union.
T. Harman—British Pest Control Association.
Dr. D. Goode—London Ecology Unit and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.
J. Stephens—Department of the Environment.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust also cover the interests of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how Her Majesty's Government intend to promote sustainable development as outlined in the Queen's Speech.

Mr. Yeo: We are preparing a strategy for sustainable development and intend to publish it shortly. We shall lay the document before the House in the normal way.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives he has taken to encourage public response to his consultation paper on sustainable development.

Mr. Yeo: My Department published a consultation paper on sustainable development in July this year. They and other Government Departments then held a series of

round table discussions with interested people and organisations, and I and my colleagues took every appropriate opportunity to raise the issues in speeches and discussions. We received over 500 responses.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the currently envisaged timescale for the stabilisation of emissions of greenhouse gases; and what he sees as the likely time scale for the phasing out of substances damaging the ozone layer.

Mr. Yeo: Under the United Nations framework convention on climate change, the United Kingdom Government are committed to taking measures aimed at returning emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000. A detailed programme of measures designed to achieve this target for each of the main greenhouse gases will be published soon.

Current agreed phaseout dates for ozone depleting substances are as follows:

Substance	*Phaseout date*
CFCs	1 January 1995
Carbon Tetrachloride	1 January 1995
Halons	1 January 1994
111 Trichloroethane	1 January 1996

Hydrochlorofluorocarbons are likely to be phased out by 2015 subject to EC agreement.

There is also to be a cap on methyl bromide use in 1996.

Council Tax

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total number of proposals to amend council tax valuations received to date by valuation offices in England; and how many of these have been dealt with to date, including the numbers involving an amendment to the original banding and the date by which all outstanding proposals are expected to have been dealt with in each of the London boroughs.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Minister for Local Government and Planning gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on Thursday 25 November. Of the proposals settled to date, around 80,000 have resulted in an amendment to the original banding.

As my hon. Friend announced on 29 June, *Official Report* column *416*, we expect some 560,000 council tax appeals to have been settled in England before the end of 1994, with the remaining cases being decided as rapidly as possible in 1995. Progress to date has been consistent with this expectation. I cannot, however forecast a precise end-date, either for England as a whole or for individual local authority areas.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to correct the discrepancy in the minimum age requirements of men and women for eligibility for allocation of sheltered accommodation for elderly persons; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: There is no statutory requirement that sheltered housing can be made available only to persons over a certain age. Decisions on the allocation of such accommodation are the responsibility of the landlord concerned.

Architects

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the deregulation of the registration of architects.

Sir George Young: None at present. The Government have given further consideration to the future of the Architects (Registration) Acts. They still believe that the best long-term solution for architects would be for the chartered institutions and others to develop and improve the system of self-regulation of the profession. This would serve to educate the consumer in what the architect has to offer, so that the need for statutory protection of title would diminish.

The Government understand the strength of feeling against the removal of statutory protection of title shown by consumer organisations, colleagues and many within the profession. The Government have therefore decided, on balance, not to proceed with the repeal of the Architects (Registration) Acts, but to examine, in consultation with the profession and other bodies, measures which could be taken to simplify the present arrangements.

In the meantime, the Government look to the Royal Institute of British Architects and the other professional bodies to address the standing of the profession including the relevant recommendations of the Warne report.

"London, Making the Best Better"

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the initial print number of his coloured consultative document on London and its approximate cost; what plans he has for further printing; and what are the current and future means of its distribution or availability to *(a)* official bodies and *(b)* the public.

Mr. Gummer: Two hundred and fifty thousand copies of the document were printed, each of which contains a questionnaire. Fifty thousand separate questionnaires were also printed. The cost of producing the document and questionnaire, including distribution and publicity, will amount to an estimated £168,000. Decisions on printing extra copies will depend on the demand for the document. Copies were distributed initially through the *Evening Standard* network and sent to a wide range of London organisations. Copies are available by writing to the Department of the Environment, PO Box 151, London E15 2HF.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration was given by his Department to ensure that the distribution and circulation of the questionnaire accompanying the document "London, Making the Best Better" would provide a statistically representative sample of the views of all sections of the London population; if he intends to weight the responses to the questionnaire in any way to provide a statistically representative sample of the London population; and whether he sought outside professional

advice as to whether the questions in the questionnaire were likely to provide data which could be relied upon for the purposes of making decisions.

Mr. Gummer: Two hundred thousand copies of the document were distributed from *Evening Standard* outlets across London. The aim was to reach as many people as possible who have opinions and ideas and to give them a chance to put their point of view to me. In addition, copies are being sent to a wide range of organisations and to anyone who requests them. The distribution method was not intended to provide a statistically representative sample. We will, of course, analyse the responses in terms of age and geographical distribution and these results will be published.

The survey was piloted by MORI and was subsequently modified to make some of the questions clearer. MORI commented that reactions to the pilot survey were very positive: many were pleased to have been invited to take part and were keen to express their views.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the precise method and criteria by which he intends to collate and publish responses to the questionnaire accompanying the document "London, Making the Best Better".

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him earlier today. I will publish a digest of the responses in due course.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table giving separate expenditure breakdowns for *(a)* the questionnaire accompanying the document "London, Making the Best Better" and *(b)* the document, "London, Making the Best Better", without the questionnaire, broken down into (i) the total number produced, (ii) the total cost of typesetting, (iii) the total cost of layout and printing, (iv) the total cost of paper and assorted materials and (v) the total cost of distribution.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him earlier today. Design and typesetting costs were £31,500 for the document, and £500 for the questionnaire. Two hundred and fifty thousand copies of the document and questionnaire were printed and are being distributed together, so it is not possible to separate the costs of each. The cost of printing the 50,000 separate questionnaires was £1,500.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration was given to including London zoo in the list of London attractions for which public approval was sought in the questionnaire accompanying "London, Making the Best Better."

Mr. Gummer: It was not possible to include every London attraction by name in the questionnaire but space is provided for people to name aspects of London which they appreciate. London zoo is mentioned on page 42 of the document.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost of his consultation paper "London: Making the Best Better" in (i) staff time involved in research and preparation of text, (ii) photography and artwork, (iii) printing, (iv) distribution, (v) publicity and (vi) all other expenses.

Mr. Gummer: There was no dedicated team set up solely to prepare the document. My Department's London policy unit co-ordinated the preparation of the document alongside its other duties; the estimated salary and superannuation costs of their time spent on the document amounts to about £18,000. Staff in other parts of my Department and in nine other Departments contributed to the draft. It would be impossible to quantify the total staff time involved.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) today for details of other costs incurred in producing the document.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the final date by which responses to the questionnaire accompanying the document, "London, Making the Best Better" have to be received in order to be considered valid by his Department;

(2) by what date he will publish the full results of the questionnaire accompanying the document "London, Making the Best Better;"

(3) by what date he will publish his response to the results of the questionnaire accompanying the document, "London, Making the Best Better."

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* I want to give people plenty of time to respond to the questionnaire or to write to me, so I have not at this stage set a final date for responses; therefore, I cannot yet give a date for the timing of publication of the results. Clearly no one could reasonably set such dates without knowing in advance the number of responses.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each individual and organisation consulted in advance about the contents of the document, "London, Making the Best Better"; what form the consultations took; and if he will place all written material received by his Department as a result of such consultations in the Library.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* My officials and I have been in contact with a large number of organisations to discuss London issues, including input to the document. In addition, nine other Government Departments were involved, most of them consulting outside organisations as appropriate. It would be impossible to list all the contacts made and organisations involved.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement setting out the full criteria by which his Department will consider responses to the consultation document, "London, Making the Best Better"; and on what grounds responses to the document may be considered invalid.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* No rigid criteria have been set. The intention is to analyse all the responses, using the framework of the six questions in the questionnaire.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each individual and organisation sent an advance copy of the document "London, Making the Best Better"; and on what dates advance copies were sent to each organisation.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Advance embargoed copies of the document were given on 19 November to two of the organisations which assisted with input to the document, London First and the London Boroughs Association. The *Evening Standard*, which distributed the document, also received copies on 18 and 19 November.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make available for public inspection all responses to the document, "London, Making the Best Better", including those deemed by his Department to be invalid.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* No. Individual responses to the questionnaire will be treated in confidence.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total cost of production and distribution of the document, "London, Making the Best Better", broken down into *(a)* total number produced, *(b)* total cost of typesetting, *(c)* total cost of layout and printing, *(d)* total cost of paper and assorted materials, *(e)* total cost of distribution, *(f)* total cost of uses of photographic and other copyright, *(g)* individual total numbers and costs of all advance and accompanying press releases, operational notes to the press and advance advertising in the press and *(h)* the total cost of the press launch.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Two hundred and fifty thousand copies of the document were produced, each of which contains a questionnaire. A further 50,000 separate copies of the questionnaire were printed. Costs to date are as follows:

	£
Design and typesetting	32,000
Paper and printing	69,700
Distribution to date	33,400
Photographic rights to date	6,100
Press releases and advertising	1,700
Press launch	500
Questionnaire pilot survey	4,500

Further costs of some £20,000 might be incurred in sending out copies of the document and questionnaire in response to requests, in final design costs, and in additional freepost charges for the questionnaire.

One invitation—operational note—was sent out to the press and two press notices were issued; 550 copies of each were produced. There were two advertisements in the *Evening Standard.*

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date or dates legal advice was either sought from or given by *(a)* Government legal advisers or *(b)* other legal advisers, on the content of drafts of the document, "London, Making the Best Better"; and if he will place copies of all legal advice thereby obtained in the Library.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* It was not necessary to seek legal advice on the document.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table giving a breakdown of the timetable for production of the document, "London, Making the Best Better", including the specific dates on which *(a)* the initial departmental decision was formally taken to produce the document, *(b)* instructions were given to civil servants to begin preparation of initial draft, *(c)* the initial draft was completed, *(d)* the initial draft was considered by Ministers, *(e)* amendments were made to the initial draft, *(f)* the final draft was completed, *(g)* the final draft was considered by Ministers and *(h)* the final draft was considered by the Cabinet.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The decision to produce the document was taken by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on London on 22 July, and officials began preparation of the draft document immediately thereafter. Drafts of each section were produced by the Departments concerned and considered by Ministers at various times during September and October, and amendments continued to be made to the draft during that period. The final draft was circulated to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on London on 19 October.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has reached on the arrangements for the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering for housing management in England in the light of responses to the consultation paper which his Department issued in June 1993.

Sir George Young: The consultation paper set out proposals for three key components of compulsory competitive tendering—CCT—of housing management in England. These were: the "defined activity", the timetable for implementation by individual authorities and the size of contracts. We have carefully considered the responses to the consultation paper and, following discussions with representatives of local housing authorities, are now in a position to announce conclusions on the proposals subject to the consultation exercise and related matters.

The defined activity will focus on those aspects of housing management which authorities might reasonably contract out, allowing them to keep strategic, policy and enabling functions in house. The defined activity will be broadly as proposed in the consultation paper but the opportunity has been taken to refine and clarify it in the light of comments received. I am today placing in the Library a detailed description of the tasks making up the defined activity.

CCT will apply to housing management services covered by the defined activity which are provided to properties held by local authorities for the purposes of part II of the Housing Act 1985, excluding hostels as defined in the 1985 Act. A temporary exemption will be granted in respect of the Barbican estate in recognition of its special circumstances. We recognise that for operational reasons authorities need some flexibility to determine the way in which housing management services are provided. We therefore propose to relax the competition requirement by requiring that 95 per cent. of the annual value of the defined activity is subject to competition. Where contracts are won by local authorities' own direct service organisations they will be required to break even after allowing for a rate of return on capital employed. We propose that the rate should be 6 per cent.

We recognise that for a few smaller authorities the administrative burdens of introducing CCT for housing management may be unduly onerous. We therefore propose to set a de minimis threshold whereby authorities, the annual value of whose defined activity is £500,000 or less, will be exempt from housing management CCT. This figure will be kept under review in the light of experience of market-testing housing management.

It remains our intention that the introduction of housing management CCT will be phased on the basis of the bands set out in the consultation paper issued in June 1993, with the first contracts in operation from 1 April 1996. Some authorities represented that they should be placed in a different band from that proposed. Officials will be writing to them individually to let then know the band in which they will be placed.

The consultation paper indicated that, where authorities are restructured as a result of the local government review, they would be exempt from the requirement to subject the defined activity to competition from the date of the order making the structural change until 18 months after the new authority is in place. A further announcement will be made shortly about the timetable for implementation of CCT in shire counties and districts following my right hon. Friend's recent request to the Local Government Commission to complete the review by the end of 1994.

The Department will shortly be consulting local authorities and their representatives and other interested bodies on drafts of the subordinate legislation which will implement the decisions which I have announced today. It will also consult shortly on a draft circular on the statutory competition framework for CCT of white collar services, including housing management. The draft circular will include guidance on the size of housing management contracts in the terms proposed in the consultation paper.

The Department of the Environment is today writing to all local housing authorities in England with copies of this announcement, the defined activity and a fuller explanatory note. Copies of that note ae being placed in the Library.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce details of his Department's new accommodation.

Mr. Gummer: On 12 November last year, my predecessor announced that the Department of the Environment would remain in Marsham street for the time being while a search was undertaken to find the most suitable accommodation at the best value for money for the taxpayer, *Official Report*, column *955*.

I have now selected two buildings for my Department's headquarters. Eland house, in Bressenden place near Victoria, is to be rebuilt by Land Securities. As part of the deal with Land Securities, 700,000 sq ft of offices held on long lease by Property Holdings will be surrendered before lease expiry, thereby making a significant reduction in the size of the Government estate in central London.

The second building is Ashdown house in Victoria street which is currently occupied by the Department of Trade and Industry: it is in need of major repairs. These will be done when the DTI reoccupies 1-19 Victoria street.

DOE headquarters staff in 2 Marsham street, together with staff in two other buildings in London will move to this new accommodation. Marsham street is also occupied in part by the Department of Transport. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will make an announcment about future accommodation for his Department in due course. It is likely that both Departments will finally vacate 2 Marsham street towards the end of 1997, after which it will be demolished to the benefit of the London skyline.

Homelessness

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Government have to deal with homelessness in the west midlands; and how they plan to prevent homelessness in the future.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Resources for increasing and improving local authority and housing association housing stock are provided through the housing investment programme and the Housing Corporation's approved development programme, which take account of the circumstances in each area, including the level of acceptances under part III of the Housing Act 1985. In order to ensure fairer access to permanent social housing for people who need it, the Government propose to reform the homelessness provisions in the Housing Act 1985, and we hope to issue a consultation paper shortly.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the major causes of homelessness.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The main reasons for the loss of the last settled home, as given by people accepted by local authorities for rehousing under part III of the Housing Act 1985, were associated with parents, relatives or friends being no longer willing or able to accommodate, and relationship breakdown. Details appear in the quarterly information bulletins issued by my Department, which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the largest age group of homeless people.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The returns that local authorities make to my Department on the number of households accepted under part III of the Housing Act 1985 do not include information on age groups.

Economic Development, Merseyside

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the persons and organisations on Merseyside he or his predecessor has met during the current year to discuss economic development matters.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* I visited Liverpool on 14 July, and held meetings with the leader and chief executive of Liverpool city council, representatives of the regional press and media, and the Bishop and Archbishop of Liverpool. Issues of economic development were covered at all these meetings.

My right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment visited Liverpool on 30 March. He met councillors from all parties on Liverpool city council, together with the chief executive and director of resources; he also met press and media representatives, and the chairman, directors and senior officers of the Liverpool housing action trust.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a full list of each public opinion survey commissioned by his Department over the past 10 years, the organisation from which the survey was commissioned, the information which the survey was designed to elicit, whether the results of the survey are available for public consultation and the total cost of carrying out each survey.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The information available about surveys carried out by my Department since 1985, which include questions to individuals about their opinions, is as follows:

Title	*Year*	*Origination*
Right To Buy: Attitude Survey	1985	SCPR
Public Attitudes To Environment	1986	NOP
Public Attitudes To Radioactive Waste	1986	Surrey University
Unleaded Petrol Publicity Planning	1988	SAMP Surveys
Evaluate Effectiveness of Financial Incentive Schemes To Council Tenants	1987	SCPR
Evaluation Of Hostel Provision For The Single Homeless	1987	SCANTEL
Effectiveness Of Housing Management In England (Main Stage: Tenants)	1987	Glasgow University
Social Survey Of Residents For The PEP Cost-Effectivness Study	1988	Harris Res.
Evaluation Of Estate Action Funded Scheme	1988	Coopers & Lybrand
Evaluation Of National Garden Festivals	1989	CEC
Community Charge: Advertising Research	1989	Plus Four
Investigation Of Use and Safety Aspects Of Alternating Tread Stairs	1989	R. J. Feeney
Follow Up Survey Of Public Attitudes To The Environment	1989	NOP
Coastal Visitors (Part Of Coastal Recreation Strategy By Sports Council SR)	1989	Southampton University
Community Charge: Strategic Research On Advertising Strategies	1989	Andrew Irving
Public Perceptions Of Local Government Spending	1989	SCPR
Tenants' Choice—Pre And Post Advertising Check (March and April 1989)	1989	PAS
Large Scale Voluntary Transfers Of Local Authority Housing	1989	BMRB
Right To Buy Tenant Survey 1989	1989	SCPR
Tenants' Choice—Research On Landlords	1989	Birmingham University
Monitoring Housing Management Performance Under New Financial Regimes for Local Authorities and Housing Associations	1990	Universities
Evaluation Of Housing Action Trusts (Individuals)	1990	Price Waterhouse
Survey Of Housing Association Tenants	1990	PAS
Attitudes Towards Inclusive Leases	1990	March CSG.
Market Research Into Cavity Wall Insulation For Existing Dwellings	1990	IAAS
Evaluation Of Estate Action Schemes	1990	User Research
Publication Pack Assessment—General Public	1990	RJM Research
Hedgerow Management Questionnaire	1990	Cobham Research
Citizen And The Environment Leaflet Research	1990	Diagnostics
Milton Keynes 1990 Image And Advertising Research	1990	AUD. Select
Milton Keynes 1990 Image And Advertising Research	1990	Chesterton
Survey Of Single Homelessness	1991	SCPR
Evaluating The Impact Of Block Action	1991	Price Waterhouse
Under-Occupation In The Social Rented Sector	1991	LRC
The Impact Of The Landlord And Tenant Act 1987	1991	SCPR
Study Of Conversions Of Houses Into Flats In London	1991	LRC
Appraisal Of Assisted Agency Services	1991	Bristol University
The Impact Of Policies/Programmes On Inner Cities	1991	Manchester University
Conservation Advice To Farmers	1991	PAS
A National Survey Of Attitudes Towards Environmental Noise	1991	Taylor Nelson
Evaluation Of The Wake-Up Leaflet	1991	MORI
Monitoring Housing Management Performance In Local Authorities and Housing Associations	1991	PAS
Housing Attitudes Survey	1991	SCPR
Monitoring The New Local Authority Performance Indicator Regime	1991	CURDS
1991 Census Follow-Up Of Sharers	1991	OPCS
English House Condition Survey	1992	OPCS
Housing Needs Of Elderly People	1992	Ernst & Young
Ventilation In New Homes	1992	Market Research Co.
Householders' Response To Radon In The Home	1992	St. Andrew University
Energy Efficiency Campaign	1992	MASS OBS.
Energy Efficiency Campaign—Evaluation	1992	MASS OBS.
Household Budgets And Housing Costs (IND)	1992	PSI
Citizens Charter Refurbishment Contracts	1992	Reading University
Householders' Response To Radon In The Home	1993	St. Andrew's University
Housing Associations As Managing Agents Monitoring And Evaluation	1992	LRC
Evaluation Of The 'Rents To Mortgages' Scheme	1992	SCPR

Title	Year	Origination
Attitudes To Noise Comparison Survey: Parts I & II	1992	Taylor Nelson
Customer Attitudes To The Rural Development Commission's Business Advice	1992	PIEDA
Owner-Occupiers Who Are Cavity Wall Insulation Enthusiasts	1992	NBA
Evaluation Of Rebuilding Grants	1992	Salford University
Energy Use Questionnaire—Green House Schemes	1992	Optima Energy
Road And Footpath De-Icing Policies	1992	Forestry Commission
Radiological Assessment Of The Ribble Estuary	1992	Bangor University
Contingent Valuation Survey Of Environmental Change	1992	ECOTEC
Global Warming Campaign Creative Development	1992	Davies etc.
Voluntary Organisations And Environmental Action	1992	NCVO
'Helping The Earth' Campaign Evaluation	1992	MASS-OBS.
Making A Corporate Commitment—Top Management Campaign Evaluation	1992	INDAL
Council Tax Evaluation Research	1992	RSGB
Smoking In Public Places	1992	HOP
Applicants' Perceptions Of The Planning Appeals System	1993	W. S. Atkins
Evaluation Of The Rough Sleepers Initiative	1993	Research & Information 5'CS
Rent Policies Of Local Authorities In England	1993	INLOGOV
Energy Efficiency Office—Autumn 1992 Roadshow Evaluation	1993	CONT'AL
The Children's Initiative	1993	Millward Brown
Landlords Research	1993	SCPR
Evaluation Of 'Right To Buy' Publicity Campaign	1993	MORI
'Right To Buy' Campaign Evaluation—Follow-Up Stage	1993	MORI
An Evaluation Of The S73 Grant Programme	1993	York University
The Nature Of Demand For Housing In Rural Areas	1993	Birmingham University
Monitoring The Actions Of Failed Grant Applicants	1993	PAS
Environmental Protection Commission Audit; Stage 2—HMIP —Public	1993	MORI
Community Identity Research	1993	MORI
Public Attitudes To The Environment	1993	NOP
Evaluation Of Regional Energy Efficiency Offices Research	1993	Research Surveys
Helping The Earth Campign Evaluation Research 93/94 Waves 4 & 5	1993	BMRB
Helping The Earth—Literature Evaluation	1993	MAI
London Experience	1993	Department of the Environment

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. David Davis: The staff-in-post figures as at 22 November 1993, for the Cabinet Office and the Office of Public Service and Science, including CCTA and the four executive agencies—Chessington Computer Centre, Civil Service College, the Occupational Health Service and the Recruitment and Assessment Services, are as follows:

Grade Band	Total	Women
Grade 1 (Including 1A)	3·0	0·0
Grade 2	17·0	2·0
Grade 3	24·0	4·0
Grade 4	2·0	0·0
Grade 5	57·0	17·5
Grade 6	62·0	15·0
Grade 7	258·0	56·0
SEO	200·0	64·0
HEO(D) & AT	16·0	4·0
HEO	288·5	122·0
EO	414·5	220·5
AO	605·0	418·5
AA	300·0	207·5
Total	2,247·0	1,131·0

EMPLOYMENT

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 3 November by my hon. Friend the Minister of State to the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) *Official Report,* columns *268-70.*

Aids to Employment Scheme

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled working people in *(a)* London and *(b)* Lewisham currently benefit from the special aids to employment scheme; and how many disabled working people throughout the country he expects to lose their jobs once employers have to pay 50 per cent. of the cost of special aids in the workplace.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The numbers are: *(a)* 381; *(b)* 38. Changes to our current special schemes for helping people with disabilities, including the introduction of an employers' contribution, up to a ceiling to be specified, to help for existing employees who have worked for them for more than six months, are aimed at helping more people

with disabilities to get and retain jobs and at making a much wider range of help available. We are currently finalising details of these changes with these aims in mind.

Disablement Resettlement Officers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measurements he uses to assess the performance of disablement resettlement officers; what targets and performance indicators he sets for these officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 26 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about assessing the performance of Disablement Resettlement officers and setting targets and performance indicators for them. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

We no longer use the term Disablement Resettlement Officers. During 1992-93 Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams were set up to provide a comprehensive and local specialist employment service for people with disabilities and employers. The Teams provide many of the services previously delivered by Disablement Resettlement Officers, the Disablement Advisory Service and most of the assessment element of Employment Rehabilitation Centres.

Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams are staffed by Disability Employment Advisers who are experienced in placing people wth disabilities into jobs. They offer professional advice and support to help improve the job prospects of people with disabilities and encourage employers to take on or keep people with disabilities.

The Annual Performance Agreement with the Secretary of State for Employment sets a target for the number of unemployed people with disabilities to be placed into jobs. Targets are also set for the number of people benefiting from special scheme provision, the number of people starting rehabilitation programmes, the number of people in sheltered employment and the number of employers who satisfy the conditions to use the disability symbol. Achievements against all these targets are used to assess the performance of the Placing, Assessment and Counselling Teams.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the library of the House.

Graphology

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received about the validity of graphology as a personnel selection tool; what consideration he is giving to banning graphology as a selection tool; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received one letter on this subject. We have no plans to ban the use of graphology as a selection tool. Provided that they do not discriminate unlawfully, employers should be free to use whatever selection methods they consider best suit their needs.

VAT (Books and Newspapers)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the book publishing and newspaper professions regarding the employment consequences of the imposition of VAT on books and newspapers.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have received two such representations.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken in the United Kingdom to implement the directive 82/501/EEC on hazardous wastes; and what information he has on its implementation in other European Community countries.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

Directive 82/501/EEC is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984 (CIMAH). Amending regulations, applying CIMAH to installations for the disposeal of hazardous waste have been approved by the Health and Safety Commission and should come into force by the end of the year.

Information on the implementation of directive 82/501/EEc is published periodically by the Commission of the European Communities.

Scotch Whisky

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many are employed in the Scotch whisky industry now and how many were 10 years ago.

Miss Widdecombe: I regret the information is not available. The standard industrial classification does not separately identify the whisky industry from other industries involved in spirit distilling and compounding.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Labour and Social Affairs Council of 23 November.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 24 November 1993, *Official Report*, column 72.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Interest Rates

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce interest rates.

Mr. Nelson: The level of interest rates will continue to be set to meet the Government's objectives for inflation and sustainable growth.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the number of regional newspapers of the imposition of VAT on books and newspapers.

Sir John Cope: Analysis commissioned by the Newspapers Society suggests that VAT imposition at the standard rate would close 245 titles out of a total of 1,265 titles.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what representations he has received regarding the possible imposition of VAT on *(a)* books, *(b)* national newspapers, *(c)* regional newspapers, *(d)* local newspapers, *(e)* free newspapers and *(f)* magazines; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many representations he has received on the possible introduction of VAT on fares on *(a)* domestic travel, *(b)* international travel, *(c)* rail travel, *(d)* bus/coach travel, *(e)* air travel and *(f)* sea-river travel; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: I have received a number of representations which are all being considered very carefully as we prepare for the Budget on 30 November. However, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the normal practice of VAT commissioners on making large repayments other than by electronic transfer;

(2) what plans he has to improve the security involved in transferring money from the VAT commissioners; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many cheques sent throught the post by the VAT commissioners have been fraudulently encashed in the last five years; what was their value; and if he will make a statement;

(4) whether repayments made by VAT commissioners are usually sent by recorded delivery or registered post; and what is the usual practice on them being made by cheque.

Sir John Cope: Customs continually encourages businesses to provide it with bank account details, so that repayments can be electronically transferred. Despite this encouragement, not all traders take advantage of this facility and almost 1 million payable orders, with a total value in excess of £7 billion, are issued each year by first class post.

In conjunction with Her Majesty's Treasury, Customs has been taking steps to increase even further the security measures for payable orders. These include higher levels of security printing so as to make alteration of the payee's name more difficult.

Excluding the recent Haringey case, Customs has investigated 112 cases since 1 July 1988 where VAT payable orders have gone astray. The total value of those orders is £360,638, a substantial proportion of which has subsequently been recovered. During the same period, over 5 million orders have been issued, with a total value approaching £30 billion.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total budgeted contribution to be made by each member state of the European Communities according to the 1994 EC budget; what is the net contribution to be made for each state after deduction of rebates and budgeted receipts; and what figure the EC predicts as the gross domestic product for each state in 1994.

Sir John Cope: The Budget Council established a second reading of the draft 1994 EC budget on 15 November. The European Parliament will consider this at its next plenary session in December and each member state's budgeted contribution will not be finalised until the budget is adopted by the European Parliament.

EC budgets do not give a breakdown, by member state, of receipts. Details of member states' receipts from the EC Budget are, however, published annually in the European Court of Auditors' report: the report for 1992 was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, volumn 36 C309, on 16 November 1993.

As part of the budget, estimated figures are agreed for one per cent. of gross national product for each member state, in order to calculate contributions based on GNP and the value of the own resources ceiling. Those in the 1994 draft budget are:

	Million ecu
Belgium	1,880·8
Denmark	1,186·2
Germany	16,981·0
Greece	739·6
Spain	4,751·4
France	11,482·0
Ireland	353·5
Italy	9,175·0
Luxembourg	123·2
Netherlands	2,757·4
Portugal	800·0
United Kingdom	8,004·0
Total	58,234·1

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what matters in regard to the cost of implementation of European Community directives he raised at the ECOFIN Council in Brussels on 22 November.

Ms Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the ECOFIN Council of 22 November.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Economic and Finance Council of the European Union—ECOFIN—met in Brussels on 22 November. I represented the United Kingdom.

There was detailed discussion on the Commission's ideas for the White Book on a medium-term strategy for growth, competitiveness and employment that they are preparing for the European Council in December. Virtually all member states agreed that obliging employers to introduce new work-sharing arrangements was not the solution to the present high levels of unemployment. Other member states also shared our concern that the Commission appeared to be giving insufficient weight to the need for structural reforms to improve the flexibility of labour markets. The Council invited the Commission to take account of the points made in discussion in preparing the White Book.

The Council had a general orientation debate on the broad economic policy guidelines under article 103 of the treaty. These guidelines take the form of recommendations and are not legally binding. There was a general consensus that the guidelines should provide a credible framework

without being over-prescriptive about how member states should set their economic policies. It was agreed that the Council would meet again on 5 December to consider the Commission's formal recommendation, and to agree its report to the European Council.

France and Germany presented convergence programmes to the Council. The Council concluded that the French programme was solid and coherent and welcomed the planned programme of structural reforms. Budgetary consolidation was identified as the main challenge facing the French Government, following two years of deterioration in public finances mainly due to cyclical factors.

The Council welcomed the efforts of the German Government to achieve convergence, notwithstanding considerable difficulties in the aftermath of German unification. The Council noted the strategy for structural policy and the need for measures to improve the productivity and competitiveness of the German economy and to deal with the distributional questions raised in the unification process. The Council welcomed the determination of the German authorities to achieve fiscal consolidation.

Council decisions were adopted on the capital key for the European Monetary Institute (EMI), on consultation of the EMI on draft national legislation within its field of competence, and on bringing the staff of the EMI within the tax system for staff of Community institutions. The Council also adopted a regulation on details of the excessive deficits procedure under article 104c of the treaty and agreed common positions on draft Council regulations providing definitions relating to the treaty provisions banning monetary financing and privileged access. All these measures are due to take effect from 1 January 1994 at the start of the second stage of economic and monetary union.

The Council reached political agreement on a directive to reinforce the prudential supervision of financial institutions. This will implement a number of recommendations of the Bingham report on the Bank of Credit and Commerce International affair.

There was a brief discussion of issues related to the Edinburgh growth initiative arising from the conclusions of the European Council meeting on 29 October. Ministers confirmed their intention to extend the coverage of the European investment bank temporary lending facility to transport equipment, energy and urban renewal projects. Agreement in principle was reached on the arrangements for the participation of Community institutions in the European investment fund. A proposal to implement the European Council's conclusion on interest rate subsidies for EIB lending to small and medium-sized enterprises was remitted for further consideration by officials.

I drew the Council's attention to the likely costs associated with implementing the urban waste water treatment directive and highlighted this as an example of a decision taken by a specialist Council without paying sufficient regard to the economic or budgetary implications.

There was also a short discussion of the recently published Court of Auditors' report on the 1992 Community budget. After detailed consideration of the report—and the Commission's response—the Council will adopt a recommendation to the European Parliament on granting a discharge to the Commission in respect of the implementation of the 1992 budget, during the Greek presidency in the first half of 1994.

There were no formal votes. The EMU secondary legislation, the Council decision on Community participation in the EIF and the Council conclusions on the convergence programmes of France and Germany were agreed by consensus.

Spirits and Wine

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement as to the basis on which excise duty is levied on spirits and wine.

Sir John Cope: Excise duty is levied on spirits according to the litres of pure alcohol contained therein. Wine is dutied according to its bulk quantity and the nature and strength of the product. There are eight duty bandings ranging from a strength of 1·2 per cent. to 22 per cent. alcohol by volume and differentiating between still, sparkling and fortified wines.

Haringey Council Cheque (Fraudulent Encashment)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the present whereabouts of money received from fraudulently encashing a cheque from the VAT commissioners to Haringey council.

Sir John Cope: The present whereabouts of the money are not known, but police inquiries are continuing to establish where the money went and the route it took.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action VAT commissioners will take concerning Haringey council's writ seeking recovery of a payment which was fraudulently encashed in Austria.

Sir John Cope: The commissioners have served a defence to the council's writ and the matter is now proceeding to trial.

Ministerial Letters

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many officials in his Department are currently involved in drafting replies to letters for Ministers in his Department to sign.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Five staff work full time in the ministerial correspondence unit. Many other Treasury officials draft replies to ministerial correspondence from time to time as part of their normal duties.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 November 1993

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Marsh Arabs

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had regarding the plight of the Marsh Arabs; what discussions have taken place between his Department and the United Nations over their future; what efforts his Department are making over their continued security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has received numerous representations about events in southern Iraq.

We frequently raise the plight of the Marsh Arabs at the United Nations, most recently during the review of sanctions on 18 November. We drew the attention of the United Nations weapons inspectors to reports that chemical weapons were used against civilians. We support the call of the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights for the deployment of monitors in Iraq.

In addition, British aircraft are deployed over southern Iraq in support of United Nations Security Council resolution 688.

BBC World Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations have been carried out between his Department and the BBC in respect of the BBC World Service lease at its headquarters in Bush house; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The current lease on Bush house was signed in 1990 and expires in 2005. Discussions with the BBC World Service have already taken place, and it has been agreed that the question of future location will be discussed again in due course.

Miss Patience Ikeazota

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the refusal of a tourist visa for a limited stay in Britain to Miss Patience Ikeazota by the entry clearance officer in Lagos.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Following an interview at the high commission in Lagos on 9 April 1992, Miss Ikeazota's application for a visit visa was refused, as was her previous application in April 1991, because the entry clearance officer was not satisfied that she was genuinely seeking entry to the United Kingdom for the period of the visit stated by her.

Azerbaijan

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to assist in implementing United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Azerbaijan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We maintain high-level contacts with the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis and urge them to adhere to United Nations Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884.

We are actively supporting the efforts of the Minsk group whose efforts to find a peaceful resolution to this conflict have been fully endorsed by the United Nations.

In the past year we have provided almost £1·9 million of humanitarian aid to the region.

Correspondence

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library copies of all correspondence and minutes of meetings between his Department and Gerald Bull between 1987 and 1990.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As far as we have been able to establish, there is no record of any correspondence or record of any meeting between this Department and Dr. Gerald Bull.

Endangered Species

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what exemptions have been sought by Norway under the EC convention on international trade in endangered species regulation and habitats directive.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Norwegian Government are seeking exemptions from the habitats directive and the CITES regulation for a wide variety of species. These include several species of fish, terrestrial mammals, seals and whales.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what attempts Norway has made to secure opt-outs from EC regulations covering the killing and trade in whale and seal products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Norwegian Government are requesting exemptions from the EC habitats directive in respect of five seal and three whale species. We shall be discussing the Norwegian request with other member states.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what current sanctions are being applied against the military Government of Nigeria; and what new ones are being considered.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 24 June, we announced our decision to withdraw all offers of new military training courses provided for members of the Nigerian armed forces in the United Kingdom; to suspend all assistance to

the National War College in Lagos and withdraw the British military advisory team; to suspend issue of visas for members of the Nigerian armed forces and their dependents; to withdraw special treatment of visa applications from Nigerian officials; and to consider all new aid to Nigeria on a case-by-case basis. These measures remain in force.

Our response to the latest developments is currently being discussed with our partners in the European Union and the wider donor community.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to discuss the new military takeover in Nigeria with his European Union counterparts; and what proposals he will be taking to that meeting.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The European Union issued a statement on 19 November condemning the fact that the democratic process in Nigeria has been interrupted through the resumption of power by a military dictatorship. It strongly urged the Nigerian military authorities to re-establish democratic institutions.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 17 November, we are now consulting with our partners in the European Union on what further actions we should take in response to the new military takeover.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Fire Calls

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of fire calls in *(a)* 1991 and *(b)* 1992 for each fire authority area and in total; if he will identify the number of hoax calls in each year on a similar basis; and if he will express hoax calls as a percentage of total calls.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information for fire calls attended by local authority fire brigades is shown in the table.

	1991			*1992*[1]		
	Total fire calls	*Malicious false alarms*	*Per cent. malicious of all calls*	*Total fire calls*	*Malicious false alarms*	*Per cent. malicious of all calls*
United Kingdom	859,522	148,112	17·2	874,343	160,327	18·3
England and Wales	726,015	125,790	17·3	742,840	134,421	18·1
England	683,997	118,388	17·3	697,720	124,712	17·9
England-Non-Met	349,015	49,579	14·2	362,234	53,580	14·8
Avon	11,840	1,643	13·9	12,737	1,837	14·4
Bedfordshire	5,245	580	11·1	5,646	724	12·8
Berkshire	8,504	1,170	13·8	9,097	1,350	14·8
Buckinghamshire	6,511	840	12·9	6,636	1,036	15·6
Cambridgeshire	7,744	1,091	14·1	7,954	1,232	15·5
Cheshire	13,053	1,548	11·9	12,203	1,457	11·9
Cleveland	13,237	4,418	33·4	14,150	4,346	30·7
Cornwall and Scilly	4,197	305	7·3	4,817	366	7·6
Cumbria	6,029	807	13·4	6,721	1,013	15·1
Derbyshire	9,570	1,490	15·6	11,030	1,920	17·4
Devon	11,936	1,749	14·7	12,484	1,724	13·8
Dorset	6,715	825	12·3	6,476	693	10·7
Durham	9,827	2,397	24·4	10,745	2,574	24·0
East Sussex	6,922	780	11·3	7,472	793	10·6
Essex	15,872	2,462	15·5	16,886	2,957	17·5
Gloucestershire	5,552	804	14·5	5,666	867	15·3
Hampshire	14,423	1,019	7·1	15,408	779	5·1
Hereford and Worcester	6,863	962	14·0	6,862	1,067	15·5
Hertfordshire	9,346	967	10·3	9,987	989	9·9
Humberside	14,773	2,956	20·0	14,162	3,104	21·9
Isle of Wight	1,125	94	8·4	1,147	100	8·7
Kent	15,783	2,476	15·7	16,992	2,678	15·8
Lancashire	24,574	4,305	17·5	25,271	4,745	18·8
Leicestershire	9,696	1,722	17·8	9,904	1,615	16·3
Lincolnshire	5,829	869	14·9	5,495	862	15·7
Norfolk	8,081	714	8·8	7,626	984	12·9
North Yorkshire	7,145	544	7·6	7,132	555	7·8
Northamptonshire	6,723	619	9·2	6,493	616	9·5
Northumberland	4,021	538	13·4	4,850	688	14·2
Nottinghamshire	13,559	1,532	11·3	12,445	1,446	11·6
Oxfordshire	6,440	790	12·3	7,011	986	14·1
Shropshire	5,199	766	14·7	4,951	701	14·2
Somerset	4,752	578	12·2	5,033	555	11·0
Staffordshire	11,312	1,778	15·7	11,608	2,164	18·6
Suffolk	5,591	408	7·3	5,951	632	10·6
Surrey	11,497	1,215	10·6	11,885	1,320	11·1
Warwickshire	5,534	502	9·1	5,684	681	12·0

	1991			1992[1]		
	Total fire calls	*Malicious false alarms*	*Per cent. malicious of all calls*	*Total fire calls*	*Malicious false alarms*	*Per cent. malicious of all calls*
West Sussex	8,035	655	8·2	8,635	687	8·0
Wiltshire	5,960	661	11·1	6,982	737	10·6
England-Met	334,982	68,809	20·5	335,486	71,132	21·2
Greater Manchester	58,439	13,191	22·6	57,306	11,972	20·9
Merseyside	39,689	6,562	16·5	34,286	6,451	18·8
South Yorkshire	19,079	3,853	20·2	19,527	4,630	23·7
Tyne and Wear	30,228	6,891	22·8	32,628	6,949	21·3
West Midlands	41,727	9,398	22·5	44,199	10,747	24·3
West Yorkshire	38,075	7,164	18·8	41,521	7,999	19·3
Greater London	107,745	21,750	20·2	106,019	22,384	21·1
Wales	42,018	7,402	17·6	45,120	9,709	21·5
Clwyd	5,475	733	13·4	5,677	1,024	18·0
Dyfed	3,816	559	14·6	4,231	806	19·0
Gwent	6,033	1,409	23·4	7,246	2,109	29·1
Gwynedd	3,268	258	7·9	3,355	309	9·2
Mid Glamorgan	9,487	1,843	19·4	9,467	2,160	22·8
Powys	1,061	94	8·9	1,130	120	10·6
South Glamorgan	6,575	1,279	19·5	7,222	1,638	22·7
West Glamorgan	6,303	1,227	19·5	6,792	1,543	22·7
Northern Ireland	29,425	3,844	13·1	26,568	3,397	12·8
Scotland	104,082	18,478	17·8	104,935	22,509	21·5
Strathclyde	55,973	11,370	20·3	58,295	16,349	28·0
Highland and Islands	4,932	394	8·0	4,565	346	7·6
Grampian	6,400	613	9·6	6,611	616	9·3
Tayside	7,619	1,023	13·4	8,133	1,136	14·0
Lothian and Borders	17,245	3,206	18·6	15,540	2,107	13·6
Fife	5,710	997	17·5	6,011	1,108	18·4
Central	4,067	592	14·6	3,869	567	14·7
Dumfries and Galloway	2,136	283	13·2	1,911	255	13·3

[1] Provisional.

Police Equipment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are laid down by his Department in respect of being informed of police equipment that is either lost or stolen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The loss or theft of police equipment is a matter for individual police forces and authorities. The Home Office would not become involved unless the scale of such losses was such as to call into question management procedures or the efficiency of the force in question. Nor has the Home Office any plans to introduce monitoring of losses of police equipment.

Carl Bridgewater

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police inquiries into the Carl Bridgewater convictions and the outcome in each case.

Mr. Maclean: Since the conviction in 1979 of those concerned, there have been seven police inquiries into the case, involving four separate police forces, as follows:

	Police force
1980 and 1981	Cheshire Constabulary
1983, 1984 and 1985	Greater Manchester Police
1986	Warwickshire Constabulary
1991	Merseyside Police

Following the inquiries by Warwickshire constabulary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), then Home Secretary, decided in 1987 to refer to the Court of Appeal the convictions of Michael and Vincent Hickey and James Robinson. Their appeals were dismissed in 1989.

None of the other inquiries to which I have referred disclosed grounds to take action in respect of the convictions. As part of our consideration of the latest representations in this case, we are arranging for further police inquiries to be carried out into some of the matters raised.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on which dates since 1988 he has received submissions from solicitors representing the men convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater and say what action he has taken in each case.

Mr. Maclean: Solicitors for those convicted of killing Carl Bridgewater have made a number of submissions to the Home Office since 1988. Those which relate most directly to the allegations of wrongful conviction were made on 17 Septemberr 1990, 7 June 1991, 2 August 1991, 13 August 1991, 17 October 1991, 26 May 1992 and 19 January 1993. The matters raised there were carefully considered but as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), then Home Secretary, announced on 3 February, they provided no grounds for action to be taken in respect of the convictions.

Further submissions from the solicitors were made on 8 June, 13 July, 10 November and 15 November 1993 and we understand that more are to follow. As part of our consideration of these allegations of wrongful conviction we are arranging for further police inquiries to be carried out into some of the matters raised.

Parish Constables

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the locations of the 20 pilot schemes for parish constables he intends setting up by Christmas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is for police forces and local communities to decide—through consultation—where the pilot schemes for parish constables should be. A number of forces are currently engaged in such consultation. A further announcement will be made nearer the time about the pilot schemes which are being set up. I am pleased with the progress made so far.

Football Matches

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was received by the Metropolitan police from London's professional football clubs for policing services in the season 1992-93 and 1993 to date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand that the Metropolitan police received £2,076,781 for the 1992-93 season. The amount received so far during the 1993-94 season is £424,515.

Racial Harassment

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation in his next criminal justice Bill that every tenancy for *(a)* homes and *(b)* shops contains a condition prohibiting racial harrassment, binding on landlords as well as tenants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Current landlord and tenant legislation already gives local authorities powers to take action against tenants who racially harass other tenants. The Public Order Act 1986 created a new low-level offence of offensive conduct which is relevant to all forms of harassment. There are no plans to introduce additional legislation.

The Commission for Racial Equality has produced codes of practice for both rented and non-rented housing, which were approved by Parliament in 1990 and 1992 respectively. These include practical steps to deal with, and pre-empt, racial harassment.

Police Sirens

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to the Commissioner of Police regarding the use of police sirens in the Metropolitan area.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I understand from the Commissioner that guidance on the use of sirens is included in the training given to drivers at the Metropolitan police driving school.

Lunar House

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the backlog of work at Lunar house, Croydon.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information for the end of October 1993 on the main areas of work is given in the table.

Immigration and asylum work items[1] in the Immigration and Nationality Department at 31 October 1993

	Number
Cases in the general immigration caseworking groups[2]	22,430
Cases in the EC caseworking group[2]	1,190
Cases in the asylum and special cases division	51,400
Items in the post room and registry[3]	12,420

[1]Including referred enty clearance applications and appeals awaiting preparation of statements.
[2]The majority of these were under consideration or the subject of further inquiries.
[3]Mainly passports and letters, being sorted and allocated to caseworkers.

Wheel Clamping

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will being forward proposals to make it illegal to wheel-clamp orange badge holders on private car parks or other private land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In the consultation paper on wheel-clamping on private land, issued earlier this year, we acknowledged the need to consider the particular position of orange badge holders. In the light of that consultation, we are still considering what action it might be appropriate to take.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current waiting time for consideration of immigration appeals by the immigration appeals tribunals and independent applellate authorities for nationals of each country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

The immigration appellate authorities—IAA—list cases for hearing once the parties have indicated readiness to proceed to a hearing. The nationality of the appellant does not affect when a case is heard. The first available hearing date at each of the IAA's centres as at 22 November 1993 is set out in the table:

Centre	*Long appointment*	*Short appointment*
Hatton Cross, West London	31 January 1994	4 January 1994
Thanet House, London[1]	As Hatton Cross	26 January 1994
Birmingham	21 December 1993	21 December 1993
Manchester	15 March 1994	15 March 1994
Leeds	7 February 1994	17 January 1994
Glasgow	March 1994	February 1994

[1] Hearings are offered at Hatton Cross, but where this is not accepted by the appellant, cases are listed at Thanet House for May 1994.

In proceedings before the immigration appeal tribunal, if leave to appeal is granted, a hearing currently takes place within four weeks of the record of proceedings being prepared by the adjudicator who originally heard the case.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Wigs

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the wearing of wigs by lawyers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The standard of court dress requires wigs to be worn by barristers but not by solicitors.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Queen's Counsel there are; and how many are *(a)* women, *(b)* black and *(c)* Asian.

Mr. John M. Taylor: On 1 October 1993 there were 797 Queen's Counsel in private practice, of whom 41 were women. The ethnic origin of applicants for the office of Queen's Counsel was not recorded prior to the autumn of 1991, and the formal records in respect of ethnic origin are therefore incomplete. I believe that on 1 October 1993 there were three black and five Asian Queen's Counsel.

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Kinnock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many justices of the peace fail to achieve attendance for the requirement minimum of 26 sittings of their respective benches a year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Kinnock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is his policy on the continuation of a magistrate system which includes members of the public from a wide spectrum of occupations and experience; and if he will make it his policy to encourage employers to co-operate with arrangements for their employees to meet the minimum requirements for justices of the peace.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor remains wholeheartedly committed to the concept of summary justice provided by lay people drawn from their local community and from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. In the past, the Lord Chancellor has written to the chairmen of major firms and organisations to encourage them to make employees available to serve as justices; on a local basis, his advisory committees from time to time make similar contacts.

Mr. Kinnock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of those justices of the peace who have been officially recorded as being unable to meet the annual minimum attendance have signified that their absences were due to pressures of work or inability to secure release from work for the purpose of fulfilling their duties as magistrates; and how many of these people are civil servants.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This information can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Mr Kinnock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many civil servants are justices of the peace;

(2) how many civil servants who are justices of the peace are not allowed 18 days paid leave in order to permit them to fulfill their duties as magistrates;

(3) what are the civil service grades of those civil servants who are justices of the peace.

Mr John M. Taylor: This information can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

High Court Judges

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many High Court judges there are; and how many are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* women.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As at 1 November there were 95 High Court judges including six women. The ethnic origin of those appointed as High Court judges has not been recorded in the past, but none is black or Asian.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Details of the numbers of staff employed in each civil service grade are set out in the table. In column two of the table the total number of staff employed in each grade appears; column three shows the total number of women in each grade.

Civil Service Grades in Post as at 22 November 1993

Substantive Grade	*Staff in Post*	*Number of Women in Grade*
Grade 1	1	0
Grade 2	2	0
Grade 3	9	1
Grade 4	5	0
Grade 5	20	3
Grade 5 Solicitor	14	3
Grade 6 Senior Principal	36	8
Grade 6 Legal	35	13
Senior Legal Assistant	9	2
Grade 7 Principal	143	37
Grade 7 Legal	51	33
Legal Assistant	2	0
Legal Officer	2	2
SEO	322	108
Senior Assistant Statistician	2	0
Senior Information Officer	1	0
HEO	1,066	550
Information Officer	2	1
Assistant Statistician	1	0
Chief Typing Manager	3	3
Librarian	8	4
HEO D	7	5
Administration Trainee	6	1
EO	2,060	1,346
Assistant Information Officer	1	1
Senior Personal Secretary	15	15
Typing Manager	34	34
Assistant Librarian	9	9
Support Manager 1	1	1
Support Manager 2	5	0
Support Manager 3	30	20
AO	4,447	3,933
Personal Secretary	66	66
Interpreter	2	2
AA	652	466
Support Grade Band 1	156	95

Substantive Grade	Staff in Post	Number of Women in Grade
Support Grade Band 2	1,404	827
Typist	754	752
Specialist Typist	1	1
Trainee Typist	4	4
TOTAL	11,388	7,806

District Judges

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many district judges there are; and how many are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* women.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested, as at 1 November 1993, is as follows. Records are not held on the ethnic origins of all office holders, but the numbers relating to those of black and Asian origin are believed to be as given.

	In office	Black	Asian	Women
Full time District Judges (County Court)	279	—	1	22
Full time District Judges (Principal Registry of the Family Division of the High Court)	17	—	1	5

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Poland

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many British companies in the last two years have been refused permission by the Polish authorities to sell their products in Poland; what products these British companies have been seeking to export to Poland; what reasons the Polish authorities have given to justify refusal of permission; and what efforts his Department has made on behalf of these companies to overturn the decision of the Polish authorities.

Mr. Needham: No comprehensive record has been kept in the last two years but my Department has received complaints from about half a dozen British companies concerning the application to their products of Polish technical specifications and health and safety regulations. In each case where the company has been unable to resolve the difficulties my Department has intervened in close collaboration with our embassy in Warsaw. One such case has recently been resolved entirely to the satisfaction of the British company concerned; two others are under discussion.

If the hon. Member would like to discuss any individual case, I should be pleased to hear from her. She will, no doubt, be aware that British exports to Poland have increased very rapidly over the period in question and it would perhaps be surprising if we did not encounter a few difficulties with a legal framework for business which is still evolving.

Regional Industrial Policy

Sir David Knox: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much has been spent on regional industrial policy in each year since 1974-75; and what the expected expenditure will be in the current financial year, at constant prices.

Mr. Sainsbury: The exact amount spent on regional industrial policy since 1974-75 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Most of the expenditure under regional industrial policy was on regional development grants and regional selective assistance. Information on the spend of these two schemes in Great Britain since 1974-75 is set out in the table together with expenditure on European Community schemes, regional enterprise grants and some residual spend on investment grants. The information is at 1992-93 constant prices.

FY	Total £ million
1974-75	1,407·5
1975-76	1,606·8
1976-77	1,604·6
1977-78	1,360·7
1978-79	1,458·9
1979-80	1,022·9
1980-81	1,170·9
1981-82	1,319·2
1982-83	1,371·3
1983-84	924·7
1984-85	869·6
1985-86	777·0
1986-87	1,007·6
1987-88	650·3
1988-89	653·6
1989-90	501·8
1990-91	389·6
1991-92	290·3
1992-93	248·2
1993-94	[1]325·7

[1] Estimates provision.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many statutory instruments have been introduced by his Department in each year since accession to the EEC.

Mr. Heseltine: Records for statutory instruments introduced by the Department of Trade and Industry since accession to the EC are not readily available before 1979. Accordingly the information requested is provided from that year onwards and is as follows:

Number of SIs which came into operation

Year	Number
1979	153
1980	201
1981	141
1982	118
1983	94
1984	69
1985	130
1986	92
1987	77
1988	114
1989	132
1990	137

Year	Number
1991	161
[1]1992	96
[2]1993	91

[1] Figures from this year forward include SIs relating to the former Department of Energy. Figures for SIs introduced in earlier years by the Department of Energy are not readily available.
[2] As at 24 November 1993.

Deregulation

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the organisations consulted over his proposed deregulation Bill and indicate which were broadly in favour of greater deregulation and which were broadly satisfied with the status quo.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: A wide range of organisations are beign consulted on proposals for deregulation including those which will be dealt with in the deregulation Bill. Details of measures to be dealt with in the Bill will be announced when the Bill is published. Since consultations cover a large number of specific issues they cannot be classified as for or against deregulation in general.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will review the terms of reference and the guidelines within which the Monopolies and Mergers Commission are required to operate and their operation following in the case of their recent decision on distribution arrangements for perfumes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will institute an investigation into the workings of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in order to ensure that mechanisms exist to ensure that no sectional commercial interest is allowed to overrule consumers' interests.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In reaching conclusions as to the public interest, the Monoplies and Mergers Commission are required by schedule 84 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to take into account all matters which appear to them in the particular circumstances to be relevant. These matters include the desirability of maintaining and promoting effective competition in the United Kingdom and promoting the interests of consumers. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no plans to review these provisions in the Act.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of whether protectionist trade practices approved by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission fall within the regulations of the competitions policy of the European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: In conducting its inquiries, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission takes account of the possible application of European competition law and discuss this with the EC Commission in specific cases where this seems appropriate. Enforcement of European competition law is a matter for the EC Commission or national courts.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost of each visit to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Heseltine: I have made three visits abroad during 1993, one to Brussels, one to Argentina and Mexico, and one to Germany.

The visit to Brussels was for discussions with EC Commissioners and cost £2,185. The visit to Argentina and Mexico was for trade promotional purposes and cost £27,901. The visit to Germany was to attend the Anglo-German summit and cost £1,071.

NCM

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade from what date his Department will extend NCM's transitional reinsurance cover.

Mr. Needham: The Export Credits Guarantee Department's transitional reinsurance support to NCM will be extended beyond its originally envisaged expiry date of December 1994 until at least the end of 1997. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 June 1993, *Official Report*, columns *265-66*.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the projects or localities that have been or will be assisted through the use of objective 2 funds from the European Community.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* The areas at present eligible for European structural funds grants under objective 2 are listed in full in two Commission decisions dated 21 March 1989 and 3 May 1990—*Official Journal* No. L 112/19 and 206/26. They include areas in central Scotland, the north-east, west Cumbria, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside, the west and east midlands, and north-east and south Wales. A very large number of infrastructure, training and other economic development projects have received, or are receiving, objective 2 grant in these areas in the current, 1989-93, programme period.

Objective 2 areas for the period 1994-96 are under review at present; and the Government put proposals to the Commission in October. A full list of areas proposed is available in the Library of the House. The final decision on these proposals is expected in December.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what share and how much EC objective 2 funding has been allocated to the United Kingdom; and, of this sum, what proportions have now been received or committed.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* For the period 1989-93 some 3,200 mecu—1992 prices —has been allocated to the United Kingdom under objective 2. This represents 38 per cent. of the total allocated to this objective. To date, over 85 per cent. of the United Kingdom's allocation has been committed to projects.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Historic Gardens Awards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the applicants for European Community financial assistance under this year's awards for the conservation of gardens of historic value; what were the reasons in each applicable case for a garden not receiving such funding and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The EC pilot projects grant scheme makes awards annually to conservation work within certain themes. The 1993 theme was the conservation of gardens of historic value and the English applicants were:

Gibraltar
Gibraltar Botanic Gardens

Avon
Royal Victoria Park
Prior Park

Buckinghamshire
Cancs
Hughenden Manor
Stowe—The Lamport Garden

Cheshire
Haughton Hall
Tushingham Hall

Cornwall
Penjerrick
Heligan
Prideaux Place

Cumbria
Brantwood
Naworth Castle
Kirkby Lonsdale, Ruskin's View

Devon
Castle Hill
Alleron
Hill House Nursery and Garden

Derbyshire
Melbourne Hall

Dorset
Mapperton

Essex
Marks Hall
Cressing Temple, Walled Garden

Greater London
Victoria Embankment Gardens
Ham House Avenues
Hogarth House
York House Gardens, Twickenham
William Barefoot Gardens, Greenwich
Priory Gardens, Orpington
Norwood Grove, Norbury
The Privy Garden, Hampton Court

Greater Manchester
Smithills Hall

Hampshire
Laverstoke Park
Sir George Staunton Country Park
Dean Garnier Garden, Winchester
The Wakes, Selbourne

Hereford and Worcester
Hanbury Hall
Hewell Park Garden

Hertfordshire
Temple Dinsley

Humberside
Burton Constable Hall

Kent
Chatham Dock Yard

Merseyside
Birkenhead Park
Sefton Park

Norfolk
Norwich Parks
Elgood Brewery Garden, Wisbech

North Yorkshire
Hackfall
Allerton Park
Newby Hall
Harewood House
St. Saviour's and St. Crux Churchyards, York

Oxfordshire
Oxford Botanic Gardens
Blenheim Park

Staffordshire
Hulton Abbey

Suffolk
Ickworth Park

Surrey
Roysted
Painshill Park
Gosden House School, Bramley

East Sussex
Exceat Farmhouse, Walled Garden
Brunswick Square and Royal Pavilion
Glynde Place
St. Leonards Subscription Garden
Herstmonceaux Place
Great Dixter

West Sussex
High Beeches
Hammerwood Park
West Dean

West Yorkshire
People's Park
Kirkstall Abbey Monastery Gardens

Wiltshire
Hazelbury Manor

An independent group of experts advises the Commission on the selection of those schemes to be awarded grants; it is not Commission practice to release reasons for non-selection. I congratulate the English applicants chosen by the Commission to receive assistance under the scheme, which were Painshill park, Cobham; Harewood terrace, Leeds; Brantwood garden, Coniston; Hanbury Hall garden, Droitwich; and Prior park, Bath.

Sports Council

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage whether a new director-general of the Sports Council has been appointed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: A final decision on the appointment of a new director-general has not yet been made. The selection process is continuing.

Tourist Attractions

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many visitors were recorded at *(a)* the Tower of London, *(b)* Hampton court, *(c)* the Cutty Sark, Greenwich and *(d)* the national maritime museum, Greenwich in 1992.

Mr. Sproat: The number of visitors in 1992 were:

	Numbers
Tower of London	2,235,199
Hampton Court Palace	580,440
Cutty Sark, Greenwich	304,124
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich	550,608

BBC

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect on the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland of changes in the funding of the BBC.

Mr. Brooke: Licence payers in all parts of the United Kingdom will benefit from the licence fee settlement I announced on 4 November, which will allow additional and better programmes.

The BBC is responsible for deciding how to allocate its revenue under the terms of its present royal charter and licence and agreement.

Dame Daphne Park

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what were the qualifications that led to Dame Daphne Park being appointed a governor of the BBC.

Mr. Brooke: It is not normal practice to comment on the reasons for appointing particular individuals to public bodies. The role of the BBC board of governors is to protect the public interest, and its membership reflects the experience and diversity of the country at large.

Arts and Disability

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals the Arts Council has to abolish the arts and disability unit; what advice it received from the Arts Council's arts and disability monitoring committee on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Arts Council intends to integrate the work of the units within the council responsible for implementing strategic policy in the fields of cultural diversity, disability, and women in the arts, with the art form departments. Such structural changes are matters for the Arts Council to decide.

Cliveden House

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action his Department is taking over preserving Cliveden house; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: Cliveden is owned by the National Trust. I understand that the house, which is let as an hotel, has been admirably restored and refurbished by Cliveden Hotel Ltd., which has invested some £10 million in bringing this fine building to its present excellent condition. Sympathetic new uses such as this are essential to bring in the resources needed to preserve the best of our heritage.

Some other parts of the estate require major works and for these the National Trust has launched a public appeal. Works to the clock tower have been included in the priority repair programme agreed between English Heritage and the National Trust for 1993-94 and English Heritage expects to offer substantial grant aid. The National Trust proposes to carry out further works as soon as the success of its appeal allows.

Bush House

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations have been carried out between his Department and the BBC in respect of the BBC World Service lease at its headquarters in Bush house; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: None. This is not a matter on which the Department of National Heritage would expect to be consulted.

EDUCATION

Schools, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list the schools in the Chelmsford parliamentary constituency that *(a)* are grant maintained, *(b)* have had grant-maintained status approved which is yet to come into force and *(c)* have not yet sought grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on schools by parliamentary constituency is not collected centrally. Relevant information held by the department for schools in Essex local education authority has been placed in the Library.

The benefits of self-government are becoming increasingly clear to governors and parents. This is particularly true in Essex, which already has 114 self-governing schools—more than any other LEA in the country.

Students

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action he has taken since incorporation of further education colleges to ensure that student financial support matches the needs of students.

Mr. Boswell: Local education authorities have the power under the Education Act 1962 to make discretionary awards to students on courses of further education in the light of local needs and priorities. They also have duties and powers under the Education Act 1944, as amended by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, to provide free transport and assistance with travel costs to post-16 students.

My right hon. Friend has made it a condition of grant that colleges in the further education sector may not charge tuition fees to home and EC students aged 16 to 18 on

full-time courses. Many colleges operate concessionary fees for other students. Access funds are disbursed by colleges to help eligible full-time students who are in particular financial difficulties.

Students may apply for career development loans from the Employment Department; and those in employment can look to their employers for assistance.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the drop-out rate from further education colleges; and what representations he has received that dropping out is being caused by financial constraints on support for meals and travel.

Mr. Boswell: Information on drop-out rates is not currently collected centrally for colleges in the FE sector. The Audit Commission and Ofsted report "Unfinished Business" estimated that for schools and colleges the drop-out rate for 16 to 18-year-olds on full-time courses was 13 per cent. on courses leading to academic qualifications and 18 per cent. on those leading to vocational qualifications.

We are seeking to reduce drop-out from colleges in a variety of ways: by providing more information to young people to help them make the right choices at 16; by improving the range and choice of courses available, including new GNVQs and NVQs which offer high-quality alternatives to GCE A levels; and by ensuring that funding mechanisms provide an incentive to colleges not only to recruit but to retain more students.

My right hon. Friend has received a number of letters about the duties and powers of LEAs to provide free transport and assistance with travel costs to post-16 students. He has told LEAs that he expects them to monitor the effects of transport policies on participation rates overall and that he will himself keep this aspect of the new arrangements under review.

LEAs' responsibilities to provide free meals do not extend to students in colleges in the new FE sector.

Examination League Tables

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for what reasons the school examination league tables, published on 17 November, include information about special schools, including those for children with severe learning difficulties.

Mr. Robin Squire: Special schools are included in secondary school performance tables on the grounds that parents have a right to information on any relevant results, and on rates of unauthorised absence. In successive consultation exercises, last year and this, no organisation representing special needs groups argued that they should be excluded.

Examination Results

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the precise cost of collating the information published on 17 November about school examination results and unauthorised attendance; and on what dates this information was dispatched from his Department to *(a)* the national press, *(b)* schools and *(c)* local education authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of collecting, processing and collating the comparative information on school and college performance published on 17 and 24 November is estimated at £458,000. The data on secondary school performance were sent to the national press on 15 November, under embargo until 1 am on 17 November, so that they could make the necessary preparations for publication; and to schools and local education authorities on 16 November so that they would receive it on the day in question.

Nursery Education

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the cost of providing nursery places for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost would depend on the types of provision, the balance between full-time and part-time attendance and the numbers of parents who chose to take up a nursery place. Currently, some 53 per cent. of three and four-year-olds in England are in some form of full-time or part-time schooling. We estimate that the average annual recurrent unit cost for a full-time equivalent pupil aged under five in the maintained sector is £1,770 at 1993-94 prices. In addition, there would be capital and teacher training costs.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what response he has made to the report on sustainable development prepared by the Education for Sustainability Forum as part of Her Majesty's Government's consultation on the United Kingdom strategy for sustainable development.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department is taking account of the education for Sustainability Forum's consultation document "The Role of Education for Sustainability" when preparing its contribution to the Government's overall strategy for sustainable development.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Police Evidence

33. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to simplify the procedure by which the police have to present evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Attorney-General: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary recently announced his acceptance of all 16 of the recommendations of a report by outside consultants designed to reduce and streamline police paperwork. The Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office are now working together to implement these recommendations.

Cautions

34. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Attorney-General what advice has been given to police authorities about cautions by his Department and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General: The police exercise their discretion to caution in accordance with guidelines issued

by the Home Office and administer the vast majority of cautions without reference to the Crown Prosecution Service whose function is limited to advising the police on individual cases of difficulty.

Asil Nadir

35. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the latest position regarding legal proceedings against Asil Nadir.

The Attorney-General: Mr. Asil Nadir remains in northern Cyprus with which the United Kingdom does not have extradition arrangements. There is a warrant for his arrest should he return. Interpol has been notified.

War Crimes

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about progress under the War Crimes Act 1991.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is presently considering interim reports from the Metropolitan police relating to several individuals and further inquiries are being made. Inquiries are not yet complete and the question of possible prosecution cannot be considered until they are concluded. In accordance with the requirements of the War Crimes Act 1991, my consent would be sought in any case where the Crown Prosecution Service considers that proceedings are appropriate.

"Juliette"

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General what prosecutions have been brought in connection with the publication of the book "Juliette" by the Marquis de Sade.

The Solicitor-General: No prosecutions have been brought.

HEALTH

Steroids

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Medicines Control Agency's enforcement policy relating to the investigation of reports of the illegal sale or supply of anabolic steroids.

Mr. Sackville: It is the policy of the Medicines Control Agency to investigate all reports concerning the illegal sale or supply of all drugs including anabolic steroids and to take legal action where it is appropriate to do so.

Cigarettes

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to collect statistics on the number of fires, fire deaths and fire injuries caused by cigarettes.

Mr. Sackville: Information on fires caused by smokers' materials is already collected and published in the Home Office statistics bulletins by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. Copies of the bulletins are available in the Library.

Still Births

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been done into the causes of stillbirths in the last 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: The national perinatal epidemiology Unit—NPEU—which is recognised both nationally and internationally as a centre for research on maternity and perinatal services, is funded by the Department of Health through its research and development division—RDD. The NPEU's publication "Effective Care in Pregnancy and Childbirth" lists research carried out into many aspects of care during pregnancy including circumstances where stillbirth occurs. A copy is available in the Library.

The nationwide confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy is currently collecting its first full year of data. The first annual report on the work of the inquiry was published on 15 November 1993, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Hospital Administrators

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the Government's policy on *(a)* salary levels and *(b)* 1994 pay increases for top hospital administrators.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service salaries are set at levels sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate staff of the right calibre within what is affordable. The Government are committed to delegating responsibility for pay to local managers within robust controls on total pay costs, and to establishing closer links between rewards and performance.

In 1994-95 pay increases will need to be funded from within efficiency improvements.

Treatment Activity

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list for 1992-93 the number of beds and patient activity by broad specialty or departmental group;

(2) if she will list for 1992-93 the number of beds and patient activity per thousand population by broad specialty group.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Hospital activity: Beds and finished consultant episodes

Specialty group	*Available beds*	*Per 1,000 population*	*Finished consultant episodes*	*Per 1,000 population*
All specialties	231,000	4·8	9,636,000	199·2
Acute	113,000	2·3	7,775,000	160·7
Geriatric	40,000	0·8	529,000	10·9
General and acute[1]	153,000	3·2	[1]7,770,000	160·6
Mental illness	47,000	1·0	234,000	4·8

Specialty group	Available beds	Per 1,000 population	Finished consultant episodes	Per 1,000 population
Mental handicap	18,000	0·4	56,000	1·2
Maternity	13,000	0·3	1,042,000	21·5

[1] Excludes "Well Babies", includes geriatric cases.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in ophthalmology;

(2) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in haematology;

(3) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in vascular surgery;

(4) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in ear, nose and throat;

(5) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in neonatology;

(6) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in urology;

(7) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in obstetrics;

(8) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in genito-urinary medicine;

(9) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in pain management;

(10) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in general surgery;

(11) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in dermatology;

(12) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in gynaecology;

(13) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in oral surgery;

(14) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in paediatrics;

(15) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in rheumatology;

(16) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in general practice maternity;

(17) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in general-geriatric medicine;

(18) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patient and *(z)* in-patient treatment in endoscopies;

(19) if she will list by year for the last five years and this year to date and by *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority (i) the average waiting times and (ii) the year-end waiting list for *(y)* out-patients and *(z)* in-patient treatment in (i) trauma and (ii) orthopaedics.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on waiting times for out-patient treatment is not currently available centrally. The information available centrally on waiting times for in-patient treatment by district health authority and specialty is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", published twice yearly since 1987. Copies are available in the Library.

Perinatal Epidemiology Unit

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when her Department will reach a decision about a new contract for the national perinatal epidemiology unit; how this will take account of the recommendation by the second report of the Health Select Committee of Session 1991-92,

on "Maternity Services", HC 29, that funding be guaranteed for sufficient time to ensure the recruitment and retention for the NPEU of high quality staff;

(2) what steps her Department is taking to set in train the recruitment of a new director of the national perinatal epidemiology unit.

Mr. Sackville: The Department's director of research and development wrote to the national perinatal epidemiology unit—NEPU—on 24 November, stating that he had started discussions with Sir David Weatherall, Regius Professor of Medicine at the university of Oxford, about the appointment of a new director of the NPEU. The firm expectation following this is that the Department will let a new contract with the university of Oxford in regard to the NPEU.

The Department fully intends to follow the recommendation by the second report of the Health Select Committee of Session 1991-92, on maternity services, HC 29.

Low-income Scheme

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the review into the health benefits—low-income—scheme was begun; when it was ended; and when its conclusions will be made public.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many AG1 forms are administered each year; and how much per form is spent on administration.

Dr. Mawhinney: The review was announced to Parliament on 22 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *530*. Since then, a number of internal measures to improve operational efficiency have been implemented, including the transfer of the responsibility for operating the scheme to the Prescription Pricing Authority, a special health authority within the national health service. Other proposals remain under consideration including those resulting from an examination of forms and leaflets. Any changes to the scheme itself will be announced if and when it is agreed that they should be implemented. The NHS low-income scheme remains an essential part of Government policy ensuring that only those who can afford to pay NHS charges are required to do so. In 1992-93, 1·129 million claims to the scheme were processed at an average administrative cost of £6·30 per claim.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place to allow immediate payment for emergency dental treatment for those on low incomes.

Dr. Mawhinney: Recipients of income support, family credit, or holders of national health service low-income scheme AG2 certificates for full remission of NHS charges do not pay for NHS dental treatment. Remission certificates are valid for a period of six months and may be sought as a protection by those on a low income before the need for treatment arises. These arrangements ensure that those who cannot afford to contribute towards the cost of dental services should not be deterred from seeking treatment at any time.

Pharmacies

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest figure of average population per pharmacy in each EC country.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest available information is contained in the reply I gave the hon. Member on 6 May 1993 at column *221*.

General Practitioners

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the average earnings of general practitioners, broken down by the smallest available geographical area.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information about the geographical distribution of general practitioners' earnings is not available. The intended average net income for an unrestricted principal providing general medical services in Great Britain in 1993-94 is £40,610. Payments for achieving higher levels of coverage for childhood immunisations and cervical screening, and for administering Hib meningitis vaccine are made in addition. These are currently estimated to add £3,200 to the average GP's remuneration in 1993-94.

Footwear

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the cost to the national health service of treating patients with problems that could have been prevented by healthy footwear.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been issued by her Department in relation to children's footwear.

Mr. Sackville: The Health Education Authority's publication "Birth to Five", copies of which are available in the Library, includes a section on feet and first shoes. The book is given free to all first-time mothers in England.

Geriatric Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the latest available figures for the numbers of geriatric *(a)* units, *(b)* beds and *(c)* consultants;

(2) what plans she has to increase the number of geriatric units, beds and consultants.

Mr. Bowis: The provision of such facilities and services are a matter for local health authorities who have the responsibility for assessing and meeting local health needs.

Specialist Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the correlation between the degree of specialisation of consultants and the levels of morbidity and mortality in their patients following treatment.

Mr. Sackville: Confidential audit work supported by the Department of Health, and international studies, indicate that consultants with specialist skills and experience achieve better outcomes, bearing in mind that specialised consultants may need to deal with more complex problems.

Breast Screening

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each year since 1989-90 the percentage of women invited for breast screening who attended, by regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: The breast screening programme is achieving its average uptake target rate of 70 per cent. We do not have central statistics for 1990-91 but unvalidated data are available from the national health service breast screening programme. Validated central figures are currently available only for the year 1991-92. Both are shown in the table.

Regional Health Authority	*Percentage uptake rate* 1990-91	1991-92
England	71	71
Northern	75	75
Yorkshire	68	74
Trent	76	77
East Anglian	74	81
North West Thames	60	58
North East Thames	60	61
South East Thames	70	71
South West Thames	70	67
Wessex	76	78
Oxford	81	77
South Western	69	74
West Midlands	69	72
Mersey	73	69
North Western	74	73

Health Authorities

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities and trusts have chief executives who are foreign nationals.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Suicides

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets she has set to decrease the suicide rate.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to "The Health of the Nation, A Strategy for Health in England", Cm 1986, published in July 1992.

Perioperative Death

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that all consultants who could take part in the national confidential inquiry into perioperative death are required to do so.

Mr. Sackville: We strongly support the participation of all clinicians in medical audit and in national confidential inquiries, but to be effective we believe that this must be done on a voluntary basis. All surgeons and anaesthetists are encouraged by their respective royal colleges to take part in the national confidential inquiry into perioperative deaths.

Physicians

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest figure for the number of practising physicians per 1,000 of population in each EC country.

Dr. Mawhinney: As at 30 September 1992, there were 1·6 practising physicians per 1,000 of population in England. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Equivalent information for other European Community countries is not available.

Consultants' Hours

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest figures available for the number of hours consultants worked per week, on their feet, on call and total.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Charges

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the items for which recipients are charged in the NHS and give the amounts raised in each category.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Charged National Health Service items and revenue from charges in England 1992-93

Service	*Charge Revenue (£ million)*
Family Health Services Prescriptions	242·0
Family Health Services Dental Treatment	394·8

All NHS sight tests are free of charge. People who are entitled to help with the cost of spectacles receive this in the form of a spectacle voucher; the sale of spectacles is always a private transaction between patient and practitioner, even when an NHS voucher is used. Information about hospital prescriptions, the hospital eye service, and hospital orthotic services is not available centrally.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what have been the results of her Department's investigations into the case of a young mother who contracted hepatitis B while undergoing a caesarian operation at Whipps Cross hospital, Leyton; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: An investigation is being carried out jointly by Forest healthcare national health service trust and Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority with advice from the communicable disease surveillance centre. The hon. Member may wish to contact Lord Jenkin of Roding, the trust chairman, for details.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the turnover of each NHS trust.

Dr. Mawhinney: The total income of first and second wave trusts in England for 1992-93 will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how the start-up grant for NHS trusts is calculated;

(2) what guidance she has issued to shadow NHS trusts on the use of their start-up grants.

Dr. Mawhinney: The amount allocated for top-sliced funding to meet start-up costs is divided on an equal basis between successful trusts in each wave. The uses towards which start-up costs may be put are set out in letters from the national health service management executive notifying the shadow trust of the amount to be allocated.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many trusts *(a)* met and *(b)* failed to achieve a 6 per cent. return on assets.

Dr. Mawhinney: According to 1992-93 annual accounts 106 national health service trusts have made a pre-interest rate of return of 6 per cent. or greater. Fifty NHS trusts have made a pre-interest rate of return of less than 6 per cent. The rate of return is calculated as the percentage that operating surplus bears to the average relevant net assets.

NHS Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of NHS staff employed in each region for each of the last four years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The requested information is shown in the table.

National health service staff employed in each region (whole-time equivalents)

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Northern	53,610	52,970	53,110	51,800
Yorkshire	58,060	58,320	58,470	57,800
Trent	75,280	75,650	75,810	73,910
East Anglia	31,020	31,490	31,770	31,120
North West Thames	51,100	50,910	50,170	49,330
North East Thames	66,300	66,440	66,540	63,420
South East Thames	59,690	60,220	59,940	58,520
South West Thames	43,080	42,090	42,310	44,800
Wessex	43,750	44,410	44,940	43,230
Oxford	33,040	33,540	32,670	32,860
South Western	51,050	51,900	52,770	52,410
West Midlands	83,570	83,840	83,980	85,160
Mersey	41,660	40,610	40,040	39,370
North Western	71,950	70,780	71,890	70,400
SHAs and others	24,020	24,980	29,880	35,870
England total	787,170	788,140	794,280	789,990

Notes:

1. Some totals for 1990 and 1991 differ from those given in my reply on 20 November 1992 at column *435* where the medical and dental figures were at that time provisional and have now been revised.
2. The validation of the 1992 data for ambulance staff uncovered an error in the statistics for ambulance staff in Northern region in 1991. The error has been corrected in this table and so staff totals for 1991 differ from figures previously published.
3. "SHAs and others" includes those in special health authorities, family health services authorities and other statutory authorities. Staff in special hospitals are included in "SHAs and others" from 1991 onwards.
4. The total number of staff given includes both medical and non-medical staff but excludes locum doctors and agency nurses.
5. All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
6. Whole-time equivalents are calculated by aggregating the total number of hours worked by staff in a grade and dividing by the standard hours for that grade. In this way, numbers of part-time staff are converted into an equivalent number of whole-time staff.

Influenza Vaccine

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she has taken to ensure that adequate supplies of influenza vaccine are being made available to doctors in *(a)* the north-western region and *(b)* Chorley.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has kept in close touch with influenza vaccine manufacturers who are producing additional supplies to replace those which did not gain a licence. The manufacturers have said that they intend to complete delivery of all outstanding orders no later than 7 December.

Bromley DHA

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much of the HIV/AIDS funds was ring-fenced for Bromley district health authority for 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if the relevant accounts have been published and audited;

(2) what are the South East Thames regional health authority South East Thames regional health authority HIV/AIDS funds budgets for each year since 1991-92; and what proportion of the SETRHA HIV/AIDS funds went to each of the district health authorities;

(3) when the 1991-92 and 1992-93 Bromley district health authority's overall accounts were published and audited.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested has been published in the AIDS (Control) Act reports for South East Thames regional health authority, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The external auditor certified the accounts of Bromley health authority on 30 October 1992 and 29 October 1993 for the financial years 1991-92 and 1992-93 respectively. The accounts are made publicly available following the audit certification.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the names of the members of Bromley district health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: The chairmanship of Bromley health authority is vacant due to the recent death of Mr. Alan Cumming.

At the next meeting of the district health authority on 14 December, the members will select an acting chairman from among the non-executive members.

The non-executive members are Mr. C. Ilsley, Mrs. E. Giles, Ms M. Theobald and Dr. R. Kirby.

The executive members are Ms C. Perry, Mr. P. Lloyd, Mr. K. Barton, Mr. R. Lorimer and Dr. J. Spilby.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are being taken to monitor the impact of the requirement to spend 85 per cent. of the special transitional grant in the independent sector on domiciliary care; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what mechanisms exist to monitor local authorities' compliance with the requirement to spend 85 per cent. of the special transitional grant for domiciliary care in the independent sector.

Mr. Bowis: Prior to 1993, all the resources transferred from the Department of Social Security to social services departments, via the community care transitional grant, went to the independent sectors. Local authorities are required to spend at least 85 per cent. of the social security transfer element of the special transitional grant on independent sector community care services. We have established an extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation which is considering all the key aspects of the implementation of the community care reforms. The district audit service will verify compliance with the requirement.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide a table showing those district health authorities that are over their capitation targets indicating *(a)* the percentage that they are over capitation and *(b)* the cash amount that this represents of current budgets.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information for 1993-94 has been placed in the Library.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners' surgeries there are in Liverpool, South Sefton, Knowsley and St. Helens and Wirral health authorities; how many of these are single general practitioner's practices; and what is the average list size of practices in each authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Family health services authority	*Number of practices*	*Number of single handed practices*	*Average list size*
Liverpool	103	41	2,041
Sefton	55	21	2,010
St. Helens and Knowsley	77	26	2,034
Wirral	68	17	1,874

The data relate to April 1993.

The practice information provided relates to the number of partnerships. Some of these partnerships may practise from more than one surgery.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners have moved from working outside London to inner London under the provisions of "Making London Better".

Dr. Mawhinney: Data are not available centrally showing the movement of general practitioners from one family health services authority to another. It is too early to assess the impact of "Making London Better" on GP manpower. Available information on the numbers of unrestricted GPs in the 12 complete FHSAs which fall wholly or partly within the London initiative zone as at 1 April 1993 is shown in the table:

FHSA	*Unrestricted GPs*
Brent and Harrow	272
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	372
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	189
Barking and Havering	182
Camden and Islington	218
City and East London	355
Enfield and Haringey	277
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	225
Greenwich and Bexley	213
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	419
Croydon	160
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	323
TOTAL	3,205

Sight Tests

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning the costs to optometrists of carrying out a GOS sight test in 1992; and what was the GOS sight test fee paid to optometrists for the corresponding period.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department has recently received a report commissioned by the staff side of Whitley committee C in support of their claim for an increase in the level of the national health service sight test fee. This report, which we are now studying, suggests that optometrists' unit costs in 1992 were £18·42 per sight test. The NHS sight test fee was £12·75 in 1992.

Emergency Admissions

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency admissions have been made through accident and emergency units at the Royal Liverpool university hospital, Broadgreen hospital, Fazakerley hospital, and Whiston hospital during *(a)* April 1992 to April 1993 and *(b)* April 1993 to date.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the relevant national health service trusts for details.

Registered Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appeals to registered homes tribunals have been heard in each year since the implementation of the Registered Homes Act 1984, and what were *(a)* the categories of case/section of the Act which appellants appeared, *(b)* whether the hearings concerned care, nursing homes, or joint registered homes and *(c)* the outcome of hearings.

Mr. Bowis: The numbers of appeals heard by registered homes tribunals in each year since they began to operate in 1985 were:

	Number
1985	11
1986	36
1987	26
1988	30
1989	25
1990	26
1991	32
1992	33

The further information requested by the hon. Member could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered homes have been deregistered since the implementation of the Registered Homes Act 1984; in each year how many of those were *(a)* charitable or not-for-profit homes, *(b)* private care homes, *(c)* private nursing homes and *(d)* joint registration homes; and under which provisions of the Act the deregistration took place.

Mr. Bowis: The Department does not hold information about the numbers of homes which have been deregistered.

Oxendon House

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions her Department has had with Bedfordshire county council about the future of Oxenden house, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis *[pursuant to his reply, 25 November 1993, c. 136]:* I regret that there was an error in my previous reply which should have read:

"The Department has been kept informed about recent developments in relation to Bedfordshire county council's children's home, Oxendon house. I understand that the acting principal of the home has been arrested by the police and that four other members of staff have been suspended. Following advice from the social services inspectorate, the county council is conducting an investigation into allegations of inappropriate therapies and restraint techniques and the general culture of the home. Meanwhile the home has been closed, the children relocated and 45 members of staff have been given leave of absence.

The social services inspectorate is continuing to monitor the situation."

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Non-governmental Organisations

38. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the United Kingdom aid budget the Government plan to give to non-governmental organisations in the next two years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The policy of enhancing the role that NGOs play in delivering our aid will continue. I cannot anticipate the public expenditure plans that will be announced tomorrow.

43. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Overseas Development Administration is supporting the work of non-governmental organisations in helping to meet the long-term needs of the poorest communities in developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1992-93 the ODA gave grants totalling over £77 million to support the long-term development programmes of British non-governmental organisations in their efforts to alleviate poverty among the poorest groups in developing countries.

Aid Spending

41. **Mrs. Roche:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations have been received by his Department urging him to increase aid spending to 0·7 per cent. of national income.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Many hon. Members have written to Ministers.

Bosnia

42. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are being taken by Her Majesty's Government to help the victims of the war in Bosnia during the winter.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government have committed over £152 million for aid to victims of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. We also contribute substantially to the Sarajevo airlift and through our 2,300 troop contribution to the United Nations protection forces.

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has received of the number of refugees from Burundi into neighbouring countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: According to latest estimates we have received from the United Nations, a total of some 700,000 refugees have fled Burundi—including 375,000 into Rwanda, 245,000 into Tanzania and 50,000 in Zaire.

World Bank (Loans)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what evaluation studies have been undertaken by the Overseas Development Administration of the impact and effectiveness of World bank project loans and structural adjustment programmes; which non-governmental organisations have been consulted in these studies; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what evaluation studies have been done by the Overseas Development Administration of World bank project loans and structural adjustment programmes; which non-governmental oganisations were consulted; and what measures are being taken to forward these reports to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee or the executive director of the World bank.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Evaluations of completed World bank projects are the responsibility of the bank's independent operations evaluation department. Summaries of evaluation reports will be among the expanded list of documents to be made publicly available under the bank's revised disclosure of information policy.

The ODA has produced a number of evaluations where we have co-financed with the bank. Details of how reports or summaries can be obtained are set out in ODA's "Catalogue of Evaluation Studies", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

World Bank Projects

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what evaluations were made of the environmental effects and effects on indigenous peoples of the World bank-funded Pangue dam project in Chile by the Overseas Development Administration; what were the results; what guidance was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank as to voting on the project; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted;

(2) what evaluations were conducted by the Overseas Development Administration concerning the displacement effects of the World bank's Daguangba Hainan project in China; what were the results; which local groups were consulted; what guidance was given to the United Kingdom executive director as to voting; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted;

(3) what studies were conducted by the Overseas Development Administration on the environmental effects of the World bank-funded National Thermal Power Corporation's project in India; what were the results; which groups were consulted; what guidance was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank as to voting on the issue; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted;

(4) what environmental studies were conducted on the Kureimat thermal power plant in Egypt by the Overseas Development Administration; what were the results of any such study; which groups were consulted in the evaluation; what advice was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank as to voting on the issue; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted;

(5) what studies were conducted of social consequences and displacement of population by the Overseas Development Administration on the Ertan hydroelectric plant in China; what were the results of any such study; which local groups were consulted; what guidance on voting in respect of the plant was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: ODA does not commission studies of individual project proposals presented to the World bank's board of directors for approval except where we are considering co-financing. This has not arisen in the cases specified.

Project appraisal reports and such supporting documents as summary environmental assessments which are sent to the board are reviewed by our executive director's office and, on a selective basis—mainly adjustment operations or environmentally sensitive projects—within ODA. Comments received from time to time from interested NGOs are taken into account. It is not our practice to reveal instructions to our executive director, nor to disclose the position he takes in board discussions, the proceedings of which are confidential.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the results of the World bank studies of the Narmada dam project in India initiated at the time that the loan was cancelled.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A number of environmental and hydrological studies which were initiated before cancellation of the balance of the bank loan for the Sardar Sarovar dam project in the Narmada valley, India, were financed under a technical assistance grant from ODA to the bank. The Indian authorities have recently agreed that these reports can be made available publicly. A set of the reports is being placed in the Library of the House. We have not yet seen other studies arising from the action programme agreed between the Indian authorities and the bank in October 1992.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what World bank projects are currently being evaluated by the Overseas Development Administration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: ODA's evaluation unit is not currently undertaking any evaluation of completed bank projects.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies have been conducted by *(a)* the Overseas Development Administration and *(b)* the World bank on the Pak Mun World bank project; what were the results of such studies; which social and environmental experts from the area were consulted; what advice was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank in respect of voting on the project; and how the United Kingdom executive director voted.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have not commissioned any studies of this project. When the World bank's board approved the loan in December 1991, we asked the bank to undertake a mid-term review given the concerns expressed at the time about the environmental impact and resettlement aspects of the project. The board is currently considering the report of a bank mission which concluded that the Thai authorities were complying with agreements reached with the bank on the resettlement and environmental aspects of the project, although much more needed to be done to improve communications with the affected population and NGOs.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank will be attending the non-governmental organisations meeting in Washington on 19 November concerning the environmental impact of the Pak Mun project in Thailand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our executive director was represented at the briefing meeting held in Washington on 19 November when presentations were made by a Thai NGO and academics about the potential environmental impact of the Pak Mun dam.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the United Kingdom executive director has made to the World bank to ensure that energy efficiency should be encouraged in developing countries rather than increasing the number of power plants.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our executive director played a full part in board discussion of a bank policy paper on energy efficiency and conservation in 1992. The report on the 10th replenishment of the International Development Association—IDA-10—which was approved by the board

in January 1993, noted the importance of promoting end-use energy efficiency alongside increases in supply. It also underlined the need for IDA to expand its least cost planning analysis to take account of both demand side and alternative supply side options employing proven technologies in energy conservation and renewable energy sources.

Policy Information Markers

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what are the policy information markers going to consist; and when they will be established.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Overseas Development Administration's policy information marker system—PIMS—has been operational since 1 October 1993. It is a computer based system which allows ODA's commitments of aid to be marked against one or more of 19 policy markers. The markers include ODA's seven priority objectives already announced by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development in her speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on 18 October. PIMS will provide a means of closer monitoring of ODA's performance against the objectives set for the aid programme.

Initial data from PIMS will appear in the ODA section of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental report 1994.

Russia

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what evaluations his Department has conducted of the quality of World bank lending to Russia; and what has been the level of lending in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: World bank lending to Russia began in August 1992 with a $600 million rehabilitation loan. In the bank's fiscal year ended June 1993—FY93—commitments totalled $760 million. Approvals in the current year—FY94—include a $610 million loan to the oil sector.

Further details of the bank's activities are contained in its 1993 annual report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

It is too early to assess the impact of bank lending to Russia, but we have been impressed by the preparatory work they have undertaken in support of its lending programme.

Arun-3 Project

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies of the social and environmental effects of the Arun-3 project in Nepal have been conducted by the Overseas Development Administration; what were the results and which groups in Nepal were consulted; and what is the current status of the project.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: ODA has made no bilateral financial commitment to the Arun-3 dam project in Nepal, and has commissioned no studies. The Nepalese authorities have prepared an environmental assessment. The World bank, together with other co-financiers, initiated its appraisal of the project in May; and has stated that it intends to disseminate information about the project to NGOs and other interested parties to facilitate informed discussion.

Soviet Union

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the ODA has given recently to humanitarian crises in the emerging countries of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Over the last two years we have provided over £8 million in humanitarian assistance to countries of the former Soviet Union. Details are as follows:

Bilateral aid — £'000s

	Financial year 1992-93 (expenditure)	*Financial year 1993-94 (commitments to date)*
Armenia	227	270
Azerbaijan (Inc. Nagorno-Karabakh)	533	1,541
Georgia	498	456
Khazakhstan	—	33
Kyrgyzstan	27	67
Russian Federation	475	—
Tajikistan	100	140
Ukraine	—	24
TOTAL	1,860	2,531

United Kingdom share of EC aid — £'000s

	Calendar 1992	*Calendar 1993 (to date)*
Armenia	182	768
Azerbaijan	182	1,088
Georgia	—	934
Russian Federation	—	64
Tajikistan	97	576
TOTAL	461	3,430

Cyprus

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the per capita income of Greek Cypriots living in southern Cyprus; and what considerations underlie the giving of United Kingdom aid to Cyprus.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Information on the per capita income of the two communities in Cyprus is not available. The figure for Cyprus as a whole was $8,640 in 1991. The considerations underlying our small aid programme to Cyprus are our historical relationship and an even-handed approach towards both communities.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Official Information

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the statutory provisions which *(a)* restrict the disclosure of official information and *(b)* provide legal rights of access to official information.

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of some 200 statutory provisions which have been identified as restricting the disclosure of official information can be found in the "Open Government" White Paper—Cm 2290—published earlier this year.

Statutory provisions which provide legal rights of access include: the Data Protection Act 1984; the Access to Personal Files Act 1987; the Education Reform Act 1988; the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988; the Access to Health Records Act 1990; the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985; the Health Service Joint Consultative Committees (Access to Information) Act 1986; the Community Health Councils (Access to Information) Act 1988; the Environmental Information Regulations 1992; and the Education (School Records) Regulations 1989.

Official Hospitality

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the amount spent on official hospitality by each Department, including the Prime Minister's Office, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Waldegrave: The expenditure on official hospitality by those Departments for which I have responsibility is as follows:

	OPSS £	*COI* £
1984-85	17,618	3,911
1985-86	45,707	4,121
1986-87	26,595	4,802
1987-88	13,314	4,499
1988-89	29,775	2,895
1989-90	37,276	3,267
1990-91	32,689	530
1991-92	48,642	3,187
1992-93	45,154	3,042

The figures for Office of Public Service and Science include expenditure by the Prime Minister's Office. In addition to the amount shown under OPSS for 1991-92, a further £234,126 was spent in that year in respect of official hospitality for the 1991 economic summit.

Expenditure by HMSO on official hospitality in 1992 was £15,984. Figures for hospitality were not recorded centrally by HMSO before 1992.

Expenditure records prior to financial year 1984-85 do not provide information in the form requested.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what instructions have been given to Departments of State concerning requests to them from the Scott inquiry for confidential documentary material.

Mr. Waldegrave: Departments have been instructed to make available to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry all material upon request, irrespective of classification, and have not been issued with specific instructions concerning requests for classified material.

Magistrates

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many magistrates in Lancashire have resigned this year citing as a reason dissatisfaction with the Government's policies on the administration of justice.

Mr. Waldegrave: The total number of resignations in Lancashire this year, less those retiring for reasons of age, has been 40. Only a small proportion of these have given dissatisfaction with the administration of justice as a reason for their resignation.

British Geological Survey Laboratory

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Natural Environment Research Council concerning the proposed closure of the British geological survey laboratory and office, Aberystwyth;

(2) what consultations he has had with the quarrying, mining, civil engineering and academic research interests in Wales concerning the proposed closure of the British geological survey laboratory and office, Aberystwyth;

(3) what representations he has received in relation to the proposed closure of the British geological survey laboratory and office, Aberystwyth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: These are matters for the British geological survey—BGS—and the Natural Environment Research Council—NERC—of which the BGS is a constituent part. I have received no representations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Brussels

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will consider proposals for hon. Members to be allowed to visit Brussels more than once each year on parliamentary business up to the maximum of the overall allocated budget; and if he will make a comment.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Parliamentary Broadcasting

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will propose to the Select Committee on Broadcasting that the Central Office of Information should supply the live television feed for hon. Members in their offices.

Mr. Newton: No purpose would be served by my placing this matter before the Broadcasting Committee at this juncture. As I have explained in my previous answers to the hon. Gentleman's questions, the factors influencing the time scale within which Members can be supplied with the clean feed in their offices are the complexity and cost of the comprehensive cabling exercise involved and their relationship to decisions yet to be taken by the House on the proposed parliamentary data and video network. This remains the case whatever agency or organisation might eventually be employed to carry out the necessary work.

Child Care

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what is the cost to public funds for arranging for a comprehensive survey of potential demand for a

parliamentary child care facility; how much Research Services Ltd. is being paid to prepare a questionnaire; to how many people the questionnaire has been sent; and when he hopes to make a statement as to the conclusions.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Following deliberations in the Administration Committee, the Department of Finance and Administration commissioned the preparation and circulation of the questionnaire on parliamentary child care facilities to some 4,100 recipients who work in the parliamentary estate. The Committee expects to report the results of the suvey to the House of Commons Commission early in the new year. For reasons of commercial confidentiality it is not appropriate to publish the cost of the exercise.

Vote Bundle

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if his Committee will send a questionnaire to hon. Members about the Vote bundle to ascertain what use hon. Members make of the Vote bundle, what ideas they may have for improving the service and what suggestions they have for reducing the amount of public money currently spent on the bundle.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: As I mentioned in reply to my hon. Friend's similar question on this matter on 3 November in the last session of Parliament at column *198*, the form and content of the Vote bundle remain under review by the Committee. I therefore see no reason for any survey of the kind suggested. Members are, however, always free to submit specific suggestions to the Committee.

Note Taking

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what are the current restrictions applied to note taking in the Strangers' Gallery.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Administration Committee has agreed for an experimental period of six months that the taking of informal notes of the proceedings of the House for personal purposes should be allowed in the Strangers' Gallery. These arrangements will not extend to any kind of formal reporting from that Gallery, for which the current prohibition will remain.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Working Allowance

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many current awards of disability working allowance there are; what is the total number of claims for disability working allowance received in the last six months for which statistics are available; how many claims were adjudicated upon in those six months; what proportion of those claims adjudicated in the last six months resulted in an award; and what were the reasons for unsuccessful claims with numbers and percentage for each ground for disallowance.

Mr. Scott: As of 31 October 1993 there were 3,176 current awards of disability working allowance.

The total number of claims for DWA in May to October 1993 was:

	Number
New claims	4,688
Repeat claims	2,256
Total	6,944

The number of claims adjudicated upon in the last six months is 6,547.

The proportion of adjudicated claims which resulted in an award is 54·06 per cent.

The reasons for unsuccessful claims with numbers and percentages for each ground for disallowance in the last six months are in the table.

Reason	*Number*	*Percentage*
Capital exceeds £16,000	8	0·26
Not in remunerative work	1,108	36·83
Income exceeds DWA level	443	14·73
No qualifying benefit	1,264	42·02
Disability test	4	0·14
Other reasons	181	6·02

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming disability working allowance; what is the average payment to a person receiving disability working allowance; and how many people were expected to receive disability working allowance at any one time when it was launched.

Mr. Scott: There are 3,176 people currently in receipt of disability working allowance. The average payment for October 1993 was £40·63. Our original estimate was that once the benefit was fully established about 50,000 people might be entitled to disability working allowance based on the surveys of disabled people carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Pensions Law Review Committee

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost of producing and printing the report of the Pensions Law Review Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Roy Goode.

Mr. Hague: The Pensions Law Review Committee—PLRC—report was published as two separate volumes. The cost, which was met by this Department, of producing these volumes to final art work was £73,375. As a priced publication, the printing costs of £42,737 were borne by HMSO and will be recovered from sales via HMSO.

In addition, a summary version of volume one of the report was produced at a cost of £18,640 and copies of the summary are available free of charge.

Lone Parents

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* lone mothers and *(b)* lone fathers were in receipt of social security benefits by type in (i) Lancashire and (ii) the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Benefits Agency district in each year since 1987.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested.

Benefit Fraud

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the extent of benefit fraud.

Mr. Hague: The full extent of social security fraud is not know but ways of producing statistical estimates are being considered by the Benefits Agency. Last year the Benefits Agency caught over 270,000 people defrauding the system which resulted in benefit savings of £558 million.

Maintenance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the income ceiling at which an absent parent, having met the maintenance payment at 50p in the pound, no longer has to contribute at 25p in the pound.

Mr. Burt: The 25 per cent. rate of deduction from assessable income, which applies to income left after the absent parent has met the basic maintenance requirement, applies until a maximum amount is reached. For each child, the maximum additional amount is equivalent to three times the total of the income support personal allowance for the child plus the income support family premium.

The parent with care of the children may apply to the courts for additional maintenance once the maximum is reached.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Hague: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made two trips abroad on departmental business during 1993. The details are in the table.

£

Event	*Cost to public funds*
World Economic Forum	735·00
Meeting with Mme. Veil (the senior French Minister for Social Affairs) in Paris	165·00

Suicide

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many suicides he has estimated have occurred in the last five years as a result of decisions taken by his Department about benefit entitlement;

(2) if he will commission research to establish whether the rate of incidence of suicides is higher among those on benefits and whether suicides have been caused by his Department's benefit decisions.

Mr. Scott: Information on the reasons for suicides is not collected. There are no plans to commission research on the rate of suicides among people receiving social security benefits.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total sum of money being withheld from women as a result of the suspension of payment of the increased award for invalidity benefit, pending the result of the court case concerning Council directive (EEC) 79/7.

Mr. Scott: Benefits Agency records show that around 30,000 women are having increased benefit suspended pending the outcome of this case. Statistics concerning the amount of money involved are not routinely kept and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what it would cost to introduce a £5 and £10 disregard on income support for parents with care in receipt of maintenance from an absent parent for a child or children but still receiving income support assuming that this involved *(a)* one third, *(b)* one half or *(c)* two thirds of lone parents on income support.

Mr. Burt: The latest estimates in costs are in the table.

Cost £ million	*Cost of (a)*	*Cost of (b)*	*Cost of (c)*
£5 disregard	90	130	170
£10 disregard	170	260	350

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the number of lone parents in receipt of income support as at February 1993.
2. Costs given are full year costs and rounded to the nearest £10 million.

SCOTLAND

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Lang: The number of staff and the number of women in post in the Scottish Office and associated departments as at 1 October 1993—but excluding the Scottish prison service—are shown by grade equivalent in the table:

Grade (and equivalents)	*Women*	*Total Staff*
1	—	1
2	—	8
3	4	28
4	3	19
5	18	133
6	35	199
7	85	492
Senior Executive Officer	60	500
Higher Executive Officer	294	995
Executive Officer	587	1,188
Administrative Officer	951	1,396
Administrative Assistant	902	1,408
Industrial Staff	18	491
TOTAL	2,877	6,858

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his Department operates an equal opportunities policy of recruitment to all departments for which he has responsibility.

Mr. Lang: Yes. In common with other civil service employers my departments and agencies have in place equal opportunities policies based on the principle of fair and open competition for recruitment.

Nursery Education

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of children aged three and four years were in receipt of nursery education in each region and islands area of Scotland in each school year from 1978-79.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. The numbers of three and four-year-old pupils shown are those attending education authority nursery schools and departments as at September in each school year. The percentages shown are based on the relevant mid-year estimate of the three and four-year-old population.

Number of 3 and 4-year-olds attending education authority nursery schools/departments at September

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86 1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Scotland	31,037	31,531	32,231	32,913	34,411	36,356	37,601	n/a	38,851	40,204	41,785	43,274	44,488	46,144
Borders	299	313	301	363	387	394	359	n/a	390	438	447	470	484	481
Central	1,399	1,512	1,681	1,858	1,960	2,166	2,210	n/a	2,492	2,568	2,744	2,732	2,733	2,818
Dumfries and Galloway	253	257	266	247	271	287	316	n/a	428	550	625	630	825	1,204
Fife	3,192	3,235	3,280	3,142	3,439	3,805	3,993	n/a	4,193	4,402	4,329	4,388	4,552	4,538
Grampian	2,233	2,196	2,222	2,244	2,235	2,425	2,433	n/a	2,678	2,985	3,171	3,391	3,867	4,686
Highland	331	455	484	519	567	580	618	n/a	617	645	622	730	835	891
Lothian	6,718	6,529	6,795	6,799	7,045	7,477	7,966	n/a	7,965	8,064	7,969	8,457	8,709	8,819
Strathclyde	14,501	14,768	14,841	15,406	16,071	16,793	17,376	n/a	17,551	17,828	18,683	18,911	18,799	18,695
Tayside	1,841	1,933	2,007	2,014	2,097	2,112	2,136	n/a	2,344	2,516	2,975	3,326	3,357	3,565
Orkney	78	96	93	74	85	89	92	n/a	83	97	101	102	89	192
Shetland	32	86	99	91	85	82	102	n/a	110	111	119	137	238	255
Western Isles	160	151	162	156	169	146	0	n/a	0	0	0	0	0	0

Percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds attending education authority nursery schools-departments at September

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Scotland	22·9	23·8	25·6	27·8	27·9	28·0	28·2
Borders	12·2	12·8	13·7	17·1	17·5	16·6	15·2
Central	19·3	21·4	25·2	28·8	29·3	31·2	31·2
Dumfries and Galloway	7·0	7·4	8·4	8·0	8·1	7·9	8·7
Fife	35·4	36·3	38·3	39·3	40·8	42·2	42·8
Grampian	18·2	18·0	18·7	19·4	18·3	18·6	18·6
Highland	6·3	8·5	9·1	10·2	10·7	10·3	10·5
Lothian	36·0	36·6	40·4	43·0	43·3	43·8	45·3
Strathclyde	22·2	23·2	24·7	27·7	27·8	27·7	27·6
Tayside	18·5	20·4	22·1	23·2	23·5	23·0	22·6
Orkney	16·8	19·4	19·3	14·9	16·5	17·9	18·3
Shetland	4·5	11·7	13·2	12·1	12·1	11·1	13·6
Western Isles	19·2	16·8	18·4	19·3	19·7	16·2	0·0

	1985-86 1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Scotland	n/a	30·8	31·9	32·2	33·0	33·8	35·4
Borders	n/a	16·6	18·7	19·2	19·5	19·5	19·6
Central	n/a	37·8	39·2	40·7	41·4	40·1	42·2
Dumfries and Galloway	n/a	12·7	15·8	17·4	17·8	22·4	33·2
Fife	n/a	48·5	50·4	48·4	47·6	49·3	49·7
Grampian	n/a	21·2	24·0	25·0	26·1	29·0	34·9
Highland	n/a	11·6	12·3	11·8	13·6	15·5	16·9
Lothian	n/a	47·8	47·9	44·5	45·9	46·9	47·4
Strathclyde	n/a	29·6	30·1	30·7	30·9	31·1	31·3
Tayside	n/a	25·1	26·5	31·0	34·2	34·9	37·3
Orkney	n/a	18·3	20·7	20·9	20·4	16·4	34·8
Shetland	n/a	17·7	18·1	19·3	20·5	34·8	39·2
Western Isles	n/a	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the amount of revenue support grant allocated to each district council in Scotland in the current financial year on a per capita basis; if he will explain the formulae applied in calculation of these grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is set out in the table. An explanation of how the amount of RSG

payable to each authority in 1993-94 was determined is set out in the report to the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 1993, copies of which are in the Library.

	1993-94 RSG [1]Per Capita £
Berwickshire	112·89
Ettrick and Lauderdale	104·32
Roxburgh	116·04
Tweeddale	100·78
Clackmannan	143·29
Falkirk	130·11
Stirling	162·54
Annandale and Eskdale	100·99
Nithsdale	112·66
Stewartry	98·10
Wigtown	136·10
Dunfermline	121·12
Kirkcaldy	127·51
North East Fife	122·71
Aberdeen	145·41
Banff and Buchan	118·48
Gordon	112·44
Kincardine and Deeside	99·49
Moray	126·92
Badenoch and Strathspey	103·12
Caithness	131·37
Inverness	102·12
Lochaber	150·65
Nairn	102·14
Ross and Cromarty	162·06
Skye and Lochalsh	186·57
Sutherland	166·31
East Lothian	135·56
Edinburgh	177·42
Midlothian	133·34
West Lothian	137·70
Argyll and Bute	214·65
Bearsden and Milngavie	100·88
Clydebank	170·36
Clydesdale	138·55
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	122·33
Cumnock and Doon Valley	141·02
Cunninghame	150·31
Dumbarton	128·43
East Kilbride	107·04
Eastwood	81·85
Glasgow	230·24
Hamilton	138·35
Inverclyde	159·73
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	129·12
Kyle and Carrick	131·65
Monklands	175·72
Motherwell	154·17
Renfrew	147·98
Strathkelvin	125·58
Angus	113·99
Dundee	173·69
Perth and Kinross	126·69

[1] The per capita figures have been calculated using the Registrar General for Scotland's mid-1992 estimates of total population.

Johnstone

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will visit the town of Johnstone to evaluate the need for a generation strategy similar to that in place in Barrhead.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The method of selecting areas for regeneration initiatives is one of the issues raised in the consultation document "Progress in Partnership" which my right hon. Friend and I published on 4 October. We look forward to receiving responses by the deadline of 14 January 1994.

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list each of the sources his Department uses for names from which to make appointments to non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Lang: As can be seen from the current edition of "Public Bodies", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House, I make appointments to more than 160 different non-departmental public bodies which differ widely in nature and remit. The sources of names for appointment are equally diverse. I am always pleased to receive names for public appointment from any source.

Civil Servants (Dismissal)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the grounds for summary dismissal of civil servants in each Department.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* It is Scottish Office policy to dismiss staff only after agreed internal procedures have been followed and, in serious disciplinary cases, after a full investigation of the circumstances has taken place. Where appropriate, staff may be suspended from duty while these investigations are being carried out.

PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost of each visit to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

The Prime Minister: I have made 11 overseas visits involving 16 countries. The cost and purpose of each visit was as follows:

Destination	*1993*	*Purpose*	*Cost* £
India	23-28 January	Republic Day celebrations	179,512·00
Oman	28 January	Bilateral	
Saudi Arabia	28 January	Bilateral	
USA	23-25 February	Bilateral	46,696·00
Switzerland	5-6 April	Bilateral	7,246·00
Austria	6 April	Bilateral	
France (Paris)	27-28 May	Bilateral	4,421·00
Denmark	20-22 June	European Council	11,690·00[1]
Japan (Tokyo)	7-9 July	G7 Economic Summit	68,500·00[1]
Sweden (Stockholm)	11-13 August	Bilateral	31,724·00
Portugal (Lisbon)	22-23 August	Bilateral	5,296·00
Japan	17-21 September	Bilateral	173,907·00
Malaysia	21-22 September	Bilateral	
Monaco	23 September	Manchester 2000	
Cyprus	21-25 October	CHOGM	43,873·00
Belgium (Brussels)	29 October	Special European Council	4,243·00
Germany (Bonn)	25 November	Bilateral	Not yet available

[1] Costs also include those of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Official Residences

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what was the last year's annual fuel bill for each of the official residences at his disposal; and out of which Government budget they were paid;

(2) if he will list the official residences at his disposal for the use of Ministers in the Government.

The Prime Minister: Fuel costs at Chequers, Dorneywood and Chevening are met by independently administered trusts. The cost of utilities at those parts of Nos. 10, 11 and 12 Downing street used as residences, and of flats in Admiralty house, are not separately identifiable.

Ministers Abroad

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish in the *Official Report* the rules governing Ministers' activities and conduct abroad.

The Prime Minister: Guidance covering Ministers' visits overseas is contained in paragraphs 63-81 of "Questions of Procedure for Ministers", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Local Government

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he has given to the Minister for Local Government, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), on the propriety of making public statements indicating his own preferred structure for local government for the area including his own constituency.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Planning has the guidance given to all Government Ministers entitled "Questions of Procedure for Ministers". My hon. Friend has made it clear that decisions on local government reorganisation affecting his constituency will be taken by other Government Ministers.

10 Downing Street

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if *(a)* Mr. John Latsir, *(b)* Mr. Y. K. Pao, *(c)* Mr. Octav Botnar and *(d)* Mr. Lika-Shing have attended functions at 10 Downing street since 1980.

The Prime Minister: Yes, except, as far as I am aware, Mr. Botnar.

Irish Republic

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister when he will next meet the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic.

The Prime Minister: I expect to meet the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic in December.

Legislation (Local Representatives)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy on consulting and negotiations leading to agreement with local elected political representatives before undertaking legislation affecting each part of the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: This will depend on the nature of the legislation in question.

GATT

Mr. Wells: To ask the Prime Minister what progress has been made by the Commonwealth mission on GATT in bringing forward a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* I met members of the Commonwealth on 17 November at the end of their programme which included visits to Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, France, the United States, and Japan. The mission has brought home to the major participants in the negotiations that not only the developed world but a wide range of other countries have an interest in the success of the Uruguay round. The mission was able to speak on behalf of a third of the world's nations and a quarter of the world's people.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what further action he will be taking to assist the achievement of a successful outcome of the Uruguay round of GATT talks before the 15 December deadline; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Completion of the GATT Uruguay round by the 15 December deadline is currently the Government's top trade priority. My colleagues and I take every opportunity to stress to Governments both within and outside the European Community the importance of a satisfactory conclusion, and the need for all parties to bring this about. We are also doing all we can to support the European Commission, which negotiates on behalf of the European Community.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Greece on the policies to be followed by the new Greek Government regarding Cyprus.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* None.

Commonwealth Games

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what financial and other help from Her Majesty's Government the city of Manchester can expect if its bid to host the Commonwealth games in 2002 is successful.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* The Commonwealth Games Council for England will decide next February whether an English bid will be made for the 2002 Commonwealth games. It would therefore be premature for me to comment on the nature or scale of Government support in advance of that decision.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Animal Experiments

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many establishments in Northern Ireland can carry out research which requires experimentation on live animals; and if he will make a statement regarding the legal guidelines which are laid down for such experimentation.

Mr. Ancram: Nineteen establishments can carry out research on live animals in Northern Ireland. The use of animals in experiments is regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Sir John Wheeler: The information is as follows:

Home Civil Servants

Grade	Number employed	Number of Women
Grade 1	1	—
Grade 2	2	—
Grade 3	4	—
Grade 4	2	—
Grade 5	10	—
Grade 6	4	—
Grade 7	26	6
Senior Executive Officer	4	3
Senior Information Officer	1	—
Senior Research Officer	1	—
Higher Executive Officer (Development)	4	1
Higher Executive Officer	20	12
Administration Trainee	2	1
Research Officer	1	1
Executive Officer	28	15
Senior Personal Secretary	7	7
Typing Manager	1	1
Administrative Officer	19	11
Personal Secretary	15	15
Administrative Assistant	9	5
Typist	16	16
Catering Manager 1	1	—
Catering Manager 3	1	—
Support Manager 3	1	—
Chef 1	4	2
Support Grade Band 1	6	—
Support Grade Band 2	7	3
Industrials (Non-craft)	16	12
TOTAL	213	111

Northern Ireland Civil Servants Non-industrial

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Head of Service	0	1	1
Permanent Secretary (G2A)	0	6	6
Under Secretary (G3)	0	31	31
Unified Grade 4 (G4)	0	3	3
Assistant Secretary (G5)	12	104	116
Senior Principal (G6)	0	31	31
Principal (G7)	56	348	404
Accountant Grade 7	1	1	2
Deputy Principal	165	500	665
Accountant Deputy Principal	0	4	4
Staff Officer	427	581	1,008
Staff Officer (A)	2	9	11
Staff Officer (Accountant)	3	17	20
Administration Trainee	1	5	6
Executive Officer 1	800	599	1,399
EO1 (Accountant)	2	3	5
Auditor (SO) MIIA or BATS	2	8	10
Auditor (SO) MIIA and BATS	6	16	22
Auditor Deputy Principal MIIA or BATS	0	1	1
Auditor Deputy Principal MIIA and BATS	1	11	12
Social Security Officer 1	626	280	906
Executive Officer 2	1,004	499	1,503
Administrative Assistant	2,399	819	3,218
Administrative Officer	2,544	982	3,526
Social Security Officer 2B	1,304	505	1,809
Social Security Officer 2A	246	129	375
Administrative Assistant	1	1	2
Accommodation Manager/ess	0	2	2
Assistant Accommodation Manager/ess	1	1	2
Accommodation Manager (Enniskillen)	1	0	1
Chief Executive	0	1	1
Chief Agricultural Economist (G5)	0	1	1
Deputy Chief Agricultural Economist (G6)	0	2	2
Principal Agricultural Economist (G7)	2	3	5
Senior Agricultural Economist	0	3	3
Agricultural Economist	0	3	3
Assistant Agricultural Economist	1	0	1
Chief Executive Valuation and Lands Agency	0	1	1
Chief Executive	0	3	3
Senior Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer (G5)	0	2	2
Deputy Chief Agricultural Officer (G6)	0	3	3
Agricultural Inspector Grade I	1	22	23
Agricultural Inspector Grade II	7	65	72
Agricultural Inspector Grade III	48	110	158
Inspector Group 4	0	84	84
Agricultural Inspector Grade IV	1	3	4
Inspector Group 5	0	7	7
Post-Mortem Room Attendant	0	4	4
Inspector Group 3	0	34	34
Inspector Group 2	2	105	107
Inspector Group 1	12	121	133
Food Technology Technician	1	5	6
Chief Alkali and Radiochemical Inspector	0	1	1
Alkali and Radiochemical Inspector	0	4	4
Director of Works Service DOE (G4)	0	1	1
Chief Architect (G5)	0	1	1
SUPT Architect (G6)	0	2	2
PPTO (Architect) (G7)	0	23	23
SPTO (Architect)	2	20	22
HPTO (Architect)	2	3	5
SPTO (Architectural Assistant)	0	23	23
HPTO (Architectural Assistant)	0	27	27
PTO (Architectural Assistant)	2	45	47
HPTO (Maint Tech Architect)	0	1	1
PTO (Maint Tech Architect)	0	8	8
DIR Estate Services (G4)	0	1	1
Chief Executive (IDB)	0	1	1
Divisional Director	0	3	3
Principal Auditor (G7)	0	2	2
Snr Auditor H and SS (Acc)	0	2	2
Auditor H and SS (Acc)	3	2	5
Assistant Auditor	0	2	2
Audit Assistant DHSS	3	1	4
Asst Divisional Director	0	3	3
Chief Auditor (G5)	0	1	1
Principal Auditor LG (G7)	0	2	2
Auditor LG	0	4	4
Assistant Auditor LG	0	2	2
Senior Audit Assistant LG	1	2	3
PPTO (Building Surveyor) (G7)	0	1	1
SPTO (Building Surveyor)	0	4	4
HPTO (Building Surveyor)	0	3	3
PTO (Building Surveyor)	0	3	3
Career Adviser	1	3	4
Senior Careers Officer	9	7	16
Careers Officer	63	42	105

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Catering Adviser	1	0	1
Catering Manager 2	1	0	1
Catering Manager 3	1	0	1
Div Manager Belfast (G5)	0	2	2
Chief Civil Engineer (G5)	0	3	3
Divisional Manager (G6)	0	8	8
OPS Director Water (G5)	0	1	1
Supt Civil Engineer (G6)	0	8	8
PPTO Civil Engineer	0	73	73
SPTO (Civil Engineer)	3	180	183
HPTO (Civil Engineer)	6	85	91
Grad Trainee Civil Engineer	4	19	23
SPTO (Civil Eng Asst)	1	42	43
HPTO (Civil Eng Asst)	5	197	202
PTO (Civil Eng Asst)	20	505	525
TG1 Trnee Civil Eng Asst	0	8	8
O Level Trnee Civil Eng Asst	5	56	61
Chief Clerk of Works (SPTO)	0	4	4
Clerk of Works 1 (HPTO)	0	20	20
Clerk of Works 2 (PTO)	0	88	88
Manager/Warden	0	1	1
Assistant Manager Warden	0	1	1
Director of Conservation	0	1	1
HPTO (Senior Warden)	0	2	2
PTO Warden	0	11	11
TG1 (Assistant Warden)	3	9	12
Chief Dental Officer	0	1	1
Dental Officer	0	4	4
Dental Surgery Assistant	3	0	3
Development Executive	5	9	14
Deputy Development Executive	1	1	2
Assistant Development Executive	0	2	2
Assistant Secretary Statistician (G5)	0	1	1
Senior Principal Statistician (G6)	0	1	1
Principal Statistician (G7)	5	12	17
Deputy Principal Statistician	17	14	31
Senior Assistant Statistician	5	12	17
Assistant Statistician	3	9	12
Assistant Secretary Economist (G5)	0	1	1
Special Economist (G6)	0	1	1
Principal Economist (G7)	1	7	8
Deputy Economist	2	5	7
Senior Assistant Economist	2	5	7
Assistant Economist	3	4	7
Director Environmental Services (G4)	0	1	1
Director Environmental Protection (G5)	0	1	1
Chief Environmental Health Officer (G6)	0	1	1
Senior Environmental Health Officer (G7)	0	2	2
Environmental Health Officer	1	1	2
Estates Superintendent HPTO	0	1	1
Controller (CTO) (G6)	0	1	1
Chief Examiner (CTO)	0	2	2
Senior Examiner	1	0	1
Deputy Crown Solicitor (G4)	0	1	1
Chief Inspector (Health and Safety) (G5)	0	1	1
Deputy Chief Inspector (Health and Safety)	0	2	2
Principal Inspector (Health and Safety)	0	10	10
Inspector (Health and Safety)	1	6	7
Inspector 2 (Health and Safety)	0	3	3
Fire Officer 1	0	2	2
Senior Fire Officer	0	1	1
Fire Officer	0	4	4
Fire Officer 2 (PTO)	0	2	2
PTO4 Drilling Rig Supervisor	0	2	2
Chief Fisheries Officer	0	1	1
Deputy Chief Fisheries Officer	0	2	2
Senior Fisheries Officer	0	3	3
Fisheries Officer 1	0	12	12
Fisheries Officer 2	0	10	10
Area Foreman (PTO)	0	6	6
Technical Grade 1 (DANI)	0	26	26
Chief Forest Officer (G5)	0	1	1
Forest Operations Officer	0	1	1
Divisional Officer (G7)	0	2	2
Forest Officer I	0	11	11
Forest Officer II	0	11	11
Forest Officer III	0	21	21
Forest Officer IV	1	23	24
Area Forest Engineer	0	3	3
General Manager TC (G7)	0	1	1
Senior Instructional Officer	0	41	41
Higher Instructional Officer—NIO	0	2	2
Higher instructional officer	2	47	49
Instructional officer 1	13	262	275
SPTO graphic designer	0	1	1
HPTO graphic designer	0	1	1
Audio visual technician	0	1	1
PTO graphic designer	0	5	5
Training service manager	4	27	31
Principal inspector	1	0	1
Senior inspector	2	5	7
Principal photographer	0	1	1
PTO supervisor (historic monuments)	0	1	1
PTO senior supervisor (historic monuments BD. B.)	0	1	1
Senior photographer	0	1	1
Custodian (historic monuments)	0	1	1
Photographic officer	0	1	1
Assistant draughtsman illustrator	0	1	1
Photographer	0	1	1
Field monument warden	1	2	3
Senior imports inspector	0	4	4
Imports inspector	0	12	12
Senior industrial accountant	0	2	2
Industrial accountant (G7)	2	7	9
Management accountant	0	1	1
Assistant industrial accountant	0	2	2
Deputy director information services (GR 5)	0	1	1
SP information officer (G6)	0	2	2
Principal information officer (G7)	0	6	6
Deputy principal information officer	5	6	11
Information officer	3	2	5
Chief inspector (G3)	0	1	1
Deputy chief inspector (G4)	0	1	1
Staff inspector (G5)	1	5	6
Inspector (G6)	15	34	49
Senior housing inspector (HPTO)	0	1	1
Housing inspector 2 (PTO)	0	1	1
Investigation officer	0	4	4
PTO (interior designer)	0	1	1
PPTO (landscape architect)	0	3	3
SPTO (landscape architect)	1	1	2
SPTO landscape architect	0	1	1
HPTO (landscape architect's assistant)	0	1	1
PTO (landscape architect's assistant)	3	4	7
PTO development control inspector	0	10	10
PTO senior photographers	1	0	1
TG1 photographer	0	1	1
Chief law clerk	1	5	6
Registrar lands tribunal	0	1	1
Senior law clerk	8	6	14
Law clerk 1	22	18	40
Law clerk 2	3	2	5
1st legislative draftsman (G2B)	0	1	1
2nd legislative draftsman (G3)	1	1	2
Librarian	0	2	2
Assistant librarian	4	1	5
Deputy director MGT training	0	1	1
Senior MGT training adviser	0	1	1
Management training adviser	0	1	1
Chief mapper	1	1	2
Superintendent mapper	2	3	5
Senior mapper	7	6	13
Technical grade 1	37	48	85
Mapper	24	17	41
Technical grade 2	9	15	24
HPTO ferry manager	0	1	1
Ship's captain	0	1	1
DDEE harbour master/foreman works	0	1	1
Ship's engineer	0	2	2
Ship's mate	0	1	1
Director of OSNI	0	1	1
Deputy director ordinance survey (G6)	0	1	1
PR mapping and charting of (G7)	0	3	3

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Senior map and charting officer	0	6	6
Higher map and charting officer	0	17	17
Mapping and charting officer	8	120	128
Map and charting technical grade 2	1	9	10
Map and charting technical grade 1	6	23	29
Map and charting technical grade 1	0	2	2
Senior meat inspector	0	12	12
Meat inspector	9	82	91
Poultry meat inspector	6	20	26
PTO electrical engineer assistant	0	10	10
G/T electrical engineer	0	1	1
Trainee electrical engineer assistant	1	6	7
Superintendent M+E engineer (G6)	0	2	2
PPTO (M&E engineer) (G7)	0	20	20
SPTO (M&E engineer)	0	12	12
HPTO (M&E engineer)	2	7	9
Grad TR M&E engineer	0	3	3
TR mechanical engineer assistant	0	2	2
SPTO (M&E engineering assistant)	0	33	33
HPTO (M&E engineer assistant)	0	56	56
PTO (M&E engineer assistant)	0	110	110
PT04 (M&E engineer assistant)	0	1	1
PTO (service engineer)	0	3	3
SPTO (superintendent of works)	0	2	2
HPTO (superintendent of works)	0	1	1
POT (superintendent of works)	0	6	6
Chief medical officer	0	1	1
Deputy chief medical officer	1	1	2
Principal medical officer	0	4	4
Senior medical officer	4	5	9
Medical officer	5	11	16
Medical officer (PT-time)	0	3	3
PTO materials testing TH	0	2	2
Chief nursing officer	0	1	1
Principal nursing officer	0	1	1
Nursing officer	3	1	4
Nursing grade G	1	0	1
Nurse grade F	1	0	1
Nurse grade C	2	0	2
Senior assistant director DPP	0	2	2
Superintendent office machines	0	1	1
Assistant supervisor office machinery	0	1	1
Support manager 2	3	1	4
Support manager 3	18	20	38
Support grade band 1	316	245	561
Support grade band 2	290	393	683
Chief pharmaceutical officer (G5)	0	1	1
Senior principal pharmaceutical officer	0	1	1
Principal pharmaceutical officer	0	2	2
Pharmaceutical officer	0	1	1
Director T and C planning (G4)	0	1	1
DV planning officer (G5) BF	0	1	1
Assistant director planning (G5)	0	1	1
DV planning officer (G6)	0	5	5
Superintendent planning officer (G6)	0	2	2
PPTO planning officer	4	13	17
SPTO (planning officer)	5	42	47
HPTO (planning officer)	13	26	39
GRAD TR planning officer	0	1	1
HPTO (planning assistant)	7	34	41
PTO (planning assistant)	12	42	54
Trainee planning assistant	7	5	12
Chief education and training officer (G7)	1	0	1
Education officer HOD2	0	1	1
Education officer HOD1	1	2	3
Senior teacher	1	1	2
DC ED and training officer (NIO)	0	1	1
Teacher	6	6	12
HPTO prison industries	0	3	3
PTO (prison industries)	0	1	1
Chief examiner (G7)	0	1	1
Deputy chief driving examiner	0	1	1
Deputy chief examiner (SPTO)	0	3	3
Supervising examiner	0	2	2
District examiner	0	14	14
PTO vehicle driving examiner	0	119	119
Senior driving examiner	0	3	3
Driving/traffic examiner	0	9	9

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Chief psychologist (GR6)	1	0	1
Senior psychologist	0	1	1
Higher psychologist	0	2	2
Principal psychologist	1	0	1
Curatorial grade A (G5)	0	1	1
Curatorial grade B (G6)	0	1	1
Curatorial grade C (G7)	2	2	4
Curatorial grade E	4	10	14
Curatorial grade F	2	2	4
Conservation grade F	1	4	5
Superintendent quantity surveyor (G6)	0	5	5
PPTO (quantity surveyor) (G7)	0	14	14
SPTO (quantity surveyor)	1	10	11
HPTO (quantity surveyor)	0	6	6
GRAD TR quantity surveyor	0	1	1
SPTO (quantity surveying assistant)	0	11	11
HPTO (quantity surveying assistant)	0	13	13
PTO (quantity surveying assistant)	1	9	10
Senior enforcement officer	0	2	2
Enforcement Officer	1	5	6
PTO Supervisor (Roads)	0	41	41
Director of Roads Service (G4)	0	1	1
Deputy Chief Scentific Officer (G5)	0	2	2
SP Scientific Officer (G6)	0	17	17
Principal Scientific Officer (G7)	6	68	74
Senior Scientific Officer	27	109	136
Higher Scientific Officer	32	110	142
Scientific Officer	62	114	176
Brucella Tester	9	4	13
Assistant Scientific Officer	101	128	229
PT04 Supervisor	0	6	6
Security Guard	0	7	7
Security Officer	0	7	7
SPTO Health and Safety Adviser	0	3	3
HPTO Safety Advisory Officer	0	15	15
Chief Inspector (SSI)(G4)	0	1	1
Assistant Chief Inspector	0	3	3
Inspector (SSI)	5	8	13
Head Legal Services (G3)	0	1	1
Deputy Head of Legal Service	0	1	1
Assistant Solicitor (G5) NS	0	24	24
Deputy Registrar Land Reg	0	1	1
Senior Legal Assistant	34	49	83
Legal Assistant	26	6	32
SPTO (Prison Transport)	0	1	1
Supplies Officer	0	1	1
SPTO (Supplies)	0	1	1
HPTO (Supplies)	0	4	4
PTO Supplies	1	15	16
Stores Officer (Grade C)	0	5	5
PTO Stores Liaison Officer	0	6	6
Chief Structural Engineer UN GR 5	0	1	1
Superintendant Structural Engineer (G6)	0	1	1
PPTO Structural Engineer	0	4	4
SPTO (Structural Engineer)	0	11	11
SPTO (Structural Engineering Assistant	0	2	2
HPTO (Structural Engineering Assistant)	0	7	7
PTO (Structural Engineering Assistant)	0	13	13
Superintendant Systems Analyst (G7)	0	7	7
Senior Systems Analyst	12	59	71
Systems Analyst	32	119	151
Programmer/Analyst	41	111	152
Programmer	28	96	124
SW Course Student (IT)	8	13	21
Assistant Programmer	2	5	7
Principal Transport Manager	0	1	1
Area Transport Manager	0	2	2
Assistant Area Transport Manager	0	3	3
Fleet Centre Manager	0	1	1
PTO Workshop Supervisor	0	4	4
Chief Typing Manager	11	0	11
Typing Manager	110	0	110
Typist	1,132	1	1,133
Senior Personal Secretary	36	0	36
Personal Secretary	196	0	196
Assistant commissioner	0	3	3
District valuer (G6)	0	10	10
Senior valuer (G7)	0	26	26

Grade	Female	Male	Total
Valuer I	0	63	63
Valuer II	14	40	54
Senior valuation assistant	0	12	12
Valuation assistant	4	37	41
DC veterinary officer (G5)	0	2	2
SP veterinary officer (G6)	1	4	5
Divisional veterinary officer	1	23	24
Veterinary officer (G7)	22	58	80
Chief veterinary research officer (G5)	0	1	1
Deputy chief veterinary officer	0	2	2
Senior veterinary research officer 1 (G6)	0	3	3
Senior veterinary research officer 2	1	5	6
Veterinary research officer (G7)	2	13	15
PTO water supervisor/SE	0	7	7
Director water service (G4)	0	1	1
HPTO (water supervisor)	0	4	4
PTO (water supervisor)	0	141	141
Assistant supervisor water (personnel)	0	3	3
HPTO projects officer	0	1	1
Chief inspector trading standards (G7)	0	1	1
Deputy chief trading standards officer	0	2	2
Area inspector	0	7	7
Senior inspector	0	1	1
Trading standards inspector	0	15	15
Principal (work study) (G7)	0	1	1
HPTO (work study officer)	0	1	1
Senior work study officer	0	2	2
PTO (work study officer)	0	14	14
Senior telecommunications engineer (SPTO)	0	2	2
Telecommunications technical engineer I	0	12	12
Telecommunications technical engineer II	0	19	19
Telecommunications engineering technician	0	76	76
PTO	0	4	4
PTO model maker	0	1	1
Under secretary (personnel appointments)	0	1	1
Director management training (PA)	0	1	1
Management training adviser	0	2	2
Temporary veterinary officer	5	19	24
Investigation officer (PA)	0	6	6
Principal librarian (PA)	0	1	1
TOTAL NON-INDUSTRIALS	12,748	12,147	24,895
Industrials:			
Craft	1	628	629
Non-craft	67	3,731	3,798
TOTAL INDUSTRIALS	68	4,359	4,427
OVERALL NICS TOTAL	12,816	16,506	29,322

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the Royal Victoria hospital has obtained in revenue from health authorities in the Irish Republic through the sale of bed space and theatre time for the treatment of patients from the Irish Republic; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the sale on the treatment of patients from within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The Royal group of hospitals has won a contract to carry out hip replacement operations for Eire patients. Under this arrangement some 300 patients will undergo surgery at the Royal. This has now commenced. The contract involves a half million pounds deal in a major bid by the Cork regional hospital to reduce its waiting list. No Northern Ireland people will suffer because of the Royal's arrangement with Cork. The Royal group remains committed to fulfilling obligations to patients through existing contracts with Northern Ireland health and social services boards. These contracts do not at present include hip replacement procedures.

Adoptive Mothers

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will extend the provision of statutory maternity benefits to adoptive mothers.

Mr. Ancram: Statutory maternity pay and maternity allowance provide a measure of earnings replacement to help working women give up work around the time of the birth in the interests of their own and their unborn baby's health. There are no plans to extend the provisions to mothers of adopted children.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Incomes

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average income per head by the smallest available geographical areas for which information is available for the most recent available year.

Mr. Nelson: The latest available estimates for household income, by standard region for 1991, and by county for 1990, were published in the May 1993 issue of "Economic Trends", available in the House of Commons Library. These estimates provide a breakdown of household gross and disposable income in pounds-million and per head of resident population.

Intra-EC Trade

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Intrastat system for measuring intra-EC trade.

Sir John Cope: The current system of collecting intra-EC trade—Intrastat—which was introduced as a result of the implementation of the single market on 1 January 1993 is radically different to the previous one which was based on customs documentation. Intrastat relies on a declaration by the larger traders of the details of their EC trade. A change of this magnitude has required constant assessment of all aspects of the new system.

A range of performance indicators is being monitored, including both the response levels of businesses required to complete the special returns and the error rates on returns. Both indicators have shown a continuous improvement with targets set for the new system prior to its introduction being met. Currently there is a compliance rate of 95 per cent.; amongst the highest in the EC. Some commentators have suggested there may be a discontinuity in the figures based on past trends and customs is carrying out additional checks and audits. But overall the Instrastat system is meeting operational objectives and is expected to provide timely and reliable statistics. A more general assessment of Intrastat in the context of the single market changes has been conducted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and will form part of a policy evaluation review to be published shortly.

EC Contributions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest assumption for United Kingdom net contributions to the EC in the 1994 calendar financial year; and what assumptions have been made on

the level, in the period, of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product and the exchange rate between the pound sterling and the ecu.

Sir John Cope: The latest forecast of the United Kingdom's net contribution to EC institutions by United Kingdom financial year, for the years to 1996-97, together with relevant economic assumptions, will be published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" on 30 November. The 1994 EC budget is expected to be adopted by the European Parliament in December. Following its adoption, the Government will publish a White Paper, "Statement on the 1994 Community Budget". The statement will include a calendar year forecast for the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC budget in 1994.

Meanwhile the position remains as set out in the explanatory memorandum on the draft 1994 EC budget submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 22 November 1993.

Credit Unions

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has further to support the development of credit unions in communities and workplaces.

Mr. Nelson: The credit union sector continues to expand steadily. There are now 316 community-based and 57 workplace credit unions in Great Britain. Three bodies exist to promote the further growth of the credit union movement: the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd., the Forum of Credit Unions Salford—FOCUS—and the National Federation of Savings and Co-operative Credit Unions. Funds have been made available through the DOE's urban programme to assist with the development of credit unions. Grants totalling £500,000 supported 20 projects in 1992-93.

Independent Forecasters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the qualifications of his current panel of independent forecaster advisers to his Department; when their term of office is due to expire; what plans he has for replacements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The panel members are all highly-respected economists, and experienced forecasters, who represent a range of views on how the economy works and a variety of forecasting institutions.

Appointment to the panel was for a renewable two-year period. I will review membership of the panel towards the end of this period, at the end of 1994.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of *(a)* individuals and *(b)* trusts that have gains falling below the capital gains tax annual exempt amount for the latest year available.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that precise estimates are not possible, but the number of individuals and trusts with total net chargeable gains below the capital gains tax annual exempt amount and above £1,000 in 1992-93 could be in the order of half a million.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for 1994-95 or the latest year available an estimate of the yield and the number of taxpayers affected by restricting the capital gains tax allowance to relief at the *(a)* 25p rate and *(b)* 20p rate.

Mr. Dorrell: Under current rules, net chargeable gains below the capital gains tax annual exempt amount are totally exempt from tax. The effects of restricting this relief at the 25 per cent. and 20 per cent. rates are given in the table based on 1992-93 liabilities. The estimates assume the restriction would affect only individuals with gains above the annual exempt amount and do not allow for any consequential change in their behaviour.

	Number of taxpayers affected	*Capital gains tax yield (£ million)*
Restricting the relief to		
(a) 25 per cent. rate	50,000	40
(b) 20 per cent. rate	75,000	60

Pensionable Earnings

Mr. Bates: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax is expected to be raised from capping pensionable earnings in *(a)* 1993-94, *(b)* 2003-04 and *(c)* 2013-14.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available.

Share Offers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total expenditure of his Department on advertising and promoting share offers in *(a)* gas, *(b)* electricity, *(c)* water and *(d)* telecommunications.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the cost to the Government of marketing the privatisations and secondary offers within the sectors specified. The marketing expenses include the costs of advertising. The costs of the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity plc will shortly be reported to Parliament.

Marketing costs of privatisations and secondary offers

Share offer	*Year*	*£ million*
BT	1984	14
British Gas	1986	40
Water	1989	[1]36
Electricity (England and Wales)	1990-91	[1][2]22
Electricity (Scotland)	1991	[1]6
BT		
1991	40	
BT	1993	31

[1] Excluding VAT.
[2] Costs to 31 December 1991.

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated total value of mortgage income tax relief for the United Kingdom, and for each standard region, for the latest available financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Estimates for 1993-94 based on a projection of the 1992 family expenditure survey are given in the table.

Cost of Mortgage Interest Relief

Region	£ million
North	190
Yorkshire/Humberside	350
North West	450
East Midlands	350
West Midlands	390
East Anglia	170
Greater London	500
South East	1,000
South West	380
England	3,780
Wales	180
Scotland	280
Northern Ireland	60
United Kingdom	4,300

The figures are based on current interest rates as it is not yet known what reductions mortgage lenders will make following the recent reduction in the base rate.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the tax revenues lost to the Government through residence in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man for the purpose of tax avoidance.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that information on which to base such an estimate is not available.

Income Tax

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals paid income tax in the latest year for which figures are available; and what percentage were liable for the higher rate of tax.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest estimate of the number of taxpayers in 1993-94 is 24·8 million. Of these, about 7·4 per cent. will be liable at the higher rate.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money would be raised by *(a)* a top tax rate of 50 per cent. for income over £35,000 and *(b)* a top tax rate of 50 per cent. for income over £50,000.

Mr. Dorrell: Higher rate income tax is charged on taxable income—that is gross income for tax purposes less those allowances and reliefs which are available at the taxpayers's marginal rate—in excess of the basic rate limit.

At 1994-95 income levels, the yield in a full year from the introduction of a 50 per cent. rate on taxable incomes over £35,000 would be about £2·8 billion and the yield from the introduction of a 50 per cent. rate on taxable incomes over £50,000 would be about £1·9 billion. These estimates do not allow for any behavioural effect that might result from such changes to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the change in income tax in each year since 1978-79 as against the 1978-79 indexed regime broken down into the top 1 per cent., 5 per cent., 10 per cent. and bottom 70 per cent., 50 per cent. and 30 per cent. and all taxpayers, giving the number of taxpayers in each category.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer November 1993]:* Readily available information on the annual reduction in income tax liability for the years 1989-90 to 1993-94, compared with the 1978-79 indexed regime is given in the tables. The 1978-79 regime has been indexed by reference to the statutory formula and allowing for independent taxation from 1990-91 onwards. For 1989-90 married couples are counted as one unit. For the purpose of these calculations the indexed regime of 1978-79 is applied directly to the later income base. In practice, retention of the regime, indexed as appropriate, for the intervening years would have led to changes in the income base.

1989-90

Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978-79 indexed regime (Per cent.)	Numbers of taxpayers (Thousands)	Reduction in tax (£ million)
Top 1	200	7,100
Top 5	1,100	11,000
Top 10	2,300	13,400
Bottom 70	15,900	6,700
Bottom 50	11,400	3,500
Bottom 30	6,800	1,400
All taxpayers	22,700	25,300

1990-91

Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978-79 indexed regime (Per cent.)	Numbers of taxpayers (Thousands)	Reduction in tax (£ million)
Top 1	300	8,500
Top 5	1,400	13,000
Top 10	2,800	15,800
Bottom 70	19,600	7,200
Bottom 50	14,000	3,600
Bottom 30	8,400	1,400
All taxpayers	28,000	29,100

1991-92

Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978-79 indexed regime (per cent.)	Numbers of taxpayers (thousands)	Reduction in tax (£ million)
Top 1	300	9,500
Top 5	1,400	13,900
Top 10	2,800	16,600
Bottom 70	19,300	7,300
Bottom 50	13,800	3,600
Bottom 30	8,300	1,400
All taxpayers	27,600	30,000

1992-93

Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978-79 indexed regime (per cent.)	Numbers of taxpayers (thousands)	Reduction in tax (£ million)
Top 1	300	9,600
Top 5	1,300	14,000
Top 10	2,700	16,700
Bottom 70	18,800	8,700
Bottom 50	13,400	4,500
Bottom 30	8,000	1,800
All taxpayers	26,800	32,000

1993-94

Quantile group of taxpayers under the 1978-79 indexed regime (Per cent.)	*Numbers of taxpayers (Thousands)*	*Reduction in tax (£ million)*
Top 1	300	9,300
Top 5	1,300	13,100
Top 10	2,600	15,600
Bottom 70	18,500	8,700
Bottom 50	13,200	4,500
Bottom 30	7,900	1,700
All taxpayers	26,400	31,000

VAT

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown by region and county of the number of businesses that have registered and de-registered for value added tax since 1981.

Sir John Cope: Customs holds registration and deregistration information by local office and groups these offices to form collections. It is only able to provide this information, by collection, for the period from January 1987 to September 1993. This is as follows:

Registrations

Collection	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*[1]1993*
Belfast	3,413	3,952	4,373	4,226	3,607	3,674	3,173
Birmingham	13,973	16,550	18,169	16,297	14,044	13,291	11,67[illegible]
Dover	6,186	7,795	7,552	7,104	6,575	5,859	5,13[illegible]
East Anglia	7,874	9,474	9,625	8,475	8,564	8,061	6,735
East Midlands	10,591	12,799	14,354	12,100	10,592	9,429	8,308
Edinburgh	7,423	7,808	8,228	7,873	6,667	6,604	5,375
Glasgow	5,460	5,757	8,297	7,477	6,728	6,188	5,118
Leeds	10,515	12,821	14,124	12,496	11,035	10,256	7,837
Liverpool	9,866	12,246	13,239	12,548	10,724	9,815	7,769
London Central	5,492	5,214	5,346	5,290	4,614	4,772	4,455
London North and West	11,681	13,517	15,901	14,305	11,447	10,956	8,927
London Port	7,851	9,064	10,252	8,187	6,980	6,682	5,355
London South	13,028	14,482	16,573	14,875	12,455	11,699	10,901
Manchester	10,827	12,382	14,013	13,577	12,099	11,259	8,962
Northampton	15,518	18,390	19,060	17,345	13,229	12,087	10,015
North England	6,345	7,854	8,409	7,290	5,942	5,756	4,425
Southampton	12,194	13,807	16,261	12,903	10,744	9,658	8,432
South West and Borders	10,404	13,535	14,624	12,942	10,582	9,629	7,700
South West England	13,376	16,839	16,972	13,803	11,681	10,965	9,300
Thames Valley	16,027	19,230	21,141	20,223	17,639	16,615	13,207

[1] To September.

Deregistrations

Collection	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*[1]1993*
Belfast	2,920	7,498	3,224	3,113	3,783	3,595	2,391
Birmingham	11,580	12,571	12,637	12,519	16,963	17,002	11,419
Dover	4,403	5,784	4,952	5,736	9,765	8,915	5,519
East Anglia	5,814	10,125	9,625	8,475	8,564	8,061	7,339
East Midlands	8,726	11,104	9,753	10,026	13,258	12,235	8,247
Edinburgh	6,108	9,562	6,042	6,065	7,440	6,757	5,158
Glasgow	4,494	5,095	6,279	6,178	8,035	7,033	4,864
Leeds	8,985	10,522	10,041	10,284	13,621	12,383	8,761
Liverpool	8,645	9,837	10,061	10,002	13,207	12,991	8,364
London Central	4,071	4,867	4,232	4,453	4,677	4,839	4,154
London North and West	8,421	8,568	9,938	10,687	13,765	15,070	10,312
London Port	5,722	6,741	6,457	5,913	10,275	10,048	6,909
London South	8,384	9,394	10,515	10,832	15,038	14,613	10,113
Manchester	9,670	9,822	10,248	9,641	13,571	13,387	9,399
Northampton	10,157	15,446	11,777	12,857	16,451	15,143	9,622
North England	5,354	6,283	5,998	6,357	7,686	7,242	5,088
Southampton	8,484	12,220	10,411	9,739	14,476	13,783	9,525
South West and Borders	8,156	14,380	10,296	10,437	14,394	11,902	8,898
South West England	10,525	16,687	11,716	11,751	16,461	15,811	10,320
Thames Valley	11,214	15,057	13,865	14,722	21,431	19,824	13,276

[1] to September.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will be taxing the DVLA staff's receipt of charter mark bookmarks, coasters and vehicle licence holders as a work-related benefit.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* The cost of these items was 90p per employee. The Inland Revenue will deal with these tiny amounts as it would with similar benefits for other employees.

Agency Chief Executives

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the chief executives of national agencies set up by the Government in the past 14 years are on performance-related pay; and if he will name the agencies concerned.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* Seventy-three of the 84 chief executives appointed to next steps agencies—excluding those in Northern Ireland agencies for which I am not responsible—are eligible for performance-related pay and the agencies concerned are as listed:

Next steps—Executive Agencies—Chief Executives eligible for performance-related pay

Accounts Services Agency
ADAS
Building Research Establishment
Cadw (Welsh Historic Monuments)
Central Office of Information
Central Science Laboratory
Central Veterinary Laboratory
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment
Chessington Computer Centre
Civil Service College
Companies House
Defence Analytical Services Agency
Defence Operational Analysis Centre
Directorate General of Defence Accounts
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Driving Standards Agency
DVOIT
Employment Service
Fire Service College
Forensic Science Service
Government Property Lawyers
Her Majesty's Prison Service
Historic Royal Palaces
Historic Scotland
HMSO
Insolvency Service
Intervention Board
Laboratory of the Government Chemist
Land Registry
Medicines Control Agency
Meteorological Office
National Physical Laboratory
National Weights and Measures Laboratory
Natural Resource Institute
NEL
NHS Estates
NHS Pensions Agency
Occupational Health Service
Ordnance Survey
Patent Office
Paymaster General's Office
Pesticides Safety Directorate
Planning Inspectorate
Public Record Office
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Radiocommunications Agency
Recruitment and Assessment Services Agency
Registers of Scotland
Royal Mint
Royal Parks
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency
Scottish Office Pensions Agency
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Record Office
Service Children's Schools (North West Europe)
Social Security Benefits Agency
Social Security Child Support Agency
Social Security Contributions Agency
Social Security Information Technology Services Agency
Social Security Resettlement Agency
Teachers' Pensions Agency
The Buying Agency
Transport and Security Services
Transport Research Laboratory
United Kingdom Passport Agency
Valuation Office
Vehicle Certification Agency
Vehicle Inspectorate
Veterinary Medicines Directorate
War Pensions Agency
Warren Spring Laboratory
Wilton Park Conference Centre

TRANSPORT

Road Construction

10. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the total cost of proposed budget for new roads over the next five years, and by how much it has been reduced as a result of recent discussions with the Treasury.

Mr. MacGregor: I expect to spend over £1·3 billion in 1993-94 on new construction of national roads in England. As for future years, I cannot, of course, pre-empt tomorrow's unified Budget statement.

Buses, London

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to develop an overall strategic policy for London following the decision not to proceed with deregulation of bus services in London.

Mr. Norris: Our strategy for transport in London focuses on three priorities: improving the management of the road, rail and bus networks; modernising and where necessary expanding the provision of transport infrastructure; and making greater use of private sector resources and skills. The policies for buses which we announced earlier this month are fully consistent with that approach.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers are transported on London area buses on an average day; what was the figure five years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: In 1992-93 the number of passenger journeys on LT buses was 1,127 million—3·09 million per day. In 1987-88 there were 1,211 million—3·31 million per day.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the net receipt which his Department expects for the privatisation of each of the subsidiary companies of London Buses Ltd.

Mr. Norris: The Department's estimate of the net receipts from the sale of the London Buses Ltd. subsidiary companies is commercially confidential and thus cannot be made publicly available.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the timetable for tendering all the London Transport bus routes which have not yet been put out to tender.

Mr. Norris: The timetable for tendering the remaining London Transport bus routes which have not been put out to tender is currently under consideration.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications of the proposed privatisation of the subsidiary companies of London Buses Ltd. for the pension fund of current and former London Transport employees.

Mr. Norris: The proposed privatisation of the London Buses Ltd. subsidiary companies will not affect the pensions of former employees of the subsidiary companies. The pension position of current employees of those companies is now under consideration. I recognise the concerns of employees about their pension arrangements, and will soon give London Transport guidance on the treatment of these in the privatisation.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the minimum subsidy requirement in 1994-95 for London Transport bus services; and what comparable level of subsidy has been required for each year since 1987-88.

Mr. Norris: The total of revenue grant support for London Transport bus services, including tendered bus services, for the years 1987-88 to 1992-93, was as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	83·0
1988-89	79·3
1989-90	67·7
1990-91	88·3
1991-92	101·9
1992-93	100·6

The current forecast for 1993-94 is £52·1 million. The amount of revenue grant support for 1994-95 will be determined in due course in consultation with London Transport.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to specifying a minimum reserve price for each of the subsidiary companies of London Buses Ltd. which he is proposing to privatise.

Mr. Norris: There are no plans to specify a minimum reserve price for the subsidiary companies of London Buses Ltd.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current book value of *(a)* the vehicles, *(b)* the garages and *(c)* all other assets of each of the subsidiary companies of London Buses Ltd.

Mr. Norris: At 31 March 1993, the net book value of the vehicles within the London Buses Ltd. group was £164 million; the net book value of the property was £143 million; and the net book value of the remaining assets was £21 million. These valuations reflect the current value or replacement cost of the assets, reduced by the proportion of the life of the asset which is already expired, in line with normal public sector accounting practice.

West Coast Main Line

13. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will next meet with the chairman of British Rail to discuss investment in the west coast line.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. Friend regularly meets both the chariman of British Rail and the chairman designate of Railtrack to discuss current railway issues. Further announcements about investment in the west coast main line will follow the outcome of the public expenditure survey.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the Hambros study into possible joint public/private sector financing initiatives for the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: I expect to be able to do so very shortly.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the detailed terms of reference of the Hambros research project into joint private sector/public sector alternatives for financing the west coast main line project; when the Hambros report was received by his Department; when it will be made public; and what amount was paid to Hambros for the research work.

Mr. Freeman: Hambros's remit is to examine the scope for using private finance to modernise the infrastructure of the west coast main line. We expect to receive the Hambros report shortly, but no decision has yet been taken concerning publication. Hambros's final invoice has yet to be received

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to make an official journey on the InterCity train between London and Carlisle.

Mr. Freeman: I last travelled to Carlisle on the west coast main line on Monday 14 June. I intend to repeat the journey again in the coming months.

Airport Privatisation

14. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incentives he intends to give local authorities to privatise their airports.

26. **Sir John Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on encouraging local authorities to privatise their airports.

Mr. MacGregor: BAA has proved that the private sector is ready and willing to provide capital investment for airports. I have therefore reduced the amount allocated to local authority airports to the level necessary for safety and security measures. The local authority owners, therefore, have every incentive to consider privatisation.

Railway Electrification

15. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on railway electrification.

Mr. Freeman: Under our plans for restructuring the railway, it will be for Railtrack, in the first instance, to consider the case for the electrification of any particular line.

M27

16. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the appointment of consultants to study the widening of the M27 motorway.

Mr. Key: The widening is being considered within the review of scheme priorities announced by my right hon. Friend in August. Any decision about the appointment of consultants will have to await the outcome.

London-Colchester Railway Line

17. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures will be pursued to improve services for travellers on the London-Colchester line.

Mr. Freeman: The bulk of London to Colchester services are provided by the Great Eastern route group of Network SouthEast, which is already one of the best performing lines.

In addition, the route is currently undergoing a major resignalling scheme, at a cost of £100 million. When this is completed I expect to see performance improve even further.

Hazardous Freight

18. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to subsidise the Trainload Freight division of British Rail in order to arrest the switch towards road transport of flammable petroleum based products.

Mr. Freeman: Under the Railways Act 1993, a new environmental grant is to be introduced next April to help marginal rail freight flows with the payment of track access charges. In addition, all freight operators, including BR, will be eligible for the enhanced freight facilities grants scheme.

Jubilee Line Extension

19. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to ensure fair play in the allocation of Jubilee line construction contracts.

Mr. Norris: The award of contracts for the Jubilee line extension (JLE) is entirely a matter for London Underground Ltd. LUL has a duty to secure competitive tenders in a proper, legal fashion, having regard for EC directives, and to secure best value for taxpayers' money.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

20. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects construction of the channel tunnel fast link to commence.

Mr. Freeman: Construction commencement depends on the progress of a hybrid Bill through Parliament. We expect that a Bill will be ready for introduction to Parliament next autumn.

Seat Belts

21. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to make mandatory the installation of seat belts in buses and coaches in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Key: The Department is currently looking at the circumstances surrounding the recent tragic coach and minibus accidents and is reviewing the full technical and cost implications of the compulsory fitment of seat belts in minibuses and coaches. It would not be right to take any decisions before this work has been completed.

Transport Expenditure, London

22. **Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of public spending on transport in London is spent on roads; and what proportion on public transport.

Mr. Norris: In 1992-93 public investment in London Transport, Network SouthEast and docklands light railway amounted to around £1,400 million, while expenditure by central Government and local authorities on roads in London, excluding M25, was about £400 million. Expenditure on Network SouthEast benefited a broader area than London alone.

Socially Necessary Railway Lines

23. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for how many years a subsidy for socially necessary rail lines can be guaranteed under current Treasury rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: It will be for the franchising director to negotiate contracts with franchisees, and to make such subsidy payments as are specified in those contracts from within his budget. In doing so he will be in no different a position from any other public sector body in entering into contracts which may run beyond the normal annual period for which Parliament votes expenditure.

A5

24. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had recently concerning improvements to the A5, Watling street from the A5-M69 junction to the Nuneaton Longshoot junction.

Mr. Key: The Department has recently met landowners who may be affected by a possible improvement of the A5-Nutts lane junction at Hinckley. Any scheme would be aimed at reducing congestion and the number of accidents which presently occur at, and in the vicinity of, the junction.

Toll Roads

25. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current position regarding the development of toll roads funded by the private sector.

Mr. Key: The new Dartford-Thurrock river crossing was completed in October 1991, and work has begun on the second Severn crossing. Draft orders for the Birmingham northern relief road were published in June this year; the public inquiry is expected to start next spring. We shall be considering further the possibility of involving private finance in the planned Birmingham western orbital route after we have announced our conclusions on the possibility of direct charging for existing motorways in the light of responses to the Green Paper "Paying for Better Motorways".

Roads, South-East Essex

28. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve road communication in south-east Essex.

Mr. Key: With regard to the trunk road network in south-east Essex, my Department is pressing ahead with its plan to improve the A127 between M25 and the new two-level junction at Rayleigh Weir.

In respect of local roads, Essex county council has identified three major schemes as a result of their south-east East Essex traffic study. The county council has bid for transport supplementary grant funding to start work on improving the northern section of the A130, between A12 and A132, in 1994-95. It has also bid for advance design costs on the eastern section of the A127 Southend-Rochford bypass and credit approval for a third major project in the area, the B1013 access to Southend.

A decision on TSG funding will be announced in December.

East Coast Main Line

29. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has held with ScotRail management relating to the electrification of the east coast main line between Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Mr. Freeman: I discussed Edinburgh and Aberdeen electrification matters with ScotRail management and Grampian regional council during my visit to Aberdeen in September.

I understand that ScotRail and a consortium of local authorities are jointly funding a study of the feasibility of the scheme. A report on the first phase of the study is expected in spring 1994.

M1

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has plans to improve the M1 in the coming year.

Mr. Key: Our construction programme for 1994-5 has still to be settled.

Trans-Pennine Study

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to give the Government's response to the trans-Pennine study.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *807.*

Commuter Trains

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of trains on Network SouthEast commuter services into London were late in the latest 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: For the 12-month period to 5 November 1993, 89 per cent. of Network SouthEast's morning and evening peak services trains arrived within five minutes of the advertised time. This includes some trains which did not begin or end their journeys in central London. The comparable figure for the previous 12 months was 85·6 per cent. There has therefore been a significant improvement in the quality of service for passengers.

NAO and PAC

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many files marked "Not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department; and how many are marked "Not for Public Accounts Committee eyes".

Mr. Norris: There are 684 files in my Department—out of a total of 1,331,002—marked "Not to be seen by NAO without reference to the appropriate Head of Division", sometimes abbreviated to "Not for NAO eyes". These figures refer to individual jackets—file parts. For each NAO study, a number of divisions in different locations may be involved and each may possess a file with a number of parts.

The marking "Not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and PAC are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

There is no marking "Not for PAC eyes".

London Underground

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that London Underground has sufficient resources to ensure the efficient running of the capital's underground system and the safety of passengers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I cannot comment on the Government's expenditure proposals for London Transport in advance of the unified Budget on 30 November.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement in respect of the derailments on the Central line at *(a)* Loughton on 8 November and *(b)* Epping on 1 November of the London underground.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter on which London Underground Ltd., LUL, is best placed to comment. I understand from it that the immediate cause of these derailments was very rapid rail wear on sections of the Central line. LUL's engineers have now replaced the worst affected section of track. They are also investigating why it has worn so quickly. The interface between rails and wheels of trains is a complex technical issue, but track lubrication may be an important factor.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the lines affected and estimate the number of train services delayed as a consequence of the power failure on the London underground on 24 November.

Mr. Norris: I have asked London Transport for an urgent, full report on the circumstances of the power failure, to include what actions it proposes to ensure that there is no recurrence.

M65

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been made to him regarding implications on jobs and investment prospects in north-east Lancashire arising from an eastwards extension of the M65.

Mr. Key: Some of the many responses to our consultation on the trans-Pennine study indicated that any extension of the M65 eastwards should help to stimulate economic activity in the east Lancashire area generally.

Pension Funds

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the exact sums remaining in the railway pensions fund; and what is the actuarial assessment of the amount needed to meet the pension benefits of past and present employees.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the British Rail Pension Trustee Company and the individual management committees of the various BR pension schemes, as appropriate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made for adjudication in the case of a dispute between actuaries working for the railway pension fund and actuaries working for the Government.

Mr. Freeman: In the unlikely event of a difference of opinion between the actuaries, it will be for the trustees, or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State where he is involved, to reach their own views after taking whatever advice they consider appropriate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the measures he is taking to safeguard pension funds in cases where privatised transport industries become insolvent.

Mr. Freeman: Where transport industries have been privatised, measures have been taken to safeguard the accrued rights of pensioners and active members of the industries' pension schemes up to the point of privatisation. When employees move into the private sector, any pension scheme operated by their new employer will continue to be subject to the general legal framework which applies to all such occupational pension schemes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has responsibility for such matters and announced in the House, on 3 November, that he will be issuing discussion papers as a basis for detailed exchanges with interested parties on matters arising from recommendations of the Pensions Law Review Committee.

VAT (Bus Fares)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what study he has made, or proposes to make, of the effects of VAT on bus fares in relation to bus use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have received representations from the Bus and Coach Council, and others, which estimate the effect on bus fares and patronage of imposing VAT. Decisions on taxation are a matter for the Chancellor but in reaching these he will be aware of the likely transport implications.

A51 Bypass

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will make an announcement of his decision on the A51 Burford and the Green proposed bypass.

Mr. Key: I hope to be able to announce the preferred route next spring.

Private Bus Operators

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the private bus operators which operate more than 100 buses.

Mr. Freeman: For licensing purposes, bus operators are not distinguished from coach operators. According to records held centrally in October 1993, the following private bus and coach operators, listed alphabetically, are licensed to operate more than 100 vehicles in Great Britain:

Badgerline Ltd.
Barton Buses Ltd.
Bayline Ltd.
Beeline Buzz Co. Ltd.
Bluebird Buses Ltd.
A. E. and F. R. Brewer Ltd.
Brighton and Hove Bus and Coach Co. Ltd.
Bristol Omnibus Co. Ltd.
British Airways plc
Busways Travel Services Ltd.
Cambus Ltd.
Capital Citybus Ltd.
Capital Coaches Ltd.
Cheltenham and Gloucester Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Chesterfield Transport Ltd.
City of Oxford Motor Services Ltd.
Cleveland Transit Ltd.
Clydeside 2000 plc
County Bus and Coach Co. Ltd.
T. Cowie plc (Grey-Green)
Crosville Wales Ltd.
Derby City Transport Ltd.
Devon General Ltd.
East Kent Road Car Co. Ltd.
East Midland Motor Services
East Yorkshire Motor Services Ltd.
Eastern Counties Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Eastern National Ltd.
Eastern Scottish Omnibuses Ltd.
Fife Scottish Omnibuses Ltd.
Gateshead and District Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Grampian Regional Transport Ltd.
Highland Scottish Omnibuses Ltd.
Keighley and District Travel Ltd.
Kelvin Central Buses Ltd.
Kentish Bus and Coach Co. Ltd.
Lincolnshire Road Car Co. Ltd.
London Coaches Ltd.
London and Country Ltd.
Lowland Omnibuses Ltd.
Luton and District Transport Ltd.
Maidstone and District Motor Services Ltd.
Mainline Group Ltd.
Merseyside Transport Ltd.
Midland Bluebird Ltd.
Midland Fox Ltd.
Midland Red (North) Ltd.
Midland Red (South) Ltd.
Midland Red (West) Ltd.
North Western Road Car Co. Ltd.
Northern General Transport Co. Ltd.
Northumbria Motor Services
O K Motor Service Ltd.
PMT Ltd.
Preston Bus Ltd.
Provincial Bus Co. Ltd.
Q Drive Buses Ltd.
Red and White Services Ltd.
Ribble Motor Services Ltd.
Shearings Ltd.
South Coast Buses Ltd.
South Wales Transport Co. Ltd.
Southern National Ltd.
Southern Vectis Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Stagecoach (Northwest) Ltd. (Cumberland Motor Services)
Stagecoach (Scotland) Ltd.

Stagecoach (South) Ltd.
Stevensons of Uttoxeter Ltd.
Strathclyde Buses Ltd.
Strathtay Scottish Omnibuses Ltd.
Sunderland and District Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Sussex Coastline Buses Ltd.
Tayside Public Transport Ltd.
Tees and District Transport Co. Ltd.
Thames Transit Ltd.
Thamesway Ltd.
Trent Motor Traction Co. Ltd.
United Automobile Services Ltd.
United Counties Omnibus Co. Ltd.
Wallace Arnold Coaches
West Midlands Travel Ltd.
West Riding Automobile Co. Ltd.
Western National Ltd.
Western Scottish Buses Ltd.
Wilts and Dorset Bus Co. Ltd.
Yorkshire Rider
Yorkshire Traction Co. Ltd.
Yorkshire Woollen District Transport Co. Ltd.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the number of private bus operators and *(b)* the estimated number of bus users in major conurbations.

Mr. Freeman: *(a)* For licensing purposes, bus operators are not distinguished from coach operators. In March 1993, there were an estimated 1,300 private bus and coach operators based in London and the English metropolitan areas, out of a total of 6,800 in Great Britain as a whole. Of these, about 300 operated local bus services during 1992-93, out of a total of about 1,900 in all Great Britain.

(b) The number of bus users is not available; however, it is estimated that passengers made a total of 2,514 million local bus journeys during 1992-93 in London and the English metropolitan areas, out of a total of 4,483 million local bus journeys in Great Britain.

Motorways

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are for major motorway works in 1994-95 and for lighting schemes and additional service areas.

Mr. Key: There will be an announcement about major motorway works in the new year. It is expected that about 16 miles of motorway will be equipped with lighting for the first time during 1994-95. Following a change of policy in August 1992, proposals for new motorway service areas —MSAs—are now a matter for the private sector. Nevertheless, three MSAs proposed by the Department before the change in policy are expected to open during 1994-95: they are at Birchanger on the M11 and Barn Hill and Cherwell Valley on the M40.

Motor Cycles

Mr. Robert Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to vote at the EC Council of Ministers against the proposal for a 100 brake horse power limit on motor cycles.

Mr. MacGregor: The Council of Ministers is expected to convene a conciliation meeting on this issue with the European Parliament. The United Kingdom's position is that there is no evidence to link motor cycle power with the level of accidents. We hope that a conciliation meeting will successfully resolve the issue.

Motorway Lavatories

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will state the number of lavatories adjacent to motorways in Britain in October 1992 and the number at the present date distinguishing between male, female and disabled:

(2) if he will list new toilets adjacent to motorways in Britain on which building work has commenced since October 1992 and those for which planning permission has been given, distinguishing between male, female and disabled.

Mr. Key: In October 1992 there were 44 motorway service areas—MSAs—in England and a further one, Clacket Lane on the M25, has opened since. All are required to provide free lavatories 24 hours a day. At present, the minimum number of lavatories for males, females and disabled people is specified in the leases of the MSAs, but operators are free to provide more. We do not keep records of the number currently available. Pending the provision of full MSAs, the Department also maintains temporary lavatories with facilities for the disabled alongside the M26, M40—two sites—and M56.

Motorway services in Wales and Scotland are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Live Animals (Exports)

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what control she has on the live export of lambs to prevent them being misleadingly described as being produced in another country.

Mr. Jack: Animals exported live from the United Kingdom are accompanied by documentation which identifies the country of origin. The descriptions applied to lambs or meat derived from them in another country after export from the United Kingdom are the responsibility of the authorities in that country.

Declaration on Environment and Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken by her Department to implement each of the principles of the Rio declaration on environment and development, agreed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, in so far as they apply to the matters for which her Department has responsibility.

Mr. Jack: The Government will shortly publish the United Kingdom's strategy for sustainable development, together with reports on climate change, biodiversity and forestry. This Department is contributing fully to all of these.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the June census set-aside figures for England for 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Jack: The June census set-aside figures for England for 1990 and 1991 are as follows: for 1989 the census recorded set-aside land in the category "All other land on agricultural holdings".

Land Use ('000 ha)

	1989	1990	1991
Set-aside scheme land	—	72	97
All other land on agricultural holdings	398	375	382

Set-aside was introduced as a census category only in 1990. Since it was a new category there was some uncertainty as to whether all set-aside land would have been declared as such. Some set-aside land may have been declared as bare fallow or other land. Therefore, for the purposes of determining the base area for the arable area payments scheme, the set-aside areas submitted to the EC Commission were based on actual set-aside agreements reached with farmers for the years 1989, 1990 and 1991, which gave the precise areas in set-aside.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what evidence he has that legislation requiring employers to contribute towards the cost of employing people with disabilities, under the access to work scheme, will benefit the disabled work force, and not be a disincentive to the employment of such workers;

(2) when he will announce the maximum level of aid which people with disabilities can receive over a five-year period under access to work;

(3) when he will specify the maximum contribution an employer will be expected to make over any five-year period under access to work;

(4) what estimates his Department has made of the number of people with disabilities to receive assistance under the access to work scheme in its first year of operation;

(5) how many people with disabilities received assistance from the adaption of premises and equipment, special aids to employment, personal reader service and the fares to work schemes, in the last year for which statistics are available;

(6) who will assess eligibility for assistance under access to work;

(7) what differences he proposes in the eligibility conditions for access to work compared to adaption of premises and equipment, special aids to employment, personal reader service and the fares to work schemes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a statement about access to work to the House on 22 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *102*. Access to work will replace and extend four of the Department's current special schemes and enable us to help more disabled people and meet a much wider range of their employment-related needs. To help fund the extra costs we will expect employers to contribute 50 per cent. of the cost of help, up to a ceiling, to employees who enter the scheme after working for them six months or more. Both recent and earlier research suggests that employers would be willing to make a reasonable contribution. They already do in the current adaptations to premises and equipment scheme.

There are a number of issues on access to work on which we have still to make decisions. In addition to the limits on individual entitlement and employer contributions, these include transitional arrangements for existing beneficiaries of the current special schemes, for how long those helped as new recruits will remain exempt from the employer contributions and whether there will be special arrangements for certain types of firm. My right hon. Friend is currently listening to the views of a number of interested parties and individuals and hopes to make decisions as soon as possible. Once my right hon. Friend has taken decisions on these areas it is intended to make an announcement to the House.

The numbers helped through each of the four special schemes which will be replaced and extended by access to work were: adaptations to premises and equipment—284; special aids to employment—5,255; personal reader service—796; fares to work—1,789. We hope to help around 9,000 people in the first year of operation of access to work; each person will have access to a wider range of individual items of help.

Eligibility for access to work will be assessed by disability employment advisers, who are part of the Employment Service's network of placing assessment and counselling teams—PACTs. Eligibility will be based on registrability under the terms of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944. Formal registration will not, however, be required. Formal registration under the 1944 Act is required for the special aids to employment and fares to work schemes. For the personal reader service, beneficiaries must be registered as blind or partially sighted, but need not be registered as disabled under the 1944 Act. Formal registration under the 1944 Act is not required for the adaptations to premises and equipment schemes.

Fares-to-interview Scheme

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the exclusions which apply on the fares-to-interview scheme; and what plans he has to remove them.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The exclusions which apply on fares to interviews are published in the "Travel to Interview Scheme" leaflet which I will arrange to have placed in the Library.

The scheme has been reviewed and we are now considering what changes should be made and how quickly they can be implemented.

North Norfolk Action

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will estimate the savings on benefits incurred due to persons leaving the unemployment register after interviews to persons obtaining employment after participating in North Norfolk Action stating the number in each case;

(2) what was the overall expenditure on North Norfolk Action up to 31 October; and how much expenditure has been incurred on *(a)* provider fees, *(b)* allowances, *(c)* fares to work, *(d)* publicity, *(e)* evaluation and *(f)* employment service running costs.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Sir Ralph Howell, dated 29 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions about overall expenditure on North Norfolk Action up to 31 October; how much expenditure has been incurred on: provider fees; allowances; fares to work; publicity; evaluation; Employment Service running costs; and an estimate of the savings on benefits incurred due to persons leaving the unemployment register after interviews to persons obtaining employment after participating in North Norfolk Action stating the number in each case. These are matters which fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The total expenditure on North Norfolk Action up to 31 October 1993 is £205,182, incurred on:

	£
(a) Provider fees	87,349
(b) Allowances	85,178
(c) Fares to work	2,455
(d) Publicity	1,500
(e) Evaluation by external contractors	[1]—
(f) Running costs	28,700

[1] Work to start in 1994.

The numbers of those starting work following participation on the North Norfolk Action programme is 16. The numbers of clients leaving the register to go into work following Supportive Caseload interviews is 120.

An evaluation exercise is being considered by my Research and Evaluation Branch to estimate the register effect of supportive caseload. A final report will be available early in 1994. Until we have the evaluation it is not possible to estimate savings on benefit as the effect of "deadweight" and "substitution" cannot be taken into account. Further evaluation will involve measuring the improvements in clients' jobsearch, attitude to work and motivation due to participation in North Norfolk Action. This will be done by external providers next year.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Training Schemes

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements he made to endure the monitoring of the standards of employment training schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils —TECs—are responsible for delivering employment training schemes. Relations between TECs and the Employment Department are governed by the TEC operating agreement. Under the 1993-94 agreement TECs are required to contract only with training providers that:

obtain and maintain approved training organisation status uner criteria published by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, —a copy of which is in the Library; or, have an alternative system approved by my right hon. Friend, as of equivalent or greater assurance and effectiveness.

From April 1994, the Employment Department will require TECs to operate new arrangements in the way they contract for and manage services and products which the Department funds. The new requirements have been approved by my right hon. Friend and a copy can also be found in the Library.

Vocational Courses

Ms. Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many long-term unemployed people have taken up the education allowance to enable them to study on full-time vocational courses which the Chancellor announced in his Budget statement in March; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The education allowance announced in March became available in September and is called learning for work. There were approximately 5,000 people participating on 14 October 1993.

Business Start-up Scheme

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places were offered on the business start-up scheme in 1992-93; how many places have been taken up in the current financial year; how many of the additional 10,000 places the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement he now expects will come on stream; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1992-93 there were 35,337 places available on the programme in England. Latest information for 1993-94 shows that, to 10 October 1993, there were 18,254 programme entrants. Of the additional 10,000 starts on the programme 8,580 were allocated to England. Of those 8,580, a total so far of 5,850 have been contracted with training and enterprise councils to be taken up in this financial year. Information for Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Community Action Programme

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places have been taken up in the new community action programme announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 16 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Diane Abbott, dated 29 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about the number of Community Action places currently taken up. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It may help if I explain the background to Community Action and our plans for the provision of the announced places.

Community Action is a programme to help long-term unemployed people back into work, by providing work experience on projects of benefit to local communities. In the Spring Budget the then Chancellor committed £113·5m, sufficient to provide 20,000 places and help 60,000 people in a full year. Following extensive consultation and development of this new programme, to ensure quality and value for money, the first places became available at the end of July.

Community Action opportunities will be delivered, in the main, by voluntary/charitable organisations and my people in Regional Offices were given responsibility for contracting with them. The contracting round is now almost complete and 165

contracts have, so far, been awarded. At the end of October there were 1,200 long-term unemployed people participating in the programme and numbers are increasing steadily. The programme is planned to build to 20,000 filled places by the end of March.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Pilot Schemes

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many pilot schemes have been launched, under which payments are made to employers who recruit the long-term unemployed, as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement of 16 March; where are these pilot schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In his spring Budget, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Thames (Mr. Lamont), announced the introduction of a pilot scheme called workstart which offers a financial incentive to employers who recruit eligible long term unemployed people. There are four pilots, two run by the employment service in south London and east Kent, and two by training and enterprise councils in Tyneside and Devon and Cornwall.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the new £25 million fund for training and enterprise councils announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement of 16 March; when he will invite applications for this fund; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: A prospectus inviting training and enterprise councils to bid for TEC challenge funds was issued on 13 April and the successful bids were announced on 13 July. Copies of both the prospectus and a list of winning bids have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the training and enterprise councils which have designated specific budgets to assist with student hardship in the further education sector.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not allocate specific funds to training and enterprise councils to assist with student hardship in the further education sector. TECs would be able to use their own resources to do this if they chose, but information is not held by the Department on those that may have set aside specific budgets for this purpose.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the level of employment in the Rugby-Daventry travel-to-work area in 1992 and at the latest available date.

Miss Widdecombe: Employment estimates for travel-to-work areas are available only from the periodic censuses of employment. The latest estimates are for September 1991 when the total number of employees in employment in the Rugby and Daventry travel-to-work area was 50,600.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were in employment, broken down for full time and part time, in *(a)* April 1989, *(b)* April 1993 and *(c)* the latest date for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: The work force in employment estimates are available only for March, June, September and December of each year. The numbers in full-time and part-time employment were:

Work force in employment: Great Britain (seasonally adjusted)

	Full-time	*Part-time*
March 1989	19,637,000	6,341,000
March 1993	17,480,000	6,774,000
June 1993	17,529,000	6,769,000

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average length of time *(a)* black men, *(b)* black women, *(c)* Asian men, *(d)* Asian women, *(e)* white men and *(f)* white women remain unemployed.

Miss Widdecombe: This information is not available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the unemployed are *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* white; and in each case what percentage is unemployed for more than (i) six months and (ii) one year.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest estimates from the spring 1993 labour force survey according to the international standard—International Labour Organisation—definition of unemployment are given in the following table:

Great Britain (not seasonally adjusted)

Percentage of total ILO unemployed		*Duration of ILO unemployment (per cent.)*		
		All	*Over six months*	*Over one year*
Black	4	100	78	53
Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi	4	100	77	48
White	90	100	75	42
Others[1]	2	100	77	36
All ethnic groups	100	100	75	42

[1] Includes those of mixed origin and other Asian groups not elsewhere specified.

WALES

Value Added Tax (Books)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the impact upon local education authority budgets in Wales of VAT upon books; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Taxation policy is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I cannot comment on speculation about possible Budget measures.

Plough Lane Link Road

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will visit Wepre Park and Aston, Deeside, to consider the line of route for the Plough lane link road;

(2) if he will permit a public inquiry into the proposed Plough lane link road, Deeside.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. This is a Clwyd county council scheme and the line of the route has already been determined by it. The county has submitted a compulsory purchase order and a side roads order for my right hon. Friend's consideration. The objection period for the orders expires on 17 December after which time a decision will be taken as to whether or not a public inquiry will be held.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to secure that payments made under the European Community regional development fund objective 3 and 4 programmes to projects in Wales are administered on an all-Wales basis.

Mr. Redwood: Payments made under the European regional development fund—ERDF—to projects in Wales are administered in Wales. Objectives 3 and 4 come under the European social fund and not ERDF, and future administrative arrangements are being considered.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the figures for expenditure in the last financial year on *(a)* urban development corporations, *(b)* higher education, *(c)* grant-maintained schools, *(d)* further education, *(e)* care in the community, *(f)* district health authorities and *(g)* training and enterprise councils.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information is set out in the following table:

	£ million
(a) Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (net)	36,038
(b) Higher Education	44·546
(c) Grant Maintained Schools	5·132
(d) Further Education[1]	2·100
(e) Care in the Community[2]	245·300
(f) District Health Authorities[3]	1,384,000
(g) Training and Enterprise Councils	107·260

[1] Information on expenditure on further education in 1992-93 under the control of local education authorities is not held centrally. Expenditure by the Welsh Office in respect of adult continuing further education in 1992-93 was £2·1 million.

[2] This figure is approximate and is based on outturn estimates provided by county councils.

[3] Includes Welsh Health Common Services Authority. (Excludes FHSAs).

Set-aside Land

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the figures in hectares for *(a)* set-aside, *(b)* pulses, *(c)* oil seed rape and *(d)* cereals for 1989, 1990 and 1991 which were used to calculate the base area in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The figures used to calculate the base area in Wales are as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*Hectares base area (3-year average)*
Set-aside	697	1,229	1,591	1,172
Proteins	1,004	925	1,009	979
Oilseed rape	554	744	1,094	797
Cereals	61,621	56,016	53,068	56,902

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the June census set-aside figures for Wales for 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Redwood: There were 582 hectares of set-aside land in Wales recorded in the June 1989 agricultural census. This figure is not regarded as reliable and so comparable data were not collected in Wales in 1990 and 1991. More complete data, collected for the administration of the set-aside scheme, based on all land in the scheme during the year, are shown in the following table.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Set-aside Scheme land (hectares)	697	1,229	1,591

A465

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now announce the start date for work on the A465 between Aberdulais and Glynneath.

Sir Wyn Roberts: An announcement will be made shortly.

Cardiff International Arena

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with Cardiff city council in relation to the release of urban development grant funds to Brent Walker with respect to the Cardiff international arena; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* Cardiff city council is party to the urban development grant

agreement drawn up with Brent Walker and responsible for monitoring the Cardiff international arena project. The Welsh Office receives written quarterly progress reports from the council and frequent informal contact is also maintained. These arrangements are no different from those which apply to other UDG projects.

The CIA project is now almost complete and final payment of grant, £256,000, will be made when a certificate of final completion has been issued and approved.

British Gas Wales

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he was consulted about the proposed closure of British Gas Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* I understand that British Gas is considering restructuring to become more efficient and competitive and that it has not yet reached a final decision. The future of British Gas Wales is a matter for the company to decide.

Local Government Finance

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify for each local authority the amount of accumulated capital receipts.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is given in the table.

Usable cash backed accumulated capital receipts at 31 March 1993.

	£'000
Alyn and Deeside	0
Colwyn	452
Delyn	0
Glyndwr	350
Rhuddlan	634
Wrexham Maelor	110
Carmarthen	1,120
Ceredigion	371
Dinefwr	761
Llanelli	0
Preseli Pembs	1,910
South Pembroke	1,741
Blaenau Gwent	1,406
Islwyn	648
Monmouth	2,248
Newport	5,250
Torfaen	1,634
Aberconwy	1,223
Arfon	141
Dwyfor	144
Meirionnydd	0
Ynys Mon	71
Cynon Valley	0
Merthyr Tydfil	781
Ogwr	3,453
Rhondda	0
Rhymney Valley	949
Taff Ely	91
Brecknock	996
Montgomeryshire	1,016
Radnorshire	125
Cardiff	2,601
Vale of Glamorgan	5,659
Lliw Valley	1,794
Neath	1,778
Port Talbot	77
Swansea	1,514
Clwyd	0
Dyfed	549
Gwent	5,877
Gwynedd	382
Mid Glamorgan	1,266
Powys	213
South Glamorgan	328
West Glamorgan	1,140
TOTAL DISTRICTS	41,048
TOTAL COUNTIES	9,755
TOTAL WALES	50,803

DEFENCE

Forces (Resignations)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's forces leave before the end of their contract; and what is the ethnic breakdown.

Mr. Hanley: In 1992-93, the latest year for which figures are available, 24,616 service personnel left the armed forces before the end of their commission or engagement. This figure includes those who left on redundancy terms, but excludes those who died or left for medical or compassionate reasons.

Information on the ethnic origins of those leaving the armed forces is not available.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of members of Her Majesty's forces from ethnic minorities.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available at present. My Department will however shortly be undertaking a survey of the ethnic origins of serving personnel as part of our implementation of in-service ethnic monitoring.

Skyguard

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capacity the Skyguard system has for passive monitoring of the height and speed of low-flying aircraft; and what use is made of this capacity when the system is used for covert monitoring of low flying.

Mr. Hanley: The Skyguard radar system is an active system which has no capacity for passive monitoring of the height and speed of low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what surveys have been conducted of the actions taken by military aircrew when they become aware of the location or presence of a Skyguard radar monitoring low flying.

Mr. Hanley: No such surveys have been conducted.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on which nations possess the Skyguard-Oerlikon anti-aircraft system.

Mr. Hanley: Nations which possess this system include: Argentina, Austria, Canada, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

Minehunting

Mr. James Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the United Kingdom's minehunting capability; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to achieve a flotilla of 25 mine counter measures vessels;

(3) when he expects to issue an invitation to tender for a further batch of Sandown minehunters.

Mr. Aitken: The Government are committed to retaining a capable and effective mine counter measures fleet. We therefore intend to continue over the next decade with our modernisation programme, which will entail the procurement of further Sandown class single-role minehunters and a mid-life update for the Hunt class. As we made clear in this year's Statement on the Defence Estimates, it is our intention to build up to a 25-strong fleet, consisting solely of highly capable Hunt and Sandown class vessels. The timing of this build-up will be dependent on the in-service dates of further Sandown class vessels. We expect to make an announcement on future orders for the Sandown class shortly.

Forces Pay

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the rates of pay of British forces serving in central Bosnia and Germany; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: United Kingdom service personnel are paid the same rates of basic pay irrespective of where they are serving.

Total remuneration will however vary depending on a range of factors including the allowances to which personnel are entitled. Personnel in Germany receive local overseas allowance—LOA—paid to compensate for the additional costs of living there compared to the United Kingdom. No LOA is payable in the former Yugoslavia but personnel deployed to the former Yugoslavia from Germany continue to receive a significant element of their LOA in recognition of their continuing financial commitments in Germany—70 per cent. for married personnel, 40 per cent. for single personnel.

In addition, married personnel in the former Yugoslavia are entitled to separation allowance and all personnel receive the United Nations set allowances to cover incidental expenses and rest and recreation leave. Food and accommodation charges have been waived for all personnel in the former Yugoslavia in recognition of the conditions under which they are serving.

United Nations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has made to his counterparts in NATO, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Western European Union in seeking to gain support for strengthening the United Nations, as indicated in paragraph 50 of the Government's reply to the fourth report of the Defence Committee of Session 1992-93, House of Commons Paper 988.

Mr. Hanley: The Government see a clear role for organisations such as NATO, the CSCE and WEU in supporting the conflict management and prevention activities of the United Nations. All three are already providing such support, in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. Considerable work is also under way within these organisations on how they might best contribute to and support United Nations activities in the future. The United Kingdom is a full and active participant in this work.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether high alumina cement was used in the construction of the Queen Elizabeth military Hospital at Woolwich.

Mr. Hanley: An inspection of available information shows no specific evidence of high alumina cement being used in the construction of this hospital.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total annual maintenance expenditure on the Queen Elizabeth military hospital at Woolwich for each year since 1982; and what is the budgeted expenditure in the current year.

Mr. Hanley: The budgeted expenditure for works maintenance at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich in 1993-94 is £1,990,000. Corresponding figures for 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 were £1,030,000, £2,040,000 and £2,430,000 respectively. Prior to 1990, works maintenance expenditure was the responsibility of the Property Services Agency and my Department does not hold any recorded information.

Low Flying

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been introduced to improve the geographical spread of low flying in the United Kingdom low-flying system since the report by the National Audit Office in 1990.

Mr. Hanley: In 1992, a fast jet turn-round facility was established at RAF Leuchars to enable low-flying training in the United Kingdom by RAF aircrews based in Germany to be carried out in the relatively lightly used northern half of Scotland. In addition, a continuous review of the United Kingdom low-flying system is carried out which ensures that avoidances, which tend to channel activity, only continue to apply where absolutely necessary.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the maximum permitted speeds for each type of aircraft during *(a)* the run-up to simulated targets and *(b)* practice interceptions and fighter evasion, during low-level sorties at (i) 250 ft and (ii) 100 ft, in the United Kingdom low-flying system; and if he will indicate the date on which each specified limit was introduced.

Mr. Hanley: For military aircraft operating in the United Kingdom low-flying system at 250 ft above ground level, the maximum speed permitted overland during run-up to simulated targets or during practice interceptions is 550 knots, except for F111 and F15E aircraft which are limited to 520 knots and Hawk aircraft which are limited to 500 knots. The maximum speeds for military aircraft flying at 100 ft above ground level are as follows:

Military aircraft	Knots
Jaguar	520
Tornado	500
Hawk	480
Harrier GR5/7	420

Speed restrictions for most of the aircraft concerned were introduced in January 1991, although further restrictions were introduced for Jaguar and F15E aircraft in April 1992.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Air Force fast jet pilots currently hold a qualification to fly at 100 ft above ground level.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operational low-flying sorties were authorised in *(a)* the Borders tactical training area, east, and (b) the Borders tactical training area, west, in each month from January 1991 to the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley: Figures showing the number of operational low-flying sorties flown in the borders tactical training area are not available. However, the number of operational low-flying movements authorised into the borders tactical training area, east, and borders tactical training area, west, in each month from January 1991 to the latest available date are as follows:

	LFA20T (East)	LFA20T (West)
1991		
January	113	67
February	72	55
March	203	121
April	0	0
May	4	4
June	0	0
July	0	0
August	0	0
September	5	4
October	15	23
November	103	85
December	226	156
1992		
January	76	65
February	162	199
March	146	117
April	96	91
May	52	37
June	79	72
July	74	50
August	98	75
September	39	29
October	139	104
November	87	49
December	70	61
1993		
January	149	130
February	105	74
March	396	321
April	212	200
May	138	102
June	34	23
July	0	0
August	104	46
September	28	16

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information has been collected since the Royal Air Force Strike Command trial in 1988-89, on the amount of actual low flying carried out by Royal Air Force aircrew.

Mr. Hanley: Since mid-1989 information has been collected showing the amount of time spent in different height bands by Royal Air Force Strike Command aircraft while operating in the United Kingdom low-flying system. Collection of the information continues.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the first operational low-flying sortie took place in the Borders tactical training area, west.

Mr. Hanley: Operational Low Flying was first carried out in the borders tactical training area, west, on 29 June 1988.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records are held of low flying between the hours of 11 pm and 7 am.

Mr. Hanley: Records of low-level sorties flown between these times will be held on the flight authorisation sheets held by flying stations and on the low-level booking sheets held by the tactical booking cell at RAF West Drayton. Such sorties are not, however, separately identified in the statistics maintained for central management purposes.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures have been adopted since 1989 to achieve a more even distribution throughout the working week of low-flying training over the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hanley: Every effort is made to ensure as even as possible a distribution of activity throughout the working week, subject to the constraining factors of aircraft availability, support and engineering staff availability, range opening times, normal operating hours of the United Kingdom low-flying system and suitable weather conditions.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions are placed on low flying in low-flying area 16; and what advice is given to aircrew booking into that area, when low-flying area 20 is active.

Mr. Hanley: Low flying is normally permitted down to a minimum height of 250 ft minimum separation distance within the whole of low-flying area 16. When low-flying area 20T—the borders tactical training area—is active, aircraft not conducting operational low flying are not permitted to operate below 500 ft in that part of LFA 16 which overlays LFA 20T. Aircrew are notified of the times when LFA 20T is active by means of notices to airmen.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the March 1989 report on the Royal Air Force Strike Command investigation of the amount of low flying carried out by aircrew.

Mr. Hanley: The document requested is classified and cannot be released.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operational low-flying sorties were

authorised in the area covered by the Borders tactical training area in each year between 1979 and the formal incorporation of the training area in 1984.

Mr. Hanley: No operational low flying was conducted in the area now covered by the Borders tactical training area between 1979 and November 1983, when a six-month trial of operational low flying was begun in the area prior to its formal incorporation into the United Kingdom low-flying system in 1984. During this period, a total of 373 movements were authorised into the borders tactical training area.

Civil Aircraft (Interception)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the regulations governing the practice interception of non-co-operating civil aircraft by Royal Air Force fighters.

Mr. Hanley: Royal Air Force regulations specifically state that no practice interceptions are to be made on civilian aircraft.

Bosnia

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what winter apparel has been issued to date to British forces serving in central Bosnia; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when the British forces serving in central Bosnia will be issued with Arctic kit including special warm clothing during the winter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Issues of winter clothing to British troops in central Bosnia commenced on 14 November 1993. The majority of troops have been issued with winter clothing items including cold weather caps, arctic gloves, wristlets, arctic socks, face masks, Norwegian shirts, wet weather boots and cover-alls. A delay in issuing winter clothing to a small percentage of the troops has been experienced due to the closure of the route between Split and Vitez. The route has now been reopened and all troops have now been issued with the full complement of winter clothing.

IMS Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff were employed by IMS Ltd. at each location in each year between 1987 and 1991.

Mr. Aitken: IMS is a private limited company, which ceased trading in July 1991 and is in the process of rundown. Internal management matters are the responsibility of the company. However, figures from the company's published annual accounts are available as follows:

1987	160 employees (114 United Kingdom based)
1988	132 employees (102 United Kingdom based)
1989	96 employees (65 United Kingdom based)
1990	61 employees (42 United Kingdom based)
1991	29 employees (three United Kingdom based)

Tornado

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have taken place in the requirements for competency in medium and/or high altitude weapons delivery for operational Tornado aircrew over the past four years.

Mr. Hanley: Since 1991, crews are required to complete two medium-level weaponry profiles prior to being awarded combat ready status. They are then required to complete 12 medium-level weapons profiles as part of the aircrew annual training syllabus. In addition, designated thermal imaging and laser designator crews are afforded extra sorties as are those on specific operational duties. Weapon delivery can only be undertaken at low and medium level by Tornado aircraft.

Live Weapons (Carriage)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the regulations governing the carriage of live weaponry on military aircraft using civil airports in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hanley: Military aircraft carrying live weapons plan not to use civil airports in the United Kingdom. Where, for safety reasons, an aircraft has to land as a matter of urgency however, an approach and landing may be made to a civil airport. In such cases the airport authorities are informed that weapons are being carried before the aircraft lands. On landing, all necessary precautions are taken to ensure the safety of the public and surrounding area.

Arms Transfers

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take to encourage international responsibility in arms transfers.

Mr. Aitken: The United Kingdom is an active participant in a number of multilateral export control regimes covering weapons of mass destruction. These include the missile technology control regime, Nuclear Suppliers Group and Australia Group—which deals with chemical and biological weapons. Through our membership of the EC and P5 we have agreed harmonised criteria concerning the export of defence equipment. We are also involved in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and negotiations among COCOM partners, the latter relating to replacing COCOM controls with an arrangement to cover conventional arms and dual-use equipments more generally. The United Kingdom has been at the forefront of moves to promote greater transparency in conventional arms transfers through the United Nations register of conventional arms.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans Her Majesty's Government have to discuss with non-governmental organisations the present status of instruments of verification, as part of the policy announced in the Queen's Speech to take part in negotiations towards a verifiable and comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Hanley: We are currently considering how best to establish cost-effective and sufficient verification measures as part of our policy to move towards a verifiable and comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. We will consult non-governmental bodies as necessary.

Forces (Suicides)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of suicides recorded in Her Majesty's forces in each of the last five years, and the ethnic breakdown of these.

Mr. Hanley: According to our records, the number of deaths in the armed forces recorded as suicide in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Numbers
1988	42
1989	36
1990	48
1991	43
1992	35

Of the 43 personnel who committed suicide in 1991, two were Gurkhas. No further information in respect of the ethnic origins of those who committed suicide is available.

Desert Storm Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many current or former service men have contacted his Department since August indicating they believed themselves to be suffering from Desert Storm syndrome arising from toxic poisoning or uranium contamination during the Gulf war.

Mr. Hanley: Three former members of the armed forces have contacted my Department since the beginning of August believing themselves to be suffering from medical conditions which they attribute to exposure to oil fire smoke—one individual—or to depleted uranium—two individuals. In the same period, a further two former service men have contacted my Department believing themselves to be suffering from symptoms connected to their service in the Gulf, but without specific reference to the possible causes. There have been no such approaches in the period from serving armed forces personnel.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to monitor the congressional hearings currently being held into claims that service men involved in the Gulf war, including United States service men on joint operations with United Kingdom service men, are suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Hanley: Members of the British embassy and defence staff in Washington have attended the recent congressional hearings and have forwarded to my Department comprehensive details of the discussions which have taken place. They are also actively liaising with the Department of Defence, Health Service and Veterans Affairs officials to ensure that the United Kingdom is kept fully up to date with current developments, including any further congressional hearings which may take place.

Lockerbie

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current radius of the avoidance area around the town of Lockerbie.

Mr. Hanley: It is not our practice to release detailed information on flying restrictions in individual areas.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those countries he knows to possess depleted uranium bullets or shells.

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom, the United States and Russia have publicly acknowledged that they have depleted uranium ammunition.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for each civil service grade in his Department *(a)* the total number of persons employed and *(b)* the total number of women employed.

Mr. Aitken: The following information relates to staff employed at 1 April 1993, and shows full-time, part-time and full-time equivalent numbers, which count part time as half.

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups	*Full-time staff*			*Part-time staff*			*Total FTE*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Open Structure Grade 1 (including 1A)	4	0	4	0	0	0	4·0	0·0	4·0
Open Structure Grade 2	9	0	9	0	0	0	9·0	0·0	9·0
Open Structure Grade 3	47	2	49	0	1	1	47·0	2·5	49·5
Open Structure Grade 4	32	2	34	0	0	0	32·0	2·0	34·0
Open Structure Grade 5	272	8	280	1	1	2	272·5	8·5	281·0
Open Structure Grade 6	712	15	727	3	0	3	713·5	15·0	728·5
Open Structure Grade 7	2,618	104	2,722	15	10	25	2,625·5	109·0	2,734·5
Senior Executive Officer	1,056	151	1,207	1	3	4	1,056·5	152·5	1,209·0
Higher Executive Officer (D)	12	7	19	0	0	0	12·0	7·0	19·0
Higher Executive Officer	2,112	885	2,997	0	36	36	2,112·0	903·0	3,015·0
Administration Trainee	5	1	6	0	0	0	5·0	1·0	6·0
Executive Officer	2,941	2,679	5,620	7	144	151	2,944·5	2,751·0	5,695·5
Administrative Officer	4,253	9,845	14,098	16	807	823	4,261·0	10,248·5	14,509·5
Administrative Assistant	1,612	5,110	6,722	21	882	903	1,622·5	5,551·0	7,173·5
Senior Economic Assistant	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Senior Assistant Statistician	1	1	2	0	0	0	1·0	1·0	2·0
Assistant Statistician	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Senior Information Officer	27	2	29	0	0	0	27·0	2·0	29·0
Information Officer	33	19	52	1	0	1	33·5	19·0	52·5
Assistant Information Officer	1	1	2	0	0	0	1·0	1·0	2·0
Senior Librarian	9	7	16	0	0	0	9·0	7·0	16·0
Librarian	19	29	48	0	1	1	19·0	29·5	48·5
Assistant Librarian	16	26	42	0	6	6	16·0	29·0	45·0
Museum Curatorial Group Grade D	5	0	5	0	0	0	5·0	0·0	5·0
Museum Curatorial Group Grade E	4	2	6	0	0	0	4·0	2·0	6·0
Museum Curatorial Group Grade F	8	1	9	0	0	0	8·0	1·0	9·0

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups	Full-time staff			Part-time staff			Total FTE		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Museum Curatorial Group Grade G	2	4	6	0	0	0	2·0	4·0	6·0
Museum Conservation Group Grade F	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Chief Constable	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Deputy Chief Constable	2	0	2	0	0	0	2·0	0·0	2·0
Assistant Chief Constable	5	0	5	0	0	0	5·0	0·0	5·0
Chief Superintendent	12	0	12	0	0	0	12·0	0·0	12·0
Superintendent	27	0	27	0	0	0	27·0	0·0	27·0
Chief Inspector	63	3	66	0	0	0	63·0	3·0	66·0
Inspector	141	8	149	0	0	0	141·0	8·0	149·0
Sergeant	621	34	655	0	0	0	621·0	34·0	655·0
Constable	3,228	278	3,506	0	0	0	3,228·0	278·0	3,506·0
Senior Professional and Technology Officer	2,317	14	2,331	10	0	10	2,322·0	14·0	2,336·0
Higher Professional and Technology Officer	3,950	49	3,999	9	1	10	3,954·5	49·5	4,004·0
Professional and Technology Officer	5,350	82	5,432	4	3	7	5,352·0	83·5	5,435·5
Professional and Technology Officer IV	6	0	6	0	0	0	6·0	0·0	6·0
Technical Grade 1	264	134	398	0	8	8	264·0	138·0	402·0
Technical Grade 2	15	13	28	1	3	4	15·5	14·5	30·0
Graduate Trainee	124	19	143	0	0	0	124·0	19·0	143·0
Trainee Incorporated Engineer	23	1	24	0	0	0	23·0	1·0	24·0
Senior Mapping and Charting Officer	95	19	114	1	5	6	95·5	21·5	117·0
Higher Mapping and Charting Officer	197	36	233	0	2	2	197·0	37·0	234·0
Mapping and Charting Officer	374	100	474	2	39	41	375·0	119·5	494·5
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 1	131	74	205	1	12	13	131·5	80·0	211·5
Mapping and Charting Technical Grade 2	42	42	84	1	7	8	42·5	45·5	88·0
Senior Graphics Officer	12	1	13	0	0	0	12·0	1·0	13·0
Higher Graphics Officer	54	3	57	0	0	0	54·0	3·0	57·0
Graphics Officer	187	30	217	0	1	1	187·0	30·5	217·5
Marine Service Officer Grade 1	15	0	15	0	0	0	15·0	0·0	15·0
Marine Service Officer Grade 2	92	0	92	0	0	0	92·0	0·0	92·0
Marine Service Officer Grade 3	176	0	176	0	0	0	176·0	0·0	176·0
Marine Service Officer Grade 4	108	0	108	0	0	0	108·0	0·0	108·0
Senior Research Officer (R)	38	6	44	1	0	1	38·5	6·0	44·5
Research Officer (R)	14	6	20	0	0	0	14·0	6·0	20·0
Chief Typing Manager	0	16	16	0	0	0	0·0	16·0	16·0
Typing Manager	0	199	199	0	1	1	0·0	199·5	199·5
Senior Personal Secretary	0	95	95	0	0	0	0·0	95·0	95·0
Personal Secretary	3	812	815	0	21	21	3·0	822·5	825·5
Typist	8	2,958	2,966	0	732	732	8·0	3,324·0	3,332·0
Trainee Typist	0	3	3	0	3	3	0·0	4·5	4·5
Senior Scientific Officer	1,516	126	1,642	15	21	36	1,523·5	136·5	1,660·0
Higher Scientific Officer	1,421	234	1,655	3	28	31	1,422·5	248·0	1,670·5
Scientific Officer	1,210	258	1,468	2	14	16	1,211·0	265·0	1,476·0
Assistant Scientific Officer	599	126	725	0	10	10	599·0	131·0	730·0
Senior Instructional Officer	66	0	66	0	0	0	66·0	0·0	66·0
Higher Instructional Officer	296	1	297	0	0	0	296·0	1·0	297·0
Instructional Officer I	1,071	9	1,080	2	0	2	1,072·0	9·0	1,081·0
Instructional Officer II	229	4	233	1	1	2	229·5	4·5	234·0
Catering Manager 3	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Chef 1/Chief Cook 1	11	1	12	0	0	0	11·0	1·0	12·0
Chef 2/Chief Cook 2	23	1	24	0	0	0	23·0	1·0	24·0
Chief Fire Service Officer	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Senior Fire Service Officer	12	0	12	0	0	0	12·0	0·0	12·0
Fire Service Officer I	34	0	34	0	0	0	34·0	0·0	34·0
Fire Service Officer II	57	0	57	0	0	0	57·0	0·0	57·0
Fire Service Officer III	59	0	59	0	0	0	59·0	0·0	59·0
Senior Investigating Officer	12	0	12	0	0	0	12·0	0·0	12·0
Investing Officer 1	60	1	61	0	0	0	60·0	1·0	61·0
Investigating Officer 2	225	3	228	0	0	0	225·0	3·0	228·0
Museum Technician Grade 2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Museum Technician Grade 3	2	1	3	0	0	0	2·0	1·0	3·0
Museum Support Grade 1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1·0	0·0	1·0
Museum Support Grade 2	3	0	3	0	0	0	3·0	0·0	3·0
Museum Support Grade 3	22	1	23	0	0	0	22·0	1·0	23·0
Museum Support Grade 4	5	0	5	0	0	0	5·0	0·0	5·0
Museum Support Grade 5	7	0	7	0	0	0	7·0	0·0	7·0
Senior Photographic Officer	9	0	9	0	0	0	9·0	0·0	9·0
Higher Photographic Officer	53	2	55	0	0	0	53·0	2·0	55·0
Photographic Officer	155	9	164	0	1	1	155·0	9·5	164·5
Process and Supervisory Group Grade A	7	0	7	0	0	0	7·0	0·0	7·0
Process and Supervisory Group Grade B	33	0	33	0	0	0	33·0	0·0	33·0
Process and Supervisory Group Grade C	116	1	117	0	0	0	116·0	1·0	117·0
Process and Supervisory Group Grade D	301	8	309	0	2	2	301·0	9·0	310·0
Process and Supervisory Group Grade E	127	8	135	0	0	0	127·0	8·0	135·0
Senior Psychologist	10	11	21	0	0	0	10·0	11·0	21·0
Higher Psychologist	7	16	23	0	0	0	7·0	16·0	23·0
Psychologist (Graduate Trainee)	1	6	7	0	0	0	1·0	6·0	7·0

Grades within the Open Structure and Occupational Groups	Full-time staff			Part-time staff			Total FTE		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Stores Officer Grade A	20	0	20	0	0	0	20·0	0·0	20·0
Stores Officer Grade B	130	1	131	0	0	0	130·0	1·0	131·0
Stores Officer Grade C	359	12	371	0	0	0	359·0	12·0	371·0
Stores Officer Grade D	719	61	780	1	1	2	719·5	61·5	781·0
Support Manager 1	7	2	9	0	0	0	7·0	2·0	9·0
Support Manager 2	22	18	40	0	0	0	22·0	18·0	40·0
Support Manager 3	87	121	208	0	0	0	87·0	121·0	208·0
Support Grade Band 1	338	808	1,146	5	54	59	340·5	835·0	1,175·5
Support Grade Band 2	507	481	988	5	55	60	509·5	508·5	1,018·0
Senior Telecommunication Technical Officer	50	0	50	0	0	0	50·0	0·0	50·0
Higher Telecommunication Technical Officer	166	0	166	0	0	0	166·0	0·0	166·0
Telecommunication Technical Officer	381	3	384	6	1	7	384·0	3·5	387·5
Assistant Telecommunication Technical Officer	462	13	475	0	0	0	462·0	13·0	475·0
Trainee Telecommunication Technical Officer	44	9	53	0	0	0	44·0	9·0	53·0
Communications Officer I	15	1	16	0	0	0	15·0	1·0	16·0
Communications Officer II	43	4	47	0	0	0	43·0	4·0	47·0
Communications Officer III	99	33	132	0	0	0	99·0	33·0	132·0
Communications Officer IV	245	116	361	1	4	5	245·5	118·0	363·5
Total staff in Open Structure and Occupational Groups	44,965	26,446	71,411	136	2,921	3,057	45,033·0	27,906·5	72,939·5
Total staff in Departmental Non-Industrial Grades	12,159	2,563	14,722	75	371	446	12,196·5	2,748·5	14,945·0
Industrial staff	34,343	6,218	40,561	161	1,399	1,560	34,423·5	6,917·5	41,341·0
Total non-industrial and industrial staff	91,467	35,227	126,694	372	4,691	5,063	91,653·0	37,572·5	129,225·5

There are some 500 departmental grades and some 850 industrial grades used in the Ministry of Defence, most of which are managed locally. A detailed breakdown of these could only be provided at disproportionate cost and effort.

Nuclear Weapons

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his policies discourage non-nuclear countries from developing nuclear weapons of their own.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 157 countries have already committed themselves to non-nuclear weapon status by acceding to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as non-nuclear weapon states. We look to these states to honour their obligations under the treaty. We extend to all of them our standard security assurances which remove the fear that nuclear weapons might be used to coerce non-nuclear states. We play an active part in defusing regional tensions which might fuel proliferation. We continue to urge the remaining 28 non-parties to the treaty to accede at the earliest possible date. We have demonstrated our readiness to reduce our own nuclear force levels wherever we can. We are ready to participate fully and constructively in negotiating a verifiable comprehensive test ban treaty.

Pindar Project

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations he has conducted into cost overruns on the Pindar project.

Mr. Hanley: Pindar project costs have been the subject of a number of thorough reviews and the lessons learnt are being implemented.

Aircraft Interceptions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the regulations governing the conduct of practice interceptions by aircraft carrying live air-to-air missiles.

Mr. Hanley: The regulations are: prior to a specific alert state, only designated United Kingdom quick reaction alert—(Interceptor) QRA(I)—aircraft, with a properly constituted crew may carry out interceptions with an aircraft armed with missiles or gun and missiles. During QRA(I) scrambles, a live armed QRA(I) aircraft may intercept its designated target provided the aircraft captain ensures that:

Airways traffic is avoided

The firing trigger is not operated

The sighting system aiming point is not placed on the target

Before closing below 10 nautical miles with the target aircraft, the fighter pilot is to confirm with the intercept controller that the "armament safety check is complete."

The only exception to this regulation is training undertaken by air defence aircraft in the Falkland Islands where practice interceptions with armed aircraft are permitted but against other military aircraft only.

Ministerial Speech

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of his speech to the Centre for Defence Studies on 16 November in the Library.

Mr. Hanley: Yes.

WE177 Nuclear Bomb

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the future of the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb in relation to the introduction of the Trident submarine.

Mr. Hanley: We plan on exploiting the flexibility and capability of the Trident system to provide the vehicle for our sub-strategic deterrent when the WE177 eventually leaves service.

Trident

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the factors taken into account by his Department when determining the size of the United Kingdom's strategic nuclear capability deployed on Trident.

Mr. Hanley: We will deploy on Trident only the minimum nuclear capability which we judge necessary to provide effective deterrence, presenting any potential aggressor with the prospect of unacceptable damage.

Minehunting

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's minehunting capability.

Mr. Hanley: The Government are committed to retaining a capable and effective mine counter measures fleet. We therefore intend to continue over the next decade with our modernisation programme, which will entail the procurement of further Sandown class single role minehunters and a mid-life update for the Hunt class. The 1993 statement on the Defence Estimates makes clear our intention to build up to a fleet of 25 of these highly capable vessels. We expect to make an announcement on future orders for the Sandown class shortly.

Mr. David Hart

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis he has employed Mr. David Hart to work in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Mr. Hart is not an employee of the Ministry of Defence. He is one of several people who provide informal and unpaid advice to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence from time to time.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the amount of loan debt for each local authority in England in its capital account, excluding debt related to trading services, for the year 1992-93, together with his estimate of the amount of capital expenditure not authorised by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Baldry: Statistics on loan debt excluding trading services debt are no longer collected by the Department. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publishes figures for most local authorities. The most recent publication is "Capital Payments, Financing and Debt Statistics 1991-92".

The amount of capital expenditure undertaken by local authorities is entirely for them to determine within the resources available to them. Central Government support for authorities' capital expenditure is set out in the statistical supplement to the "Autumn Statement"—"Public Expenditure Analyses to 1995-96: Statistical Supplement to the 1992 Autumn Statement", Her Majesty's Treasury 1993, Cm 2219.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will specify for each local authority the amount of accumulated capital receipts.

Mr. Baldry: I am arranging for information on the usable receipts held by each local authority in England at 1 April 1993 to be placed in the Library of the House.

Amusement Arcades

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many times the planning inspectorate has overruled local authorities and allowed the establishment of amusement arcades opposite the entrances to secondary schools since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not held in the inspectorate's records.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many overseas visits he has made since his appointment; and if he will list the places visited, the costs of the visits and the cost to public funds.

Mr. Gummer: Since my appointment I have made four overseas visits. They are:

Places Visited and Purpose	*Cost of Visit* £
New York	
To address the UN Commission on Sustainable Development	9,321·50
Luxembourg	
Meeting of the Environment Council	1,013·12
Brussels	
Bilateral with the EC Commissioner	870·30
Monte Carlo	
To support Manchester's bid to host the Olympic games	2,517·55

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Gummer: Since January 1993 either I or my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State have made 10 overseas visits. They are:

Places Visited and Purpose	*Cost of Visit* £
Washington	
Discussions with the relevant members of the new Administration	12,024·37
India	
Discussions on international environmental issues of importance to both India and the United Kingdom	5,586·36
Brussels	

Places Visited and Purpose	Cost of Visit £
Informal Environment Council	822·93
Canada	
International Environment Ministers Conference	6,689·13
Lucerne	
European Environment Ministers Conference	1,162·58
Nairobi	
Meeting of the United Nations Enviroment Programme Council	7,916·32
New York	
To address the UN Commission	9,321·50
Luxembourg	
Meeting of the Enviroment Council	1,013·12
Brussels	
Bilateral with the EC Commissioner	870·30
Monte Carlo	
To support Manchester's bid to host the Olympic Games	2,517·55

Rents

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the average cost rent will be for social housing produced at *(a)* current and *(b)* projected housing association grant levels for *(a)* 1994-95 and *(b)* 1995-96.

Sir George Young: The cost rent of any housing association development will vary depending on the nature of the particular development and the circumstances of the individual association.

Local Government Review

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities he has visited since his appointment; and what is the total number of representations and correspondence he has received concerning the local government review.

Mr. Gummer: Since my appointment, I have visited the following local authorities:

Monday 14 June — Manchester city council
Wednesday 14 July — Liverpool city council
Friday 16 July — Nottinghamshire county council
Wednesday 8 September — Derby city council
Wednesday 29 September — Southend-on-Sea borough council
Wednesday 29 September — Thurrock borough council
Wednesday 13 October — London borough of Tower Hamlets
Friday 15 October — South Cambridgeshire district council
Tuesday 19 October — London borough of Newham
Friday 22 October — Gloucester city council
Monday 8 November — Kent county council
Gravesham borough council
Dartford borough council
Gillingham borough council
Thursday 11 November — Leicester city council
Friday 12 November — Peterborough city council

A total figure for the number of items of correspondence I have received on the Local Government Commission's reviews is not available, except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have taken place with the Local Government Commission concerning the possible creation of a new unitary authority straddling the Yorkshire and Lancashire border.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission has discretion, where it judges it necessary, to make a formal request to my right hon. Friend that the area of review be extended to include localities bordering on that area. The commission has not made such a request in respect of either the Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire or the Lancashire review areas.

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decisions he has reached on the Local Government Commission's reports on Derbyshire and on Cleveland and Durham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have today written to Sir John Banham, chairman of the Local Government Commission, about the commission's reports "Final Recommendations on the Future Local Government of Derbyshire" and "Final Recommendations on the Future Local Government of Cleveland and Durham".

Having considered the commission's recommendations for Derbyshire and County Durham, together with representations made to me, I am not at present satisfied that the proposals in respect of those areas meet the criteria in section 13(5) of the Local Government Act 1992. I am still considering the commission's recommendations for Cleveland.

I have therefore, under section 15(6) of the Local Government Act 1992, directed the commission to conduct further reviews of Derbyshire and County Durham, having regard to the revised policy and procedure guidance issued to it on 2 November and 22 November respectively.

As with the other reviews which I announced on 22 November, I have directed the commission to start on 13 December 1993 and to report on or before 30 December 1994. I will be discussing target dates for final reports with the commission when it has consulted local authorities in these two areas.

These two reviews were conducted in accordance with the original policy guidance which I issued to the commission in July 1992. The revised policy guidance which I issued on 2 November clarified the Government's views on a number of issues, including unitary authorities and the importance of local consensus. Representations have been made to me by local authorities in Derbyshire and Durham that they should be given the opportunity to make fresh proposals on the basis of the new guidance. I consider that the local authorities and people of these areas ought to be given that chance.

A copy of my letter to Sir John Banham has been placed in the Library.

GATT

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* the United Kingdom environment and *(b)* the environment of the United Kingdom's trading partners of the implementation of the proposals in the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Mr. Yeo: A successful outcome to the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade will bring lower tariffs on goods and a significant liberalisation of trade in services from which all countries will benefit. This

should increase the resources available to finance environmental improvements and should help to promote sustainable development.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to implement paragraph 22.4 of chapter 22 of the Agenda 21 report from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, on the minimisation of generation of radioactive wastes.

Mr. Yeo: Paragraph 22.4 of the Agenda 21 report from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development reflects current United Kingdom policies and practices.

Inner-city Initiative

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name each urban programme authority and state the amount of aid they have received under each Government inner-city initiative since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Several Government Departments contribute to urban regeneration through a wide range of programmes. The total support provided by my Department's targeted urban group of programmes since 1981 is as follows:

	Outturn prices £ million
1981-82	160
1982-83	283
1983-84	326
1984-85	449
1985-86	437
1986-87	428
1987-88	516
1988-89	598
1989-90	817
1990-91	970
1991-92	987
1992-93	987
1993-94	[1]927

[1] provision

Comprehensive information for all eligible areas is not readily available. Further information by programme is set out in the relevant departmental annual reports and public expenditure White Papers.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the workings of the planning inspectorate and list the number of occasions on which it has overruled local authorities in each year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is listed.

Section 78 Planning Appeals

Year	*Appeals allowed*
1979	2,602
1980	4,044
1981	4,721
1982	4,003
1983	3,633
1984	3,773
1985	5,477
1985-86	5,581
1986-87	6,208*
1987-88	6,955
1988-89	7,734
1989-90	8,852
1990-91	8,871
1991-92	7,590
1992-93	5,979

Household Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the applicability of the German household waste management system to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Yeo: The approach taken in Germany to household waste management, as epitomised by the recent German packaging ordinance, has resulted in the collection of large quantities of recyclable material, without a corresponding increase in domestic processing capacity or market demand. The resulting imbalance between supply and demand has depressed prices for recyclable material across Europe. This approach proved very costly to German consumers and industry and has put at risk the recycling infrastructure in other EC member states.

The lessons which we have learned are the importance of setting realistic targets for the recycling and recovery of waste; of gearing those targets to the development of processing capacity and markets; of involving local authorities in the collection rather than insisting on separate waste collection systems; and of giving energy recovery from waste a role where recycling is not practicable or environmentally beneficial.

We believe that industry is in the best position to devise the most efficient and cost-effective means of achieving high recovery levels. That is why, in our producer responsibility initiative, we have challenged the packaging industry to devise a plan by Christmas to secure recovery of between 50 per cent. and 75 per cent. of all packaging waste by the end of the decade.

London Pensions Fund Authority

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many people are employed by the London Pensions Fund Authority; and what is its total annual salary expenditure;

(2) what is the total area of office accommodation occupied by the London Pensions Fund Authority; what is the rent per square foot; and what is the total annual cost of its accommodation.

Mr. Baldry: In its annual report and accounts for the year 1992-93, the London Pensions Fund Authority reported that there were 99 members of staff at the financial year end. The annual report also indicated that salary expenditure for the year was £2,359,000 and premises costs were £1,276,000. The total area of the office accommodation and the rent per squre foot are questions for the authority to consider and I have written to the chairman asking him to reply direct to the hon. Gentleman on these points.

1 Victoria Street, London

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the building contract in respect of work at 1 Victoria street, London SW1 to commence; and what is the total cost incurred to date by his Department in respect of these premises since they were vacated in September 1991.

Mr. Gummer: Property Holdings and DTI have concluded negotiations with the freeholders. DTI has now commenced work on the refurbishment of this building. The total cost incurred during the period the building has been empty is £4·4 million up to 9 November 1993.

Toxics Release Inventory

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to introduce a toxics release inventory for pollution management along the lines of the system used by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Mr. Yeo: As announced in April this year, an annual inventory of releases of polluting substances, from processes subject to regulation by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the integrated pollution control system introduced by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and under radioactive substances legislation, is being established. Detailed information will be available through the public register arrangements under both regimes and the first inventory data will be published in due course.

Biodiversity

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme to discuss the United Nations treaty on biodiversity.

Mr. Yeo: I met Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the executive director of UNEP, earlier this month when she was on a short visit to the United Kingdom. We discussed a number of issues of common interest including the convention on biological diversity.

National Recycling Forum

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what level his Department was represented at the National Recycling Forum's annual meeting on 24 and 25 November.

Mr. Yeo: My Department maintains a wide range of contacts on recycling with businesses, trade associations, local authorities and voluntary bodies but was not represented at the National Recycling Forum's annual meeting in November.

Development Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the development agencies together with their directors; and how much has been paid to each director, including expenses, in each of the past five years and this year to date.

Mr. Gummer: Information about the remuneration of chairmen, deputy chairmen and members appointed to non-departmental public bodies for which I am responsible is contained in the annual HMSO publication "Public Bodies", copies of which are held in the House of Commons library. "Public Bodies 1993" will be published shortly. I shall write with a list of current board members. Similar lists for the past five years are not available. Information on expenses is not held within the Department.

Dioxin Emissions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received from the European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers regarding the proposals arising from its recent study on dioxin emissions from VCM and PVC plants.

Mr. Yeo: My Department is not aware of having received any information from the European Council of Vinyl Manufacturers regarding its recent study on "dioxin" emissions from VCM and PVC plants.

Housing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of council properties in England is unfit to rent.

Sir George Young: Local authorities report the numbers of their own dwellings that are unfit, whether occupied or not, in their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns.

Some 150,000 council properties in England, 4 per cent. of the total number of local authority dwellings, were reported as unfit at 1 April 1993.

Waste Management Licences

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects waste disposal licences under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 to convert automatically to waste management licences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Yeo: It is the Government's intention to bring the waste management licensing provisions of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 into force on 1 May 1994. Waste disposal licences will convert automatically to waste management licences on that day.

Council Tax

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against banding under the council tax have been made in the current year; what is the average length of time taken to hear those appeals; and how many were successful.

Mr. Baldry: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) on Friday 26 November, *Official Report*, column *259*.

A meaningful figure cannot yet be given on the average length of time taken to hear appeals, since a great many cases are being settled by agreement between the taxpayer and the Valuation Office agency, and only a few have been transmitted as appeals to valuation tribunals.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he has received written representations from the European Commission or any EC member states concerning an environmental impact assessment of THORP under EC directive 85/337/EEC;

(2) if he will list those countries which have written to his Department concerning an environmental impact assessment of THORP under EC directive 85/337/EEC; and what his reply was, placing copies of all correspondence in the Library, including copies of any correspondence with the Commission.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the European Commission inquiry into the legality of the THORP project.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 24 November 1993]:* The United Kingdom has received a letter from the Commission seeking information in relation to the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield in Cumbria. Since the start of the second consultation period on the revised draft authorisations for Sellafield, letters referring to directive 85/337/EEC have been received from Ministers of the Republic of Ireland and Denmark, and Ministers of Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands have written about environmental impact assessments in connection with Parcom recommendation 93/5. Correspondence between the United Kingdom and the Commission or foreign Governments is treated in confidence.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 30 November 1993

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Investment Authority

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board to discuss the future of the Personal Investment Authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I meet the chairman regularly to discuss SIB's responsibilities under the Financial Services Act 1986, which include the recognition of self-regulating organisations.

Incomes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the minimum income *(a)* of the 1 per cent. with the highest incomes and *(b)* of the 10 per cent. with the highest incomes for each year since 1979 at current prices; and what were these figures at constant 1993 prices.

Mr. Nelson: The figures are given below.

Gross personal income
The top decile point and top percentile point for persons aged 16 and over

£ per year

	At current prices		*At constant 1992 prices*	
	Top 10 per cent.	*Top 1 per cent.*	*Top 10 per cent.*	*Top 1 per cent.*
1979	6,200	11,600	15,100	28,400
1980	7,400	14,600	15,400	30,200
1981	8,500	16,700	15,700	30,900
1982	9,100	17,200	15,500	29,400
1983	9,900	20,200	16,700	33,000
1984	10,400	20,800	16,200	32,300
1985	11,400	23,900	16,700	34,900
1986	12,500	26,800	17,700	38,000
1987	13,700	31,400	18,700	42,700
1988	15,100	34,900	19,600	45,200
1989	16,200	35,300	19,700	42,400
1990	18,400	42,400	20,200	46,600
1991	19,700	43,700	20,400	45,300
1992	20,300	44,700	20,300	44,700

The figures in the table are rounded to the nearest £100. The constant price figures are calculated using the retail prices index.
Source: Central Statistical Office, based on family expenditure survey.

The figures should be treated with considerable caution as they are subject to large sampling errors because of the small sample sizes, particularly for the top 1 per cent.

EC Budget

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the present positions of the European Commission and other member states of the EC in the Council of Ministers towards the means of funding the EC and of the possible increase in the resource base of the EC beyond the present own resources.

Sir John Cope: When it met in Edinburgh on 11 and 12 December 1992, under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the European Council reached a rigorous agreement about the Community's finances for the period to 1999. My right hon. Friend reported the conclusions to the House on 14 December 1992, *Official Report,* columns 23-40. They remain the position of the member states and the Commission. Discussions are currently in progress in Brussels about the Commission's proposals for a new own resources decision to give effect to the changes agreed by the Edinburgh European Council to the own resources system.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year since 1979 the total tax yield from individual gains tax and inheritance tax; and if he will give for each year since 1988-89 the number of individual taxpayers liable for capital gains tax by their highest marginal rate of tax.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information on net receipts each year since 1979-80 from capital gains tax, capital transfer tax and inheritance tax is given in the table. Separate figures on capital gains tax receipts for individuals and trusts are not available, but, in terms of tax liabilities, individuals account for between 85 per cent. and 90 per cent. of the total.

£ million

	Inheritance tax-capital transfer tax[1]		*Capital gains tax*
	Total	*of which charge on individuals*[2]	*Total*
1979-80	401	376	431
[3]1980-81	425	401	508
[3]1981-82	480	457	526
1982-83	499	475	632
1983-84	599	580	671
1984-85	658	621	730
1985-86	881	857	908
1986-87	988	963	1,064
1987-88	1,073	1,052	1,379

	Inheritance tax-capital transfer tax[1]		Capital gains tax
	Total	of which charge on individuals[2]	Total
1988-89	1,067	1,042	2,323
1989-90	1,227	1,207	1,854
1990-91	1,259	1,233	1,852
1991-92	1,295	1,261	1,140
1992-93	1,201	1,170	982

[1] Excludes small residual receipts from estate duty which was replaced by capital transfer tax in 1975.
[2] Includes charges on settled property where the individual has an interest in possession.
[3] The breakdown of receipts between 1980-81 and 1981-82 was estimated as they were affected by industrial action between March 1981 and July 1981.

The breakdown of capital gains taxpayers given in the table includes a separate column for trusts in order to reconcile with published figures on taxpayer numbers.

Number of capital gains taxpayers
Highest rate of tax charged on individuals

	Lower rate	Basic rate	Higher rate	Trusts	All
1988-89	—	52,000	87,000	16,000	155,000
1989-90	—	48,500	88,000	18,500	155,000
1990-91	—	44,000	57,500	13,500	115,000
1991-92	—	34,000	45,000	11,000	90,000
1992-93[1]	4,000	29,000	42,000	10,000	85,000

[1] Provisional.

Taxation

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give for each year since 1979 *(a)* the total income, both earned and unearned *(b)* the total national insurance contributions and *(c)* the total income tax paid by (i) the top 1 per cent., (ii) the top 5 per cent., (iii) the top 10 per cent., (iv) the bottom 50 per cent. amd (v) all taxpayers.

Mr. Dorrell: Readily available estimates based on the survey of personal incomes are in the tables. For 1978-79 and 1989-90, married couples are counted as one taxpayer and their incomes are combined. Following the introduction of independent taxation, for 1990-91 onwards, husbands and wives are counted separately. The estimates of total income relate to income subject to income tax and exclude non-taxable income such as certain social security benefits.

1978-79

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million
Top 1	5,000	2,300
Top 5	14,900	4,900
Top 10	24,200	7,000
Bottom 50	30,300	3,900
All taxpayers	102,800	20,300

[1] Tax units for years prior to 1990-91.

1989-90

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability	Employees' and self-employed national insurance contribution liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million	£ million
Top 1	24,200	7,800	300
Top 5	61,700	16,600	1,400
Top 10	93,400	22,600	2,700
Bottom 50	86,600	8,500	3,900
All taxpayers	323,400	53,400	14,400

[1] Tax units for years prior to 1990-91.

1990-91

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability	Employees' and self-employed national insurance contribution liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million	£ million
Top 1	28,300	9,200	300
Top 5	68,700	18,900	1,300
Top 10	102,800	25,400	2,700
Bottom 50	95,500	9,000	4,300
All taxpayers	358,300	60,400	15,500

1991-92

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability	Employees' and self-employed national insurance contribution liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million	£ million
Top 1	31,200	10,400	300
Top 5	73,900	20,700	1,500
Top 10	109,600	27,500	3,000
Bottom 50	98,200	9,300	4,200
All taxpayers	373,800	63,500	16,200

1992-93

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability	Employees' and self-employed national insurance contribution liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million	£ million
Top 1	31,600	10,500	300
Top 5	74,500	21,000	1,500
Top 10	110,300	27,700	3,100
Bottom 50	97,600	8,300	4,100
All taxpayers	375,300	62,100	16,400

1993-94

Quantile group of taxpayers[1]	Total income	Income tax liability	Employees' and self-employed national insurance contribution liability
Per cent.	£ million	£ million	£ million
Top 1	32,000	10,700	300
Top 5	75,600	21,400	1,600
Top 10	112,200	28,400	3,300
Bottom 50	96,500	8,300	4,000
All taxpayers	378,000	63,300	16,900

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current average cost of preparing answers to *(a)* written and *(b)* oral parliamentary questions.

Mr. Dorrell: The current average cost of preparing an answer is assessed as £97 for a written question and £225 for an oral question.

Lending Institutions

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has to bring centralised lending institutions within the scope of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the Banking Act 1987.

Mr. Nelson: The Financial Services Act applies to firms carrying on investment business in the United Kingdom. The Banking Act applies to firms engaged in deposit taking in the United Kingdom. There are no plans to amend the scope of either Act.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Commission Report

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he proposes to bring forward legislation to enact the recommendations of the Law Commission contained in its report "Landlord and Tenant Law: Privity of Contract and Estate", No. 174; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Legislation to give effect to the Government's decision to implement the recommendations in the Law Commission's report "Landlord and Tenant Law: Privity of Contract and Estate"—Law Com. No. 174—for future leases, but not for existing leases, will be introduced as soon as there is a suitable opportunity.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Arts Funding

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he received on 23 November in regard to the risks to continuity and innovation in the arts of cuts in public funding.

Mr. Brooke: I received a number of representations on 23 November and I have since had a meeting with representatives of the National Campaign for the Arts, the group which organised the lobby of Parliament on that day.

London Orchestras

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what meetings he has held with representatives of *(a)* the London Philharmonic orchestra, *(b)* the Philharmonic orchestra and *(c)* the Royal Philharmonic orchestra since the beginning of the Arts Council's review of the funding of the London orchestras; and if he will make a statement on the matters discussed during such meetings.

Mr. Brooke: I have held no such meetings.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hong Kong

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to repeal the Broadcasting Authority Ordinance in Hong Kong before the handover of the colony in 1997.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Hong Kong Government intend to enact in 1994 an omnibus broadcasting Bill to consolidate and update the present legislation on television broadcasting. On enactment of the omnibus broadcasting Bill, the Broadcasting Authority Ordinance will be repealed. This proposal is not related to the transfer of sovereignty in 1997.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whose responsibility it will be to submit an annual report on adherence to the international covenant for civil and political rights within Hong Kong to the United Nations after 1997; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: China is committed under international law in the joint declaration to ensure that the provisions of the international covenant for civil and political rights as applied to Hong Kong will remain in force after 1997. The responsibility for submitting reports on Hong Kong after 1997 will therefore pass to China. We are discussing with the Chinese in the Sino-British joint liaison group the mechanisms by which this might be achieved.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of Radio Television Hong Kong.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Hong Kong Government are continuing to consider the question of corporatisation of Radio Television Hong Kong. No final decisions have been taken.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the Emergency Regulations Ordinance applicable in Hong Kong is in conflict with the Bill of Rights Ordinance.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The question of whether the Emergency Regulations Ordinance applicable in Hong Kong is consistent with the Bill of Rights Ordinance is currently under review by the Attorney-General of the Hong Kong Government. This review is expected to be completed in December.

Christians (Persecution)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take over the persecution of Christians for their faith in Pakistan.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory : We have regularly raised with the Pakistani Government our concerns about the treatment of all minorities in Pakistan including Christians. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs most recently raised this issue during his visit to Pakistan earlier this month. We shall continue to make known our concerns.

United Nations Centre for Human Rights

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many fax machines the United Nations Centre for Human Rights has.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The United Nations office in Geneva operates a central fax system, with hourly distributions. The Centre for Human Rights has one fax machine of its own.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what view he has formed about the adequacy of the resources available to the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We regard human rights as a priority of the United Nations. The resources now available to the Centre for Human Rights do not allow it to carry out all the tasks mandated to it. We support the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to increase substantially the resources available to the centre from within existing and future regular budgets, through redeployment from areas of lower priority.

Matrix Churchill

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provision is made in the recent compensation claim made through his Department by MC Realisation—Matrix Churchill—to the United Nations to include money to compensate the ex-employees of Matrix Churchill.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Price Waterhouse acting as administrative receivers has submitted a claim to the United Nations Compensation Commission on behalf of MC Realisations (Birmingham) Ltd.—in receivership—formerly Matrix Churchill Ltd. However, we cannot divulge the content of this or any other of the claims submitted. Requests for information on the substance of the claim should be addressed to Price Waterhouse.

Sudan

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he proposes to take over the persecution of Christians for their faith in Sudan.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have made clear to the Sudanese Government, both bilaterally and with other member states of the European Union, our growing concern at their record on human rights and their lack of respect for fundamental freedoms, freedom of religion among them. We were active at the last session of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in highlighting the situation in Sudan, and in particular in securing the appointment of a public rapporteur. The rapporteur has now issued an interim report, and hopes to visit Sudan again shortly.

Ascension Island

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to safeguard the numbers of sea birds on Ascension Island.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The programme of feral cat culling has been enhanced by the setting of more traps. The success rate has been good. Since January this year up to the end of October, 269 cats had been culled. The administrator has installed a barrier at the entrance to the breeding grounds to prevent access by vehicles. This has substantially reduced the risk of damage to eggs by people walking near to nesting sites. We shall keep the situation under review.

BBC World Service

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff the BBC World Service had *(a)* in 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93; and how many it has at present.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1991-92 the total staff complement of the BBC World Service, including BBC Monitoring, was 2,826. The equivalent figure for 1992-93 was 2,941. At the end of September 1993 there was a total of 2,920 staff.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many hours of programmes to *(a)* Africa and *(b)* Europe the BBC World Service broadcast in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93; and how many hours will be broadcast in 1993-94.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is as follows:

	1991-92 hours	*1992-93 hours*	*1993-94 hours*
Sub-Saharan Africa	13,500	13,850	14,310
Europe	21,550	22,060	23,240

Each regional total includes broadcast figures for World Service in English.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase funding for the BBC World Service.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Plans for future funding of the BBC World Service will be disclosed in due course.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what were the transmission hours of the BBC World Service *(a)* in 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93; and what will be the transmission hours in 1993-94.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1991-92, World Service's total transmitted hours were 42,436, and in 1992-93, 43,797. The estimate for 1993-94 is 45,220. These figures do not include programme material not directly broadcast but sent via satellite, on disc or on cassette, to be available for local rebroadcasting.

There is also a significant amount of local rebroadcasting from direct transmissions. Figures for these are: 1991-92, 2,895 hours; 1992-93, 15,527 hours; and the estimate for 1993-94 is 18,700 hours.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his most recent estimate of the number of people living outside the United Kingdom who listen to BBC World Service broadcasts.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Latest estimates by the BBC World Service, based on audience research, indicate that

the regular global audience for World Service broadcasts in all languages, outside the United Kingdom, is in the region of 130 million. This figure does not include any information on audiences in certain countries, such as China, Burma and Vietnam, where reliable data are not available.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding has been made available to the BBC World Service in *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* 1993-94.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total grants-in-aid to the BBC World Service were £156·75 million in 1991-92 and £166·91 million in 1992-93. The total provision for 1993-94 is £175·87 million. These figures include the Ministry of Defence contribution to BBC Monitoring.

HOME DEPARTMENT

London Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet governors of London prisons to outline his policy on prison matters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend currently has no plans to meet governors of London prisons. On 3 November he made a speech about imprisonment to the prison service conference, to which senior governors were invited.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to extend privatisation and market testing in the prison service in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your recent Question about privatisation and market testing in the Prison Service in London.

As the then Home Secretary announced on 16 February, the court escort and custody service in the Metropolitan Police District is to be contracted out in 1994. The contracted service will be phased in beginning in July 1994. The other identified candidates for market testing in the Prison Service in London are the work of the Parole Board Secretariat, some registry work and some information technology work. Consideration is being given to what further candidates might be added.

You will also be aware of the Home Secretary's announcement on 2 September that about 10 per cent. of prisons, twelve in all, will be managed by the private sector. No decision has been made as to whether any of these establishments will be in London.

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the time scale for the building of the proposed secure training centres; and where the centres are to be located.

Mr. Maclean: The creation of secure training centre places will start as soon as possible after the necessary legislation has been enacted. The Government have announced their intention to introduce such legislation in this Session of Parliament. No final decisions have been taken about where secure training centres will be located.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance his Department intends to issue on the referral of juvenile offenders to the proposed secure training centres.

Mr. Maclean: The secure training order will be a sentence of the court. The statutory criteria for the order will be set out in the forthcoming criminal justice Bill.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how his Department will monitor and run the proposed secure training centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Secure training centres are to be provided by agreements with organisations from the public, private or voluntary sectors following a process of competitive tendering. A draft specification issued on 30 July to potential providers indicated the likely requirements of the type of regime operating in the centres. Arrangements for monitoring regimes in these centres will be included in legislation which I will shortly be introducing.

Murder (Life Sentences)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will instigate a review to consider changing the law in respect of mandatory life sentences for murder; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to instigate such a review.

Racial Offences

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of prosecutions for incitement to racial hatred *(a)* in each year since 1965 under section 5(1)*(a)* of the Public Order Act 1986 and *(b)* for each year since 1987 under sections 17 to 23 of the Public Order Act 1986; how many of these prosecutions have been successful in each relevant year under each Act; and how many prosecutions under each Act in each relevant year have been against ethnic minority individuals or groups.

Mr. Maclean: I will write to the hon. Member.

Football Offences

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of prosecutions for each relevant year to date under section 3 of the Football (Offences) Act 1991; and how many of these in each year have been successful.

Mr. Maclean: In England and Wales in 1991 there were six prosecutions under section 3 of the Football Offences Act 1991, five of which resulted in a conviction.

For 1992—which is provisional—there were 31 prosecutions under section 3 of the aforesaid Act which resulted in 17 convictions.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many juveniles were *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* prosecuted by the police in (i) Barnsley, (ii) Doncaster, (iii) Rotherham, and (iv) Sheffield for each year since 1990 and this year to date; and how many of those prosecuted were committed by the courts;

(2) how many juveniles convicted of a crime in *(a)* Barnsley, *(b)* Doncaster, *(c)* Rotherham, and *(d)* Sheffield had committed an offence which was drug related, in each year since 1985 and for this year to date.

Mr. Maclean: The available information is given in the tables. It is possible to identify separately only those who have been cautioned or convicted for drug offences. It is not recorded, for other offences, whether they were drug related.

Table A1.—Number of juveniles aged 10 to under 17 cautioned and prosecuted and committed for trial at magistrates courts within the South Yorkshire area by type of offence 1990

Area/type of offence	Cautioned	Prosecuted (=100 per cent.)	Committed for trial	
			Number	Per cent.
Barnsley Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	180	5	3
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	80	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	260	5	2
Doncaster Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	394	19	5
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	104	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	498	19	4
Rotherham Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	243	17	7
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	74	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	317	17	5
Sheffield Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	463	45	10
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	169	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	632	45	7
South Yorkshire				
Indictable offences	2,578	1,280	86	7
Summary non-motoring offences	931	427	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	3,509	1,707	86	5

[1] Not applicable.

Table A2.—Number of juveniles aged 10 to 17 cautioned and prosecuted and committed for trial at magistrates courts within the South Yorkshire area by type of offence 1991

Area/type of offence	Cautioned	Prosecuted (=100 per cent.)	Committed for trail	
			Number	Per cent.
Barnsley Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	147	8	5
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	74	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	221	8	4
Doncaster Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	410	26	6
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	109	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	519	26	5
Rotherham Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	225	7	3
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	76	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	301	7	2
Sheffield Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	507	31	6
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	151	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	658	31	5

Area/type of offence	Cautioned	Prosecuted (=100 per cent.)	Committed for trail Number	Committed for trail Per cent.
South Yorkshire				
Indictable offences	2,382	1,289	72	6
Summary non-motoring offences	772	410	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	3,154	1,699	72	4

[1] Not applicable.

Table A3.—Number of juveniles aged 10 to 17 cautioned and prosecuted and committed for trial at magistrates courts within the South Yorkshire area by type of offence 1992[2]

Area/type of offence	Cautioned	Prosecuted (=100 per cent.)	Committed for trial Number	Committed for trial Per cent.
Barnsley Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	175	18	10
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	57	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	232	18	8
Doncaster Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	282	16	6
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	75	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	357	16	4
Rotherham Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	201	2	1
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	70	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	271	2	1
Sheffield Petty Sessional Division				
Indictable offences	[1]—	469	30	6
Summary non-motoring offences	[1]—	126	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	[1]—	595	30	5
South Yorkshire				
Indictable offences	2,940	1,127	66	6
Summary non-motoring offences	776	328	—	—
All offences (excluding summary motoring)	3,716	1,455	66	5

[1] Not applicable.
[2] Provisional data.

Table B—Number of juveniles aged 10 to under 17 years convicted of drug offences in the South Yorkshire area 1985 to 1992[1]

Year	Barnsley petty sessional division	Doncaster petty sessional division	Rotherham petty sessional division	Sheffield petty sessional division
1985	—	—	—	—
1986	—	—	—	1
1987	—	—	—	1
1988	—	—	—	—
1989	—	—	—	—
1990	—	1	1	4
1991	—	2	—	2
1992[1]	—	1	—	4

[1] Provisional data.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the most common crimes committed by persons aged under 16 years in the Lancashire constabulary's Pennine F division for each year since 1985; and of those juveniles convicted of an offence over this period, what was the average sentence served.

Mr. Maclean: Information collected centrally shows only the police force area in which the crime was recorded. The tables show the number of juveniles aged 10 to under 16 years of age cautioned, convicted and the average sentence length given by type of court in the Lancashire constabulary for 1985 to 1992.

Table A Number of persons aged 10 to under 16 years cautioned in Lancashire police force area by type of indictable offences 1985-1992[1]

Offence	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*[1]
Indictable offences								
Violence against the person	80	55	57	126	96	75	71	99
Sexual Offences	12	17	27	23	26	14	31	20
Burglary	446	331	293	310	301	348	317	251
Robbery	1	2	10	1	6	2	10	5
Theft and handling stolen goods	1,911	1,399	1,334	1,648	1,011	1,248	1,226	1,151
Fraud and forgery	23	9	20	18	21	12	24	15
Criminal damage	105	145	165	224	195	180	175	134
Drug offences	2	—	—	2	1	31	43	51
Other (excluding motoring)	2	11	7	6	8	14	22	11
TOTAL	2,582	1,969	1,913	2,358	1,665	1,924	1,919	1,737

[1] Provisional.

Table B Number of persons aged 10 to under 16 years convicted and average sentence length (months) given at magistrates courts in the Lancashire police force area by type of indictable offences 1985-1992[1]

Offence/disposal	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*[1]
CONVICTIONS								
Indictable offences								
Violence against the person	99	68	64	67	46	51	39	41
Sexual Offences	14	7	9	8	8	9	4	4
Burglary	419	321	311	190	146	134	89	103
Robbery	7	6	3	3	7	8	2	11
Theft and handling stolen goods	694	549	470	294	161	221	149	156
Fraud and forgery	14	9	6	5	3	6	3	5
Criminal damage	37	26	31	26	18	13	7	10
Drug offences	—	5	1	1	3	3	3	2
Other (excluding motoring)	8	9	11	5	10	6	10	6
Motoring offences	22	30	37	24	1	1	1	1
TOTAL	1,314	1,030	943	623	403	452	307	339
AVERAGE SENTENCE LENGTH (MONTHS)								
Indictable offences								
Violence against the person	1·7	1·3	2·9	3·5	3·0	1·7	—	2·0
Sexual Offences	2·5	—	—	—	1·4	—	—	—
Burglary	2·9	2·5	3·3	2·8	3·2	2·6	3·5	3·8
Robbery	6·0	—	4·0	—	3·0	—	—	4·0
Theft and handling stolen goods	2·3	2·8	2·2	3·5	2·3	0·7	2·2	3·0
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	2·0	4·0	3·0	1·6	6·0	—	—	6·0
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	6·0	—	—	—	—	—	0·9
Motoring offences	0·9	1·0	3·0	2·0	2·0	—	—	—
TOTAL	2·6	2·5	3·0	2·9	3·1	2·3	3·0	3·6

[1] Provisional.

Table C Number of persons aged 10 to under 16 years convicted and average sentence length (months) given at Crown courts in the Lancashire police force area by type of indictable offences 1985-1992[1]

Offence/disposal	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*[1]
CONVICTIONS								
Indictable offences								
Violence against the person	1	—	—	2	2	2	3	3
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	1	12	7	8	6	5	—	3
Robbery	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	3	1	2	—	—	—	—	3
Fraud and forgery	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	1	1	—	3	—	1	1	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	7	16	11	14	11	12	5	10
AVERAGE SENTENCE LENGTH (MONTHS)								
Indictable offences								
Violence against the person	—	—	—	7·5	11·0	8·0	—	4·0
Sexual Offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Burglary	—	6·8	6·0	5·4	5·7	6·0	—	—

Offence/disposal	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992[1]
Robbery	—	—	—	—	12·0	12·0	—	—
Theft and handling stolen goods	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6·0
Fraud and forgery	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Criminal damage	—	—	—	—	—	12·0	—	—
Drug offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other (excluding motoring)	—	—	—	5·0	—	—	—	—
Motoring offences	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	—	6·8	6·0	5·8	8·5	9·5	—	5·0

[1] Provisional.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by police force, and by year for the last five years, the number of United Kingdom people arrested helping illegal immigrants into this country; how many were subsequently found guilty in the courts; and what sentence they received.

Mr. Maclean: Information on arrests is not collected centrally. Neither is the nationality of an offender recorded. The tables show the number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts and tried at the Crown court for the offence of

"knowingly facilitating or assisting the entry of an illegal entrant"

under section 25(1) of the Immigration Act 1971 by police force area and result for the years 1988 to 1992.

Table A Defendants proceeded against at magistrates court for knowingly facilitating or assisting the entry of an illegal entrant[1] by police force area and result 1988-1992[2]

Year and police force area	Prosecutions	Committed for trial	Total found guilty	Total sentenced	Absolute or conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Fully suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
1988										
Essex	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	12	11	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Lancashire	1	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police District[3]	7	4	2	2	—	1	—	1	—	—
Suffolk	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sussex	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Mercia	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	6	6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	34	23	4	4	1	1	—	2	—	—
1989										
Derbyshire	5	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	6	5	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Lancashire	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police District[3]	9	3	3	3	—	2	1	—	—	—
Sussex	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Wales	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	28	20	4	4	—	3	1	—	—	—
1990										
Essex	5	—	4	4	—	3	—	1	—	—
Greater Manchester	6	3	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	21	17	3	2	—	2	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police District[3]	5	4	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sussex	4	2	2	2	—	1	1	—	—	—
West Midlands	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	46	29	11	10	—	8	1	1	—	—
1991										
Avon and Somerset	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Bedfordshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Durham	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Essex	5	1	3	3	—	3	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hampshire	3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	15	9	5	5	—	1	—	2	2	—
Lancashire	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Metropolitan Police District[3]	21	12	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	2	—	2	2	—	2	—	—	—	—
Northumbria	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
South Yorkshire	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Suffolk	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sussex	6	4	2	2	1	1	—	—	—	—

Year and police force area	Prosecutions	Committed for trial	Total found guilty	Total sentenced	Absolute or conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Fully suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
West Midlands	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Yorkshire	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dyfed-Powys	5	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Wales	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	73	41	15	15	1	9	—	2	2	1
1992[3]										
Bedfordshire	1	—	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	2	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Essex	12	4	8	8	—	5	2	—	1	—
Greater Manchester	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Humberside	1	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	18	8	9	9	—	2	—	1	6	—
Leicestershire	4	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lincolnshire	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Metropolitan Police District[2]	11	6	2	2	—	1	—	—	1	—
Sussex	9	5	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Thames Valley	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	63	33	23	23	1	9	3	2	8	—

[1]Offences under section 25(1) of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2]Includes the City of London.
[3]Provisional data.

Table B Defendants proceeded against at Crown court for knowingly facilitating or assisting the entry of an illegal entrant[1] by police force area and result 1988-1992[3]

Year and police force area	Total for trial	Total found guilty	Total sentenced	Absolute or conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Fully suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
1988									
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Derbyshire	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Essex	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Kent	21	17	17	—	—	1	13	13	—
Suffolk	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	2	—
West Midlands	7	7	7	—	—	—	3	4	—
England and Wales	33	29	29	—	—	1	7	21	—
1989									
Derbyshire	4	4	4	4	—	—	—	—	—
Greater Manchester	2	2	2	1	—	—	—	1	—
Kent	—	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Metropolitan Police District[2]	7	4	4	—	—	—	1	3	—
Sussex	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
West Midlands	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
South Wales	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
England and Wales	19	14	14	5	—	—	3	6	—
1990									
Kent	15	15	15	—	2	1	5	7	—
Metropolitan Police District[2]	9	5	5	—	—	—	2	3	—
Northumbria	1	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
England and Wales	25	21	21	—	4	1	7	10	—
1991									
Essex	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Hampshire	2	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Kent	13	10	10	—	2	1	1	6	—
Metropolitan Police District[2]	13	12	12	2	—	—	1	9	—
Suffolk	3	2	2	—	—	—	—	2	—
Sussex	3	3	3	—	—	—	2	1	—
West Midlands	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
West Yorkshire	2	2	2	—	—	—	2	—	—
England and Wales	38	32	32	2	2	2	6	20	—
1992-3									
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—
Essex	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kent	14	12	12	—	—	—	1	10	1
Leicestershire	3	3	3	—	—	2	—	1	—
Metropolitan Police District[2]	11	10	10	2	1	—	5	2	—
Suffolk	1	1	1	—	—	1	—	—	—
Sussex	4	3	3	—	—	—	3	—	—
West Midlands	1	1	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
Dyfed and Powys	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—

Year and police force area	Total for trial	Total found guilty	Total sentenced	Absolute or conditional discharge	Fine	Community sentence	Fully suspended sentence	Immediate custody	Otherwise dealt with
England and Wales	38	33	33	2	2	3	10	15	1

[1]Offences under section 25(1) of the Immigration Act 1971.
[2]Includes the City of London.
[3]Provisional data.

Prison Overcrowding

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present level of prison overcrowding as a percentage for each prison in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about overcrowding in each prison in the United Kingdom.

The table shows those prisons in England and Wales that were overcrowded on 24 November. The percentage overcrowding is calculated from the extent to which population exceeds the certified normal accommodation (CNA) available for use.

Local prisons

Establishment	CNA	Population	Percentage overcrowding
Bedford	170	256	151
Birmingham	618	731	118
Bristol	363	408	112
Brixton	518	605	117
Canterbury	128	193	151
Cardiff	243	331	136
Chelmsford	217	342	158
Dorchester	116	179	154
Durham	344	525	153
Exeter	265	316	119
Gloucester	207	229	111
Hull	269	446	166
Leeds	700	1,124	161
Leicester	194	335	173
Lewes	267	351	131
Lincoln	444	603	136
Liverpool	931	1,335	143
Manchester	291	323	111
Norwich	274	308	112
Pentonville	559	631	113
Preston	324	514	159
Shrewsbury	168	296	176
Swansea	156	203	130
Winchester	298	327	110
Wormwood Scrubs	472	647	137

Remand centres

Establishment	CNA	Population	Percentage overcrowding
Cardiff	85	86	101
Exeter	52	56	108
Glen Parva	320	437	136
Low Newton	163	224	137
Moorland	486	508	105
Swansea	57	75	132

Adult male training prisons

Establishment	CNA	Population	Percentage overcrowding
Hewell Grange	136	161	118
Lancaster	186	249	134
Ranby	331	339	102
Shepton Mallet	158	186	118
Wellingborough	284	304	107

Protection of Property

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to review the doctrine of minimum force in relation to the actions a home owner may take to protect himself and his property.

Mr. Maclean: On 16 November, the Law Commission published the report of its review of offences against the person—Law Com 218, a copy of which is in the Library. The commission's review of the law in this area covers the issues raised in this question. The Government are presently giving careful consideration to the commission's report.

Girl Prisoners

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 1993, *Official Report*, column 29, on what grounds his Department considers that holding girls of 16 and 17 years with adult women prisoners is the best option for holding them, in their own interests.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Twenty girls under 18 years old are held with other female young offenders in establishments which also hold adult women. These arrangements allow them the freedom and choice of activities available in a larger community that would not otherwise be possible. Holding them separately would involve either a national unit for their detention, and consequent dislocation from their home area and a weakening of family ties, or keeping them in very small isolated units. Neither option would serve their best interests.

Mr. Thomas Mason-Rushton

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific steps he will now take to ensure that Mr. Thomas Mason-Rushton, presently held in Her Majesty's prison Whitemoor, is guaranteed immediate access to the medical treatment for his known medical condition.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Robin Corbett, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the medical treatment for Mr. Thomas Mason-Rushton who is at Whitemoor prison.

Mr. Mason-Rushton is at present suffering from a chronic infection. A specialist physician with considerable experience of the management of Mr. Mason-Rushton's condition visits the prison at regular intervals. Mr. Mason-Rushton refuses to see this specialist, however, or to become involved in any of the other locally available medical facilities relating to his illness. It would seem that this is because Mr. Mason-Rushton wishes to return to a London prison to visit a particular London hospital. This is despite there being adequate NHS facilities throughout the country for the treatment of his condition.

There is 24 hour nursing cover at Whitemoor and a doctor on call around the clock. In the event of an emergency, Mr. Mason-Rushton would be transferred immediately to the appropriate local NHS hospital.

Immigration Detention Centres

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he plans to cease holding asylum seekers in the Prison Service;

(2) by how many places he intends to increase immigration detention centres.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The opening of Campsfield House detention centre on 29 November provided 200 additional detention spaces. In addition, we plan to increase the number of places available in immigration detention centres by another 135. However, there will be a continuing need for some detainees held under powers contained in the Immigration Act 1971—including some asylum applicants—to be accommodated in Prison Service establishments for the foreseeable future.

Blakenhurst Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the capacity of Her Majesty's prison Blakenhurst as specified by contracts; what is the current number of prisoners at the prison; how many have been transferred to other prisons in recent weeks; what current plans there are for transfer to other prisons; and to which prisons prisoners have been sent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your recent Question about the numbers of prisoners at HMP Blakenhurst.

The certified normal accommodation of Blakenhurst prison is 649 but the contract provides that the roll should grow at the rate of approximately 100 prisoners per month. The target under the contract is that the prison should reach capacity by the end of the year. In fact, the number of prisoners on 26 November was 625 and the population reached as many as 644 on 23 November. Between 1 and 26 November 98 prisoners were transferred to other prisons.

It is, of course, a primary part of the function of a local prison to classify prisoners and to allocate them to trainers and the 98 movements were part of these normal arrangements. There are no special plans to transfer prisoners from Blakenhurst. Prisoners have been transferred from Blakenhurst to Ford, Bullingdon, Stafford, Ashwell, Sudbury, Featherstone, Hewell Grange, Channings Wood and Brockhill.

Prison Ships

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statutory provisions which authorise the use of prison ships.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Sections 33, 35 and 36 of the Prisons Act 1952—as amended by section 87(8) of the Criminal Justice Act 1991—deal with the Secretary of State's powers to provide prisons.

We are considering this legislation carefully to see whether it would cover the use of marine detention vessels. We would not attempt to hold prisoners in such vessels unless we were satisfied about the legality of such action.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what stage the market testing of operations undertaken by the Metropolitan police service has reached.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A market-testing programme for the Metropolitan police which covers the period up to August 1995 has been prepared. The estimated annual value of the areas of work involved is £85 million.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why a letter to him from the chair of the Association of London Authorities about asylum seekers and refugees dated 9 November 1992 was not responded to until 14 October 1993.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Between October 1992 and November 1993, over 1,500 written representations were received from hon. Members, interested organisations and members of the public about general asylum issues. The small unit dealing with this correspondence was also responsible for supporting the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 which came into force in July this year. The priority which had to be given to the new legislation regrettably resulted in long delays in replying to general correspondence.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are currently detained in Britain and of those how many are being held with *(a)* people convicted on criminal charges and *(b)* people awaiting trial.

Mr. Charles Wardle: On 29 November 1993, 472 people detained under the powers contained in the Immigration Act 1971 had claimed asylum. Information about those held with convicted prisoners and people awaiting trial is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many remand prisoners were being held in police cells in London on the last day for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners in police cells in London.

No remand prisoners are currently being held in police cells in London and it is many months since such action was necessary.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost per day of holding a remand prisoner in *(a)* a police cell and *(b)* prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the daily costs of holding a remand prisoner in *(a)* a police cell and *(b)* prison.

In 1992-93 the average daily cost of holding prisoners was £254 in police cells and £75 in local prisons and remand centres. The costs of remand prisoners are not recorded separately from those of other inmates.

Crime Prevention Board

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how the effectiveness of the National Board for Crime Prevention will be measured;

(2) what quantifiable targets have been set for the National Board for Crime Prevention.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The National Board for Crime Prevention was set up earlier this year as one element of the Government's crime prevention strategy. It is an ad hoc advisory body whose members serve voluntarily and without remuneration. As the board has no executive powers, it would not be appropriate to set performance targets for it.

The board has identified its initial priorities as retail crime, car crime, and young people and crime. Only when its recommendations and advice are implemented can methods for measuring their effectiveness be devised.

Racial Harassment

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are promoting in the current Session of Parliament to prevent racial harassment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government condemn racial harassment and fully support initiatives of the police and other agencies arising from recommendations of the racial attacks group.

We will be looking closely at the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee following the investigation of racial attacks, and will be considering whether further Government action would be effective in helping prevent racial harassment.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the zero tolerance campaign against domestic violence being undertaken by the Association of London Authorities;

(2) what resources he will allocate to support the Association of London Authorities zero tolerance campaign against domestic violence.

Mr. Maclean: The response to domestic violence involves a number of Government Departments whose work needs to be co-ordinated at ministerial level. Although such central co-ordination is important, the Government believe that effective action against domestic violence requires the commitment and involvement of local agencies, both statutory and voluntary, working in concert to develop local preventive strategies. The zero tolerance publicity campaign against domestic violence being undertaken by the Association of London Authorities is one such example.

Although the Home Office is unable to assist directly with the financing of the proposed publicity campaign, the issue of raising public awareness in this complex area is one which will be given early consideration by the ministerial group on domestic violence.

Regional Expenditure

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a table showing for each standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region, the total expenditure in 1992-93, and the budgeted expenditure in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 in respect of *(a)* safer cities, *(b)* section 11 grants, part to be included in single regeneration budget, *(c)* ethnic minority grant and *(d)* ethnic minority business initiative.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I will write to the hon. Member.

Police Cells

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether remand prisoners will be held in police cells in London in the coming year;

(2) what additional resources will be provided to the Metropolitan police service to ensure adequate facilities for and security of prisoners held in police cells in London.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible to give any assurance that remand prisoners will not be held in police cells in London in the future. A number of urgent measures are being taken to accommodate the ongoing rise in the prison population without resorting to the use of police cells.

In the event that prisoners have to be held in police cells, the arrangements for reimbursement of expenditure incurred by police forces in providing adequate facilities and security are set out in Home Office circular 36/1993 to clerks to police authorities and chief officers of police, a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category C prisoners escaped from custody in each year since 1979; and how many were subsequently recaptured.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. John Hutton, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many Category C prisoners escaped from custody in each year since 1979 and how many were subsequently recaptured.

This information is not available in the form you request, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Incidents of escape from custody are recorded according to the security category of the prison from which the prisoner escapes and not by the security category of the prisoner.

Information about escapes has only been recorded centrally since 20 June 1988. During the period 20 June 1988 to 31 October 1993 the number of prisoners who escaped from category C prisons is as follows:

Period	*Number*
20 June to 31 October 1988	45
1 November 1988 to 31 October 1989	98
1 November 1989 to 31 October 1990	124
1 November 1990 to 31 October 1991	185
1 November 1991 to 31 October 1992	138
1 November 1992 to 31 October 1993	102

Information about the recapture of escaped prisoners by the prisoner's security category could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Of the total of 1,917 prisoners of all security categories who escaped from custody during the period 20 June 1988 to 31 October 1992, 1,750 have been recaptured, four died whilst unlawfully at large and 163 remain unlawfully at large.

TRANSPORT

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost of each visit to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. MacGregor: I have made eight visits abroad so far during 1993. The cost of each visit, including some travel costs of accompanying officials, was as follows:

Destination	*Date*	*Cost (£)*	*Purpose*
Brussels	9 January	282	Speaker at Aviation Conference
Brussels	25 January	1,089	Joint EC Transport and Environment Council
Brussels	14-15 March	1,553	EC Transport Council
Oslo/Gothenburg	9-11 May	1,194	Fact-finding tour on congestion charging technology
Luxembourg	7-8 June	2,611	EC Transport Council
Paris	14 June	484	Paris Air Show
Luxembourg	19 June	2,523	Additional EC Transport Council
USA	12-16 September	7,450	To negotiate aviation liberalisation with United States Transportation Secretary and fact-finding tour on highways issues

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the Hambros study into possible joint public/private sector financing initiatives for the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: I expect to be able to do so very shortly.

MV Avon

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the report of the inquiry into the incident in which the MV Avon ran ashore off Browndown, Gosport, on 21 July.

Mr. Norris: In accordance with normal practice in circumstances such as this, the report will not be published but a copy of the summary report will be provided to anyone who can show a legitimate interest.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Norris: It remains the Government's practice not to comment on security matters.

Trans-Pennine Study

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement as to the outcome of consultations on the Trans-Pennine study strategy report.

Mr. Key: I have now considered all the replies to the consultation on the Trans-Pennine study strategy report.

The responses to that consultation were divided on the desirable way forward. While there were many who saw the need for improvements to the road network in the Pennine region for economic reasons, there were many who rejected any further major road improvements because of the likely impact on the natural environment.

I have therefore decided to end public uncertainty and proceed with a limited package of measures focused on particular problems. No new schemes will be added to the national roads programme at this stage.

Although the A69 was outside the study area it was identified as a significant strategic route in responses and I will consider the need and justification for its specific improvement in the programme review which is currently under way.

We have already recognised the strategic importance of the A66 in our current programme of improvements and I do not intend to propose further schemes for the A66 at this stage. There will be no improvements to routes east of the M65 at Colne.

The M62 will remain the main trans-Pennine route and we will be taking forward improvements to the motorway already in the national programme. Following the recent decision to take the M1-M62 link out of the programme, we shall be investigating the need for increasing the capacity of the relevant lengths of the M1 and M62, to deal with increasing levels of traffic, to improve road safety and help economic growth in the area. Any proposals for further improvements which may emerge from these

investigations will be considered for entry to the trunk road programme at a later date, and would be subject to the usual consultations and statutory procedures.

We remain committed to our policy that no major development should take place in national parks, save in exceptional circumstances. We stand by our decision at the start of the consultation period that we will not upgrade the A628-A616 to dual carriageway through the Peak district national park. No additional major schemes will be added to the national programme in this corridor, although some minor, limited, schemes may be necessary to relieve environmental problems and improve safety.

Some respondents called for traffic restraint measures to be adopted in the Peak district national park. Whilst such measures would reduce traffic in the park they would also increase the pressure on the routes to the south of the park and so the Department will not be pursuing this option.

A number of responses asked us to look at the scope for transferring passenger traffic from road to rail. A Trans-Pennine rail study, undertaken by a consortium of local authorities and passenger transport authorities, has indicated that any improvements to the rail network would have only a marginal effect on road traffic flows.

London Transport

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set financial objectives for London Transport.

Mr. MacGregor: I have today written to the chairman of London Transport in the following terms:

"As of course you know, Section 16 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984 gives me power to determine financial objectives which I consider it reasonable for London Regional Transport, or any of its subsidiaries, to achieve. This letter sets out the financial objectives which I have, with the approval of the Treasury and after consultation with London Transport, determined for London Underground Limited and London Buses Limited for the period up to and including the 1995-96 financial year. A separate letter from Handley Stevens to Alan Watkins sets out the objectives determined with respect to LT's other subsidiaries and activities.

London Underground Limited (LUL)

I do not need to emphasise the view which you and I both share that safety remains LUL's—and indeed LT's—top priority. I have also set objectives, agreed with you and now incorporated in LUL's Customer Charter, for the quality of service on LUL. The financial objectives for LUL complement these measures by seeking to ensure that the costs of operating the Underground system represent value for money and are kept to the minimum consistent with the achievement of your safety and quality of service objectives. In this connection, I greatly welcome the LUL Company Plan and the good progress made so far in implementing the improvements in efficiency and cost reductions that the Plan entails. The objectives set out below are based on achievement of the reductions in operating costs promised in the Company Plan programme in the autumn of 1991, which prompted Government to invest public funds in implementation of the Plan.

The objective, I have set for LUL unit costs (defined as operating costs, excluding depreciation and renewals, divided by loaded train miles) is that they should be reduced to no more than £16·20, in 1993-94 prices, for the financial year ending 31 March 1996.

I wish to supplement this objective by one in the form of the percentage which revenue represents of operating costs for LUL (for this purpose operating costs include depreciation but exclude renewals). The objective is that this percentage should be at least 105·6 per cent. for the financial year ending 31 March 1996. This figure is consistent with my unit costs objective and with the provision for depreciation for 1995-96 shown in your 1993 Corporate Plan, and the revenue forecast shown in that Plan as amended by your subsequent forecasts.

I also attach importance, in the context of the pursuit of value for money and cost reduction, to an increasing proportion of LUL's expenditure being subject to market testing. As you know, my officials are consulting LUL on the basis for setting precise targets in this regard. My intention is that such targets should attract bonus of at least 5 per cent. of salary in the Board Performance Bonus schemes for 1994-95 and 1995-96. I would also wish you to include in LT Annual Reports, starting with that for 1993-94, a report on progress on the LUL market testing programme, including a measure or measures showing as a proportion of the appropriate base the amount of work which has been market tested during the year in question, compared with the equivalent amount for the previous year.

Finally with respect to LUL, I would like to see the establishment of a measure, agreed with Government, showing the full economic costs to the public sector of the services provided by LUL. This should include a figure representing the opportunity cost of the asset base. This measure should be published in LT's Annual Report and Accounts for the year 1993-94 and for each subsequent year.

London Buses Limited (LBL)

The current objective is that LBL should achieve, for as long as this remains relevant, a 5 per cent. return on those of its tendered operations which are subject to "gross cost" contracts. We will set fresh financial objectives for bus services purchased by LT in the light of our recent announcement on the future of London's bus services. New targets for 1994-95 and 1995-96 will be set by the end of March 1994.

Public Accountability

As in previous years, performance and progress against these objectives, and against your safety and quality of service objectives, should be published each year in LT's Annual Reports and Accounts."

As my letter states, objectives with respect to LT's subsidiaries and activities, other than London Underground and London Buses, have been set in a separate letter from my Department to the LT's chief executive and deputy chairman, Dr. Alan Watkins. The following is a summary of these objectives:

LT Central Services. Gross costs to be no more than £57 million in 1993-94; a fresh objective for the period up to 1995-96 to be set by 31 March 1994.

Victoria Coach Station. Return on turnover to be at least 5·8 per cent. in 1995-96.

LT PASS. Total costs in 1995-96 to be no more than 2·6 per cent. of gross ticket sales.

LT Museum. Revenue in 1995-96 to be at least 56 per cent. of costs.

Dial-a-ride. Operating costs per trip in 1995-96 to be no more than £9·30, at 1993-94 prices.

LT Property. Net operating costs in 1995-96 to be no more than £1·6 million at 1993-94 prices. Rental income to increase by 1·1 per cent. in 1993-94. Targets for rental income in subsequent years, linked to an appropriate index of performance in the property market, to be set by 31 March 1994.

LT Advertising. Sale of LTA to be completed by 30 June 1994.

Coaches (Safety)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many coaches in England and Wales were tested for roadworthiness in each year since 1979; how many failed this test; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Vehicle testing is conducted by the Vehicle Inspectorate Executive Agency (VI). The annual statutory testing of public service vehicles began in 1982. The statistics are not produced on a regional basis and therefore relate to all first annual tests conducted in England, Scotland and Wales. Additional information on PSV testing and retests can be found in current and past editions of the VI annual report and accounts.

Year	Number of tests	Initial failures[1]	Final failures[2]
[3]1982-83	66,221	—	16,357
[3]1983-84	65,292	—	13,972
[3]1984-85	61,288	—	11,749
1985-86	69,334	27,110	13,250
1986-87	68,376	26,462	13,627
1987-88	67,282	27,128	14,986
1988-89	72,215	27,998	15,620
1989-90	72,391	27,407	14,963
1990-91	71,351	24,994	13,692
1991-92	71,789	26,443	13,647
1992-93	73,350	27,059	13,342

[1] Initial failures are those for vehicles as presented for the annual test.
[2] Final failures are those following rectification of minor defects.
[3] Statistical information on initial failures is unavailable.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal coach crashes there have been in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The number of fatal coach accidents and their resulting fatalities are shown for each year from 1979 to 1992 in the table.

All accidents involving coach occupant fatalities

	Fatal coach accidents	Occupant fatalities in coaches
1979	27	34
1980	27	29
1981	19	20
1982	27	33
1983	26	38
1984	35	37
1985	25	32
1986	21	24
1987	14	15
1988	17	17
1989	18	20
1990	17	19
1991	22	25
1992	17	19

All fatal accidents involving coaches

	Fatal accidents	All fatalities[1]
1979	299	327
1980	253	272
1981	219	239
1982	248	279
1983	234	263
1984	224	245
1985	181	211
1986	195	227
1987	187	199
1988	174	188
1989	195	223
1990	209	225
1991	177	189
1992	160	177

[1] Includes pedestrians and fatalies in other vehicles involved in a coach accident.

Severn Bridge

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the annual average daily traffic flow figures for the Severn bridge, for each year since 1983 and the current year.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* The figures are shown in the table. Since the start of one-way tolling on 26 April 1992 only westbound traffic flows were recorded, until 4 November 1993 when an additional automatic counting system was installed to monitor eastbound traffic.

Two-way flows Year to 31 March	Annual average daily traffic
1982-83	33,997
1983-84	34,004
1984-85	35,636
1985-86	36,764
1986-87	40,151
1987-88	44,384
1988-89	49,129
1989-90	51,789
1990-91	51,545
1991-92[1]	51,128
Westbound flow only	
1992-93[2]	25,882

[1] 1 April 1991 to 25 April 1992.
[2] 26 April 1992 to 31 March 1993.

PRIME MINISTER

National Identity Card

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report,* column 107, which Departments are keeping the question of a national identity card under review.

The Prime Minister: The question of a national identity card scheme is a matter for the Home Office.

Housing

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he expects to be able to meet the Government's commitment to provide 153,000 homes for those in housing need by the year 1995-96.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Crime Prevention

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Prime Minister how often the ministerial group on crime prevention meets; when it last met; and in what form its deliberations are published.

The Prime Minister: The ministerial group on crime prevention meets about three times per year. The last meeting was held on 16 November 1993. Its most recent report, entitled "Reducing the Costs of Crime: Measures Taken by Government Departments", was published in November 1992; a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. The minutes of its meetings are not published.

Fund-raising Events

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the fund-raising events for which *(a)* 10 Downing street and *(b)* Chequers have been used for events since he became Prime Minister; what events are planned for the future; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Since November 1990 there have been a total of 31 receptions, dinners or other functions at No. 10 Downing street for charities or voluntary bodies and three at Chequers. The organisations concerned were:

(a) 10 Downing street
NSPCC
Surrey County Cricket Club Youth Trust
Lords Taverners
MENCAP
Age Concern
EUREKA
Wordsworth Trust
Huntington's Disease Association
Action Research
Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust
National Council of Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care
Crossroads Care (two functions)
Animal Health Trust
ORT
Youth Clubs (UK)
ChildLine
Silver Trust
Marie Curie Cancer Care
Excalibur Scheme
Motability
Westminster Foundation for Democracy
London Community Cricket Association
International Spinal Research Trust
Cambridge Arts Theatre Trust
YMCA
Leeds International Piano Competition
Westminster Medical School Research Trust
The Shakespeare Globe Trust
National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Consortium for Street Children

(b) Chequers
MENCAP
ARC
CORDA

I am not prepared to give advance notice of functions at No. 10 or at Chequers, whether official or non-official.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to permit fund-raising events to be held at No. 10 Downing street; which organisations will be eligible to apply for such functions; and what charges will be levied for the use of the premises, attendance of staff and other costs which might otherwise fall on public funds.

The Prime Minister: When charitable or other non-official events are held at No. 10 Downing street, the organisers are responsible for all catering and staff costs, as well as other miscellaneous direct costs. Organisers may use the kitchens or other facilities at No. 10 Downing street.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many functions have been held at 10 Downing street since 5 July at which funds have been raised for political parties, or for which tickets have been sold for the benefit of political parties.

The Prime Minister: None.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to allow 10 Downing Street to be made available to political parties other than the Conservative party for the purposes of fund raising.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* As under previous Administrations, the use of 10 Downing street for non-official or party functions is a matter for the Prime Minister.

Security and Intelligence Agencies

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what is the expenditure of the security and intelligence agencies.

The Prime Minister: The aggregate provision for the security and intelligence agencies in 1994-95 will be around £900 million, including about £100 million for the attributed costs of Ministry of Defence personnel who mainly assist GCHQ in its functions. The provision for the agencies is planned to reduce by over 4 per cent. in the following two years.

Precise figures for the 1994-95 aggregate budget will be given in the main estimate for the new single intelligence vote, to be presented to Parliament next March, after appropriate charging arrangements for departmental support for the agencies have been determined.

The provision for 1993-94 is carried in part by the Cabinet Office—£197 million on class XIX, vote 2 "Cabinet Office: Secret Service"—and in part by the Ministry of Defenc, roughly 80 per cent. of the balance, and the Foreign Office, 20 per cent., which at present carry the whole of the cost of GCHQ.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Land Reclamation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives his Department has taken to promote United Kingdom expertise in decontamination of soil and land reclamation.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department works together with the Department of the Environment, and other bodies, on a number of activities to promote United Kingdom expertise in decontamination of soil and land reclamation. Some of these provide financial support for private sector projects in new technology—for example under the LINK, environmental technology innovation scheme and Euroenviron programmes.

DTI also promotes export opportunities in this area as part of our general support for the United Kingdom environmental industry, by improving the access of overseas firms to United Kingdom technology.

The Laboratory of the Government Chemist is active in promoting awareness of contaminated land and the need for investigation, as well as acting as a consultancy.

Green Business Parks

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the development of green business parks.

Mr. McLoughlin: I welcome any commercially sound development which helps business to improve its environmental performance or which furthers the growth of the United Kingdom's capability in the field of environmental technology and services.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress made in commissioning the Sizewell B nuclear plant.

Mr. Eggar: Nuclear Electric continues to make good progress on the Sizewell B project. The company is

confident that the project can be completed within the timetable committed at the Sizewell B public inquiry and within budget.

Energy Advisory Panel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the first meeting of his energy advisory panel held on 22 November.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 26 November, *Official Report,* column *254.*

Industry (Costs)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has that the principle of best available techniques not entailing excessive cost is not causing excessive costs to British industry where it is applicable.

Mr. McLoughlin: I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 26 November, *Official Report,* columns *255-56.*

Trading Standards Departments

Sir David Steel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate he has made of the effects of the local government review on the number of trading standards departments in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. The effects will depend on the future number of local authorities and the arrangements made for trading standards functions to be carried out. Some authorities may join together to set up a combined trading standards department as have the five authorities in west Yorkshire.

Nirex Rock Characterisation Facility

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information has been presented to justify expenditure on the Nirex rock characterisation facility; and if he will publish it.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure proposals by UK Nirex Ltd. are a management matter for the company and its shareholders, who are represented on the board of the company.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest cost estimate of the Nirex rock characterisation facility; on what date the planning application will be submitted; and what is the proposed date of its opening.

Mr. Eggar: These are management matters for UK Nirex Ltd. However, I understand that the company currently estimates the cost of constructing the rock characterisation facility at around £120 million, and that the company hopes to be in a position to submit the relevant planning application early in 1994. The applications and documentation accompanying it will include information about time scales.

EC Consumer Council

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EC Consumer Council of 19 November.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Council discussed the draft timeshare directive, and agreed on a common position by a qualified majority vote.

Industry Council

Ms Quin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Industry Council of 18 November.

Mr. Sainsbury: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to her on 26 November, *Official Report,* columns *251-52.*

Gas and Electricity (Standing Charges)

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken to encourage gas and electricity companies to reduce or cancel standing charges, with particular reference to pensioner households; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The level of standing charges is a matter for the Directors General of Gas Supply and of Electricity Supply respectively.

Combined Heat and Power, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the involvement of Warren Springs in the application by Leicester Combined Heat and Power to develop a CHP scheme in Leicester; what was the cost to public funds of this involvement; what are the position and salary scale of Dr. Rampling; on whose invitation Dr. Rampling attended the meeting in Leicester on 9 November; and what was the cost of attendance by Dr. Rampling at that meeting.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have asked the chief executive of Warren Spring Laboratory to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from D. Cormack to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 26 November 1993:

Warren Spring Laboratory (WSL) has the remit to recover its costs through the execution of contract work for both government and non-government customers. In this case WSL was acting under contract to Leicester CHP Limited, to study the distillation of oil from waste tyre pyrolysis, to evaluate its possible use as a fuel for CHP application.

It is normal WSL practice to provide high quality objective scientific and technical data and evaluations, on all its contract work. This is recognised by its customers, and understood by all parties who may have an interest in any particular issue.

There was no cost to public funds of this involvement. All Dr. Rampling's activities, including meetings with interested parties at the invitation of Leicester CHP Ltd, are charged to Leicester CHP Ltd under the contract, at a rate which covers all his costs, including his salary, according to Treasury rules under which the Laboratory operates as a full economic cost recovery Agency.

Chad

Mr. Bates: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on trade with Chad.

Mr. McLoughlin: United Kingdom exports to Chad in the year to September 1993 were valued at £1·94 million up 55·02 per cent. on £1·25 million the previous year. In 1992 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development United Kingdom market share in Chad was 2·1 per cent.; in 1991 it was 2·5 per cent. United Kingdom

imports from Chad in the year to September 1993 were valued at £0·87 million down from £2·36 million for the year to September 1992.

Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1992

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to announce the commencement of the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1992.

Mr. Eggar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 25 June 1993, *Official Report*, column *294*. It is still our intention to bring the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993 into force by mid-1994.

Smoking

Mr. Sims: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to enforce restrictions on smoking within his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Smoking is permitted only in a few specified areas. A copy of my Department's current smoking policy will be lodged in the Library of the House.

Insolvency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many investigations the Insolvency Service agency has conducted into independent practitioners during each year since 1990 and so far in 1993.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Insolvency Service undertakes routine monitoring visits to practitioners to test their compliance with the legislation. Detailed special inspections are carried out where the facts of the case suggest that this is merited. The following figures are on a financial year basis: detailed records were not maintained prior to 1991-92.

	Numbers
Monitoring visits	
1991-92	31
1992-93	147
1993-94 (to date)	135
Special inspections	
1991-92	2
1992-93	9
1993-94 (to date)	5

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Stoy Hayward review of the future of the Insolvency Service will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am currently considering what further work needs to be done following the Stoy Hayward review and shall announce to the House in due course what the next steps will be, including any plans for making public the contents of Stoy Hayward's report.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many independent practitioners have been struck off as a result of complaints made about their conduct to the Insolvency Service agency.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Since the introduction of the requirement to be authorised in the Insolvency Act 1986, 12 insolvency practitioners have had their authorisations withdrawn by their respective authorising bodies. In 11 of these cases, the initial complaint was made to the Insolvency Service.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints the Insolvency Service agency received about the conduct of independent practitioners during each year since 1990 and so far in 1993.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Insolvency Service agency does not keep a record specifically relating to complaints about the conduct of insolvency practitioners, but receives a range of correspondence relating to the administration of insolvencies.

Mr. Peter Joyce, the agency's chief executive, answered letters, some of which contained criticism of practitioners, totalling 26 in 1991, 85 in 1992 and 50 to 31 October 1993.

In addition, I and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade have responded to letters from hon. Members concerning specific insolvencies totalling 399 in 1991, 355 in 1992 and 314 to 31 October 1993. Officials have answered on our behalf 207 letters in 1992 and 147 to 31 October 1993. Information on how many of these letters contained complaints about independent practitioners could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

No central record is kept of complaints about the conduct of insolvency practitioners made direct to official receivers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much of the Stoy Hayward review of the future of the Insolvency Service cost; and whether it came from the Insolvency Service agency budget.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The cost of the review, which is commercially confidential, was paid for from Insolvency Service resources.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Mills: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what savings he estimates will result from the transfer of aspects of the Insolvency Service from his Department to the Association of Chartered Accountants and the Institute of Professional Accountants.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Each of the professional bodies recognised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to authorise insolvency practitioners has undertaken to commence routine monitoring of its own practitioners and is developing systems to take on this work which is presently carried out by my Department's Insolvency Service.

We presently expect there to be savings of between two and three man years in the long term as a direct result, but this is dependent on the continuing progress of the professional bodies towards becoming fully operational in this area.

British Coal

Mr. French: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what change has been made to British Coal's external financing limit for 1993-94.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal's external financing limit for 1993-94 has been changed from £1,880 million to £1,750 million. The revised financing requirement reflects reduced estimates of expenditure by the corporation.

Utilities (Meter Reading)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding fuel and power companies reading meters annually only, estimating the intervening bills; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Representations received by my Department on these matters are passed on to the independent regulators who each have a duty to protect the interests of consumers.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Consumer Affairs Division has carried out into the costs to consumers resulting from estimation of quarterly fuel and power bills by the companies.

Mr. Eggar: Representations received by my Department on these matters are passed on to the independent regulators who each have a duty to protect the interests of consumers.

Wind Power

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of electricity generated in Wales is attributable to wind power; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: As at 30 September 1993, the installed electrical capacity of wind projects in Wales commissioned under the first two orders of the non-fossil fuel obligation totalled approximately 86 MW, representing about 1·2 per cent. of the total electrical installed capacity of about 7 GW in the Principality. The proportion of electricity actually generated by wind in Wales will depend on a number of factors, including the performance of the non-wind plant.

Regulations (Impact Assessment)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement setting out the detailed arrangements which will be adopted for the assessment of the impact on companies which will precede all future regulations, indicating what role businesses will play in that assessment and the way in which the results of the assessment will be published.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The detailed arrangements for assessing the impact on companies of proposed regulations are set out in "Checking the Cost to Business: A Guide to Compliance Cost Assessment", a copy of which I am arranging to be deposited in the Library of the House. As indicated in paragraph 9, section 1 of this booklet, business should be encouraged to comment critically on the assessment so that the final assessment is as accurate as possible. The arrangements for publishing the results of the assessment for proposed domestic legislation were set out in my written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on 19 October, *Official Report*, column *202*. The arrangements for publishing the assessments for proposed EC legislation were set out in the written reply by my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) on 19 July, *Official Report*, column *24*.

Regional Grants

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide a table showing for each standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region, the total expenditure in 1992-93, and the budgeted expenditure in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 in respect of *(a)* regional enterprise grant and *(b)* English Estates.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of expenditure on the regional enterprise grants scheme and by English Estates for 1992-93 are shown in the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

For 1992-93, the London city challenge and task force areas were eligible for regional innovation grants, the only part of the Greater London region eligible for either element of the regional enterprise grants scheme. Provision for regional enterprise grants in 1993-94 in England is £8·8 million. This is not allocated on a regional basis. The regional enterprise grants scheme in England is to become part of the single regeneration budget from 1 April 1994 as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 4 November 1993, *Official Report*, columns 515-25. Figures for forecast capital expenditure by English Estates in 1993-94 are as follows:

Forecast expenditure (£ million)

	1993-94
North East	17·4
North West	19·2
Yorkshire and Humberside	9·6
West Midlands	1·0
East Midlands	1·8
South West	1·8
South East (former Chatham dockyard)	20·2
Greater London	0

English Estates will be incorporated into English Partnerships next spring. English Partnerships is currently in the process of drawing up its first corporate plan and regional budgets are not yet available.

Coal Industry

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the average figure for the last six months of cost per gigajoule for each British Coal pit;

(2) what were the average figures for output per man shift for the last six months for each of the pits in British Coal;

(3) what are the latest figures for output per man shift in each of the British coal pits;

(4) what were the figures for the costs per gigajoule of coal produced for each pit in the Northern region of British Coal for each of the last 12 months;

(5) if he will list the latest figures he has for costs per gigajoule of the coal being produced in each British Coal pit.

Mr. Eggar: These are matters for British Coal.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the figures for output per man shift for each pit in British Coal northern region for the last 12 months.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not available in the detail requested. The figures for the whole of the northern region were:

Average output per manshift worked

	Tonnes
1992	
October	4·12
November	4·30
December	4·23
1993	
January	4·58
February	4·99
March	5·48
April	4·26
May	4·03
June	4·43
July	6·61
August	6·13
September	6·17

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions Bentley colliery has been penalised in a contract for supply to electricity generators for *(a)* the chlorine content and *(b)* the sulphur content of its fuel.

Mr. Eggar: These detailed points relate to supply contracts and are matters for British Coal.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what figures he has, in terms of cost per gigajoule, on the prices being paid by electricity generators for British coal.

Mr. Eggar: The prices paid by the electricity industry to individual coal supplies are confidential to the companies concerned. The average price of all coal purchased by the major United Kingdom electricity generating companies is however published in table 26 of "Energy Trends", the Department's monthly statistical bulletin. In the second quarter of 1993 the average price was £1·64 per gigajoule.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what were the profit and loss figures for each British Coal pit for *(a)* the last six months, *(b)* the first six months of this year and *(c)* each of the last three financial years;

(2) if he will list British Coal pits in order of profitability in the last 12 months;

(3) what was the total profit for each British Coal pit over the last five years.

Mr. Eggar: The profitability of individual pits is a matter for British Coal.

Redundant Steelworkers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the maintenance of ISERBS—iron and steel employees readaptation benefits scheme—arrangements for redundant steelworkers in the United Kingdom will be considered at the next meeting of the appropriate committee of the EC.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* Steel issues concerning the treaty of Paris are discussed in the European Coal and Steel Communities working group. We are aware of no plans for ISERBS to be on the agenda of the next meeting.

RECHAR

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the procedures for approving projects designed to attract Rechar money after 1 January 1994.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 2 November, *Official Report*, column *96*.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those representations which he has received *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against the proposal to establish Rechar II.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* I have received numerous representations, from both within and outside Parliament, with regard to the establishment of a Rechar II programme.

Postal Services

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of postal administrations, in Canada, the United States of America, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands; in respect of their *(a)* quality of service achievements for first class letters, *(b)* volume of mail delivered, *(c)* number of delivery points, *(d)* turnover and profit, *(e)* definition of monopoly position, *(f)* regulator *(g)* ownership and *(h)* proposals for privatisation.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* As part of the Post Office review, we have considered developments in a number of countries, including those mentioned by the hon. Member and also others such as Australia and New Zealand.

My Department does not hold detailed information such as that sought on all the countries listed by the hon. Member. Some of the information is available for EC countries in the EC Commission's Green Paper—COM(91)476—published in June 1992. Geographical and other differences, particularly density of population, mean that such data are not always instructive in making comparisons between them or with the United Kingdom.

Important developments in overseas postal administrations include the abolition of the postal monopoly in Sweden from 1 January 1993 and the proposal of the Netherlands Government to sell a substantial stake in the postal administrations' holding company in 1994. Competitive reforms are being considered in most of the countries mentioned and some are considering the conversion of their postal administrations to plc status, with or without privatisation. There is, however, no set pattern of reform yet emerging in any of these areas.

We will continue to follow these developments with interest in reaching decisions on the Post Office review.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his latest estimate of the number of maintenance requirement assessments completed by the Child Support Agency since April;

(2) what is his latest estimate of benefit savings achieved by the Child Support Agency since April.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. Hepplewhite to Mrs. Jane Kennedy, dated 29 November 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Questions to the Secretary of State about estimates of maintenance assessments completed by the Child Support Agency since April 1993 and benefit savings achieved since April 1993.

The number of maintenance assessments completed to 31 October is 56,800. The benefit savings so far reported by the Agency in the same period is £142 million. This does not represent the total amount of savings achieved by the Agency because some are scored retrospectively.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what target he has set the chief executive of the Child Support Agency for the time taken to respond to letters from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from R. Hepplewhite to Mr. David Lidington, dated 29 November 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Question to the Secretary of State about the targets he has set for the time taken to respond to letters from honourable Members.

All letters from Members of Parliament addressed to me are acknowledged and I aim to respond within an average of 20 working days. Recent press interest has stimulated a great deal of correspondence from constituents and although that target is not being met at the moment, the necessary steps are being taken to ensure that correspondence from Members will be answered as promptly as possible.

I hope you will find this helpful.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown of the representations received regarding the operation of the Child Support Agency on the basis of *(a)* sex of the applicant and *(b)* region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Between April 1993 and November 1993 the Department of Social Security headquarters and the Child Support Agency headquarters received in the region of 3,000 written representations covering a range of views about child support issues.

The cost of establishing the number of written representations made to field offices and Child Support Agency centres would be disproportionately high. The number of representations made in person or by telephone, the region from which the people who have made representations came from and their sex is not recorded.

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the number of cases dealt with so far by the Child Support Agency, by constituency.

Mr. Burt: I understand from Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive of the Child Support Agency, that information in the form requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, a report showing the agency's national performance is available each month in the Library.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the chief executive of the Child Support Agency's performance-related pay is calculated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The nature of the Child Support Agency chief executive's performance package was set out in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) on 5 November, at column *588*. The amount of the chief executive's total remuneration in any year will be published in the agency's annual report for that year.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if sufferers from repetitive strain injury qualify for sick pay.

Mr. Scott: Employers administer and pay statutory sick pay. Subject to the satisfaction of the other qualifying conditions, payment is made whenever the employer is satisfied that his employee is incapable of doing the work required under his contract of service, whatever the cause of incapacity.

Whether or not occupational sick pay is payable in these circumstances will depend on the terms of individual schemes.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of single pensioners who are calculated for *(a)* income support purposes, *(b)* housing benefit purposes and *(c)* council tax benefit purposes, to have notional income from savings of £1, £2, £3, £4, £5, £6, £7, £8, £9, £10, £11, £12, £13, £14, £15, £16, £17, £18, £19 and £20 per week.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables. Details in respect of council tax benefit are not available.

Income support

Amount of notional income	*Single pensioners*[1]
£1	[2]11,000
£2	9,000
£3	7,000
£4	6,000
£5	5,000
£6	4,000
£7	3,000
£8	3,000
£9	3,000
£10	3,000
£11	2,000
£12	2,000
£13	1,000
£14	2,000
£15	2,000
£16	2,000
£17	2,000
£18	2,000
£19	2,000
£20	2,000
All cases	72,000

Housing Benefit

Amount of notional income £	*[1]Single pensioners*
1	[2]17,000
2	13,000
3	11,000
4	9,000
5	10,000
6	9,000
7	6,000
8	5,000
9	7,000
10	5,000
11	5,000
12	5,000
13	5,000
14	3,000
15	3,000
16	4,000
17	3,000
18	3,000
19	2,000
20	2,000
All cases	128,000

Sources: Income support quarterly inquiry, November 1992.
Housing benefit and community charge benefit management information system, income support statistics annual inquiry, May 1992.

[1] Single pensioners are defined as people in receipt of income support and/or housing benefit aged 60 or over who do not have a partner.

[2] The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of *(a)* single pensioners and *(b)* pensioner couples were receiving means-tested benefits in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables:

	Number of cases	*Percentage*
Income support:		
Single pensioners	1,463,000	33·3
Pensioner couples	254,000	9·8
Family credit:		
Single pensioners	220	<1
Pensioner couples	1,300	<1
Disability working allowance:		
Single pensioners	26	>1
Pensioner couples	51	>1
Housing benefit/Community charge benefit:		
Housing benefit only		
Single pensioners	187,000	4·3
Pensioner couples	64,000	2·5
Community charge benefit only		
Single pensioners	524,000	12·1
Pensioner couples	371,000	14·3
HB and CCB		
Single pensioners	639,000	14·8
Pensioner couples	337,000	13·0

Notes:

Sources:

1. Income support statistics, quarterly inquiry, November 1992.
Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards, April 1993.
Disability working allowance caseload allowing for three months' backdating of awards, June 1993.
Housing benefit and community charge benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample of cases in Great Britain, May 1992.
1992 Provisional estimates, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

2. Income support figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Percentages are correct to one decimal place.

3. Percentages are of the estimated numbers of single pensioners and pensioner couples in private households in Great Britain.

4. For income support, housing benefit, community charge benefit and disability working allowance pensioners are cases where the recipient and/or the partner are aged 60 or over. For family credit pensioners are cases where the main earner is aged 60 or over.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will express the value of the state pension for a single person as a percentage of average male earnings at April.

Mr. Hague: The answer is 15·9 per cent.

Source: Employment Department's new earnings suvey—all adults average weekly earnings.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his best estimate of the number of pensioner households with total weekly incomes below income support level.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The latest estimates for the take-up of income-related benefits are for 1989 and show that there were around 1·3 million pensioners who were eligible for but not claiming income support.

Estimates of take-up of income support are subject to particular uncertainty because of under-reporting of receipt of benefit in the family expenditure survey on which the figures are based. This particularly affects pensioners who often fail to distinguish between retirement pension and income support which are paid as one combined payment.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people paid contributions to a personal pension in the latest tax year for which figures are available; and how the total is divided between *(a)* the self-employed, *(b)* employees not contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme, *(c)* employees contracted out of SERPS paying only the minimum needed to contract out and *(d)* employees contracted out of SERPS paying more than the minimum needed to contract out.

Mr. Hague: The number of people paying contributions to a personal pension scheme during the financial year 1991-92 is in the table.

	Million
(a) Self employed contributors	0·5
(b) Employed contributors (not contracted out of SERPS)	2·2
(c) Employed contributors (contracted out of SERPS, receiving DSS minimum contributions to their scheme only)	3·0
(d) Employed contributors (contracted out of SERPS, making personal payments in addition to DSS minimum contributions)	2·1
Total	7·8

Notes:

1. Data derived from Inland Revenue Statistics.
2. The figure for the number of self-employed contributors is an estimate only.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment he has made of the proportion

of the money contributed to a typical personal pension at the rebate only level by a man of 30 years which would be absorbed in expenses, charges and commission during the lifetime of the contract up to maturity;

(2) what assessment he has made of the proportion of the money contributed to a typical personal pension at the rebate only level by a man of 30 years which would be absorbed in expenses, charges and commission during the lifetime of the contract if it were terminated after five years;

(3) what assessment he has made of the proportion of the money contributed to a typical personal pension at the rebate only level by a man of 30 years that would be absorbed in expenses, charges and commission in the first year of the contract.

Mr. Hague: Charges associated with personal pensions vary according to the investment base underlying the policy and also between different personal pensions providers. Consideration of the level of charges associated with appropriate personal pensions is a matter for individual investors in their choice of scheme. The DSS has recently published a new guide for potential personal pension investors suggesting questions to ask before deciding on a scheme. The guide advises potential investors to ask about cost and benefits of schemes offered to them and to compare different products available.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those covered by personal pensions at the rebate only level are entitled only to the minimum benefits needed to contract out of SERPS.

Mr. Hague: All holders of appropriate personal pensions are contracted out of SERPS. The benefits received from a rebate only plan take the form of an annuity purchased with the fund produced by the investment of the rebate together with any incentives, additions and tax relief payable.

National Insurance

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has yet completed his review of national insurance contributions for 1994-95.

Mr. Lilley: I have completed the annual review under section 141 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. My proposals will take effect from 6 April 1994. The levels of contributory benefit expenditure I am maintaining, and the extra help with fuel costs which I am making available to pensioners, widows and people receiving invalidity benefit, will mean a continuing shortfall in the national insurance fund between income and outgoings. The stability of the fund will be maintained partly by means of the Treasury grant introduced by the Social Security Act 1993 and partly by means of the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions for employees and the self-employed which was announced in the Budget last March.

Employers and Employees

In line with the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, the lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions is to be raised to £57 a week, which is the nearest whole pound to the basic retirement pension rate for a single person from April 1994. The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £430 a week which is slightly less than 7·5 times the new basic pension rate as provided by the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act. These new earnings limits will replace the current ones of £56 and £420 respectively.

There will be no change to the initial rate of 2 per cent. payable by employees on the first £57 of weekly earnings, but the main rate payable on employees' earnings between £57·01 and £430 a week will increase from 9 per cent. to 10 per cent. as already announced.

For employers, I am proposing to reduce the standard rate of contribution from 10·4 per cent., to 10·2 per cent., a reduction of 0·2 per cent. I also propose to decrease, from the same date, the reduced rates which employers pay for lower-paid workers. The reduction will be 1 per cent., giving new rates for 7·6 per cent., 5·6 per cent. and 3·6 per cent. These reductions will therefore be especially helpful to employers of the lower-paid, often smaller employers, and should more than offset extra costs which employers meet as a result of changes to the reimbursement provisions for statutory sick pay.

The thresholds for the special reduced rates will also be raised so that from April 1994 they apply to weekly earnings which fall below the ceilings of £100, £145, and £200 respectively, compared with £95, £140, and £195 at present.

Not Contracted-Out Employees and their Employers

Neither the employee nor his employer will have to pay any contributions if earnings are less than £57 a week. Employees earning up to about £64 a week will pay slightly less in contributions. Employees earning above £64 but not more than the existing upper limit of £420 will generally pay more contributions, ranging from a few pence to £3·56. Employees with earnings above £420 a week will pay a maximum increase of £4·56. For employers, the reduction in their contributions will depend on the level of the employee's pay.

Contracted-Out Employees and their Employers

Those with earnings between £63 and £420—the former upper earnings limit—will pay more contributions, ranging from a few pence up to £3·58 a week more. Those who earn more than £420 will pay contributions on the next £10 of earnings from next April—up to £430 a week, the proposed upper earnings limit, a maximum increase of £4·40 a week. Contracted-out employees who earn £62 or less will pay the same or slightly less.

For employers, the reduction will again depend upon the level of employee's pay.

Self-employed people

Although contributions for employees are to increase, I do not propose to raise the flat rate class 2 contribution other than in line with inflation. It will therefore increase by 10p to £5·65.

However, class 4 contributions, payable by those self-employed people with profits above a certain level, will be increased by 1 per cent. to 7·3 per cent. The annual limits of profits will be raised to £6,490 and £22,360 from

£6,340 and £21,840 respectively. Self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions will pay an extra £5·20 a year in 1994-95.

The changes for class 4 contributions mean that some lower earners will pay less or no class 4 contributions; higher earners will pay a maximim of £187·21 more.

Class 3—voluntary—contributions

The rate of class 3 contributions will be raised by 10p to £5·55 a week.

National Health Service Allocation

The allocation to the national health service, currently 1·05 per cent. from employees and 0·9 per cent. from employers, remains unchanged.

Treasury Grant

In accordance with section 2(2) of the Social Security Act 1993, I propose to maintain the level of the national insurance fund during 1994-95 by means of a grant from the Treasury. I estimate that the grant required will be approximately 6·4 billion.

As usual, I shall by laying a draft order before Parliament together with a report by the Government Actuary describing the effects of my proposals.

Benefits (Uprating)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out details of the new rates of benefits proposed from April 1994 and the details of help to be made available to meet the cost of VAT on domestic fuel.

Mr. Lilley: The annual uprating of social security benefits will take place, as usual, in the first full week of the tax year—which in 1994 will be the week beginning 11 April.

Expenditure on social security will be £83 billion in 1994-95, £87·8 billion in 1995-96 and £91·7 billion in 1996-97. The settlement fulfils the Government's commitment to the needy, the sick, the elderly, to disabled people and to families. It gives the promised help to those who may have most difficulty in meeting the cost of VAT on domestic fuel.

I have reviewed social security benefits in accordance with section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. My proposals, which are set out in the schedule, fully reflect the commitment to increase all major benefits in line with inflation. The statutory instruments to implement them will be laid before both Houses for debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

All national insurance benefits will be uprated at least in line with the annual increase in the retail prices index up to September, which this year is 1·8 per cent.

In addition, all pensioners who receive a full basic pension, including those receiving income support, will gain an extra 50p per week for single people and 70p per week for couples to help meet the cost of VAT on fuel. This help will double in April 1995 when VAT on fuel rises to the standard rate. Widows and people receiving invalidity benefit, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, war pensions unemployability supplement and disabled people on income support will receive similar increases in both April 1994 and April 1995.

Income-related benefits are normally uprated by the Rossi index—RPI less certain housing costs—which this year increased by 3·5 per cent. in the year to September. In April 1994, however, extra help will be provided to people receiving income support by bringing forward by a year the effect of VAT on domestic fuel on the Rossi index. Next April their benefits will go up by a total of 3·9 per cent. This is more than the rate at which earnings are rising. These increases will feed through into other income-related benefits: family credit, disability working allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Altogether, the total package of extra help through the social security system will be worth more than £1·5 billion over the next three years. More than 15 million people will gain. By paying the additional increase from April 1994, the Government have ensured that help will be available before payment is due on bills which include VAT.

The Government's success in keeping inflation low has maintained the value of benefits between upratings. This contrasts with the erosion of purchasing power between upratings during the high inflation of the 1970s. Since September, there has been a further welcome fall in the rate of inflation.

The main features of my uprating package are:

Retirement Pension

Retirement pension which is received by 10 million people will rise by £1·50 per week to £57·60 for a single person and by £2·30 to £92·10 for a couple. Not only does this mean a bigger rise next year but it builds in a permanent enhancement to the basic pension which will be uprated in future years.

Invalidity Benefit

Invalidity pension will increase by £1·50 to £57·60 per week for a single person and the basic rate of severe disablement allowance will rise from £33·70 to £34·80 per week.

Unemployment Benefit

Unemployment benefit for a single person will rise from £44·65 to £45·45 per week.

Child Benefit

Child benefit will be fully uprated in line with prices meaning £10·20 per week for the first or eldest eligible child and £8·25 for each subsequent child.

War Pensions

War pensions will be uprated fully in line with prices. Also, the special MOD payments to pre-1973 war widows, which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, will rise in line with the RPI —from £47·84 to £48·70 per week.

Non-dependant Deductions

From next April, I propose to increase the level of non-dependant deductions to income-related benefits to £5, £9, £13 and £25 per week. At the same time, income thresholds and the thresholds for second adult rebates will be raised by up to £4 per week.

Residential Care and Nursing Home Limits

The limits for existing income support recipients living in residential care homes will be increased by £9 per week for the elderly and very dependent elderly, and by £7 per week for other groups. There will also be a £5 increase to the London extension for residential care homes. All nursing homes limits will be increased by £10. The residential allowance paid under community arrangements will be increased by £3 per week to £53 in London and £48 elsewhere.

Schedule of Main proposed Social Security Benefit rates from April 1994 (weekly rates unless otherwise shown)

	Old Rates 1993 £	*New Rates 1994* £
Attendance Allowance		
higher rate	44·90	45·70
lower rate	30·00	30·55
Child Benefit		
only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable	10·00	10·20
each subsequent child	8·10	8·25
Child's Special Allowance		
see note on Child Dependency Increase	10·95	11·00
Council Tax Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	34·80	36·15
25 or over	44·00	45·70
lone parent—18 or over	44·00	45·70
couple—one or both over 18	69·00	71·70
dependent children		
under 11	15·05	15·65

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
11 to 15	22·15	23·00
16 to 17	26·45	27·50
18	34·80	36·15
Premiums		
family	9·65	10·05
lone parent	10·95	11·25
pensioner		
single	17·30	18·25
couple	26·25	27·55
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	19·30	20·35
couple	29·00	30·40
pensioner (higher)		
single	23·55	24·70
couple	33·70	35·30
disability		
single	18·45	19·45
couple	26·45	27·80
severe disability		
single	33·70	34·30
couple (one qualifies)	33·70	34·30
couple (both qualify)	67·40	68·60
disabled child	18·45	19·45
carer	11·95	12·40
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	14·05	14·40
lower rate	11·20	11·50
Non-dependant deductions aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
gross income: £108 or more	2·00	2·30
gross income: up to £108	1·00	1·15
others, aged 18 or over	1·00	1·15

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Alternative maximum Council Tax Benefit second adult on Income Support	25 per cent. of council tax	
second adult's gross income:		
under £108·00	15 per cent. of council tax	
£108 to £139·99	7·5 per cent. of council tax	
Capital		
upper limit7	16,000·00	16,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregard		
where disability premium awarded	15·00	15·00
various specified employments	15·00	15·00
lone parent	25·00	25·00
where the claimant has a partner	10·00	10·00
single claimant	5·00	5·00
where carer premium awarded	15·00	15·00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15·00	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·60	8·60

	Old rates 1993	New rates 1994
Dependency increases		
Adult Dependency Increases		
For spouse or person looking after children, with;		
retirement pension on own insurance, invalidity pension, unemployability supplement and, if beneficiary over pension age, unemployment benefit	33·70	34·50
severe disablement allowance	20·15	20·70
invalid care allowance	20·15	20·65
sickness benefit if beneficiary over pension age	32·30	33·10
unemployment benefit	27·55	28·05
maternity allowance/sickness benefit	26·40	26·90
Child Dependency Increases, with;		
retirement pension, widows' benefit, invalidity benefit, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and sickness/unemployment benefit if beneficiary over pension age	10·95	11·00

Note: The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases, guardian's allowance and child special allowance to be adjusted where the increase or allowance is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom Chb is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase or allowance is reduced by the differential (less the 75p derived from the October 1991 increase in Chb) between the rate of Chb payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child. This gives a rate of £9·80 (1993) and £9·80 (1994).

	Old rates 1993 £	New rates 1994 £
Disability living allowance		
Care component		
Highest	44·90	45·70
Middle	30·00	30·55
Lowest	11·95	12·15
Mobility component		
Higher	31·40	31·95
Lower	11·95	12·15
Disability working allowance		
Adult allowance		
Single people	43·95	46·05
Couples/Lone parents	60·95	63·75
Child allowance		
Under 11	10·75	11·20
11 to 15	17·85	18·55
16 to 17	22·20	23·05
18	31·00	32·20
Applicable amount (i.e. taper threshold)		
Single people	41·40	43·00
Couples/Lone parents	69·00	71·70
Capital		
Upper limit	16,000·00	16,000·00
Amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
Child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
Maintenance disregard	15·00	15·00
War disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
Voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
Student loan	10·00	10·00
Student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
Income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
Furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
Where heating is included, additional	8·60	8·60

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Earnings Rules		
Invalid Care Allowance	50·00	50·00
Unemployment Benefit (daily rate)	2·00	2·00
Unemployment Benefit (maximum weekly amount)	56·00	57·00
Therapeutic earnings limit	42·00	43·00
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,184·00	2,236·00
War pensioners unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	2,184·00	2,236·00
Adult dependency increases with sickness benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	26·40	26·90
(b) over pension age	32·30	33·10
maternity allowance	26·40	26·90
unemployment benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	27·55	28·05
(b) over pension age	33·70	34·50
retirement pension, invalidity pension, severe disablement allowance, unemployability supplement where dependent		
(a) is living with claimant	44·65	45·45

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45·09	45·09
retirement pension, invalidity benefit and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	33·70	34·50
severe disablement allowance where dependant not living with claimant	20·15	20·70
invalid care allowance	20·15	20·65
Child dependency increases level at which CDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	120·00	120·00
for each subsequent child	16·00	16·00
Family credit		
Adult credit	42·50	44·30
Child credit		
under 11	10·75	11·20
11 to 15	17·85	18·55
16 to 17	22·20	23·05
18	31·00	32·20
Applicable amount (ie taper threshold)	69·00	71·70
Capital		
upper limit	8,000·00	8,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
maintenance disregard	15·00	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·60	8·60
Guardian's Allowance		
see note on Child Dependency Increase	10·95	11·00
Hospital Downrating		
20 per cent. rate	11·20	11·50
40 per cent. rate	22·40	23·00

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Housing Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	34·80	36·15
25 or over	44·00	45·70
lone parent		
under 18	34·80	36·15
18 or over	44·00	45·70
couple		
both under 18	52·40	54·55
one or both over 18	69·00	71·70
dependent children		
under 11	15·05	15·65

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
11 to 15	22·15	23·00
16 to 17	26·45	27·50
18	34·80	36·15
Premiums		
family	9·65	10·05
lone parent	10·95	11·25
pensioner		
single	17·30	18·25
couple	26·25	27·55
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	19·30	20·35
couple	29·00	30·40
pensioner (higher)		
single	23·55	24·70
couple	33·70	35·30
disability		
single	18·45	19·45
couple	26·45	27·80
severe disability		
single	33·70	34·30
couple (one qualifies)	33·70	34·30
couple (both qualify)	67·40	68·60
disabled child	18·45	19·45
carer	11·95	12·40
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	14·05	14·40
lower rate	11·20	11·50
Non-dependant deductions rent rebates and allowances		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or gross income under £72	4·00	5·00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
gross income: £72 to £107·99	8·00	9·00
gross income: £108 to £138·99	12·00	13·00
gross income: £139 or more	21·00	25·00
Service charges for fuel		
heating	8·60	8·60
hot water	1·05	1·05
lighting	0·70	0·70
cooking	1·05	1·05
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	15·75	16·30
each person in family aged 16 or over	15·75	16·30
each child under 16	7·95	8·25
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	10·45	10·80
each person in family aged 16 or over	10·45	10·80
each child under 16	5·25	5·45
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	1·90	1·95
Capital		
upper limit	16,000·00	16,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	15·00	15·00
various specified employments	15·00	15·00
lone parent	25·00	25·00
where the claimant has a partner	10·00	10·00
single claimant	5·00	5·00
where carer premium awarded	15·00	15·00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15·00	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·60	8·60

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Income Support		
Personal allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate	26·45	27·50
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	34·80	36·15
18 to 24	34·80	36·15
25 or over	44·00	45·70
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	26·45	27·50
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	34·80	36·15
18 or over	44·00	45·70
couple		
both under 18	52·40	54·55
one or both 18 or over	69·00	71·70
dependent children		
under 11	15·05	15·65
11 to 15	22·15	23·00
16 to 17	26·45	27·50
18	34·80	36·15
Residential Allowance except Greater London	45·00	48·00
Greater London	50·00	53·00
Premiums		
family	9·65	10·05
lone parent	4·90	5·10
pensioner		
single	17·30	18·25
couple	26·25	27·55
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	19·30	20·35
couple	29·00	30·40
pensioner (higher)		
single	23·55	24·70
couple	33·70	35·30

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
disability		
single	18·45	19·45
couple	26·45	27·80
severe disability		
single	33·70	34·30
couple (one qualifies)	33·70	34·30
couple (both qualify)	67·40	68·60
disabled child	18·45	19·45
carer	11·95	12·40
Maximum amounts for accommodation and meals in residential care homes		
old age	185·00	194·00
very dependent elderly	215·00	224·00
mental disorder (not handicap)	195·00	202·00
drug/alcohol dependence	195·00	202·00
mental handicap	225·00	232·00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	255·00	262·00
(b) (over pension age)	185·00	194·00
others	185·00	194·00
maximum Greater London increase	25·00	30·00
nursing homes		
mental disorder (not handicap)	280·00	290·00
drug-alcohol dependence	280·00	290·00
mental handicap	285·00	295·00
terminal illness	280·00	290·00
physical disablement		
(a) (under pension age)	315·00	325·00
(b) (over pension age)	280·00	290·00
others (including elderly)	280·00	290·00
maximum Greater London increase	35·00	35·00
Amounts for meals where these cannot be purchased within the accommodation (Daily Rate)		
breakfast	1·10	1·10
midday meal	1·55	1·55
evening meal	1·55	1·55
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in private and voluntary residential care and nursing homes		
personal expenses	12·65	13·10
dependent children		
(a) under 11	5·20	5·40
(b) 11 to 15	7·60	7·85
(c) 16 to 17	8·80	9·10
(d) age 18	12·65	13·10
hospital		
higher rate	14·05	14·40
lower rate	11·20	11·50
local authority (Part III) accommodation	12·65	13·10
the Polish home Ilford Park		
max amount for accommodation and meals	280·00	290·00
personal expenses for claimant	16·75	17·35
personal expenses for partner	16·75	17·35
personal expenses for dependant children		
(a) under 11	5·20	5·40
(b) 11 to 15	7·60	7·85
(c) 16 to 17	8·80	9·10
(d) 18	15·00	15·55
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependants aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or gross income under £72	4·00	5·00
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
gross income: £72 to £107·99	8·00	9·00
gross income: £108 to £138·99	12·00	13·00
gross income: £139 or more	21·00	25·00
Deduction for direct payments		
arrears of housing, fuel and water costs council tax and fines default, and deductions for child maintenance	2·20	2·30
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2·20	2·30
court order against couple	3·45	3·60
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	6·60	6·90
where claimant convicted of fraud	8·80	9·20
Reduction in benefit for strikers	23·50	24·50
Capital		
upper limit	8,000·00	8,000·00
amount disregarded	3,000·00	3,000·00
child's limit	3,000·00	3,000·00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5·00	5·00
higher earnings	15·00	15·00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10·00	10·00
voluntary and charitable payments	10·00	10·00
student loan	10·00	10·00
student's covenanted income	5·00	5·00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20·00	20·00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4·00	4·00
where heating is included, additional	8·60	8·60

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	56·10	57·60
lower rate	16·83	17·28
Industrial Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependants		
100 per cent.	91·60	93·20
90 per cent.	82·44	83·88
80 per cent.	73·28	74·56
70 per cent.	64·12	65·24
60 per cent.	54·96	55·92
50 per cent.	45·80	46·60
40 per cent.	36·64	37·28
30 per cent.	27·48	27·96
20 per cent.	18·32	18·64
Under 18		
100 per cent.	56·10	57·10
90 per cent.	50·49	51·39
80 per cent.	44·88	45·68
70 per cent.	39·27	39·97
60 per cent.	33·66	34·26

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
50 per cent.	28·05	28·55
40 per cent.	22·44	22·84
30 per cent.	16·83	17·13
20 per cent.	11·22	11·42
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	6,080·00	6,190·00
Unemployability Supplement	56·10	57·60
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	11·95	12·15
middle rate	7·50	7·60
lower rate	3·75	3·80
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	36·64	37·28
Maximum retirement allowance	9·16	9·32
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	73·40	74·80
intermediate rate	55·05	56·10
normal maximum rate	36·70	37·40
part-time rate	18·35	18·70
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	36·70	37·40
Invalid Care Allowance	33·70	34·50
Invalidity Benefit		
Invalidity pension	56·10	57·60
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	11·95	12·15
middle rate	7·50	7·60
lower rate	3·75	3·80
Maternity Allowance	43·75	44·55
One-parent Benefit	6·05	6·15
Pneumoconiosis, Byssinosis, Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation) and other schemes		
Total disablement allowance and major incapacity allowance (maximum)	91·60	93·20
Partial disablement allowance	33·70	34·50
Unemployability supplement	56·10	57·60
plus where appropriate increases for early incapacity		
higher rate	11·95	12·15
middle rate	7·50	7·60
lower rate	3·75	3·80
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	73·40	74·80
intermediate rate	55·05	56·10
normal maximum rate	36·70	37·40
part-time rate	18·35	18·70
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	36·70	37·40
Lesser incapacity allowance		
maximum rate of allowance	33·70	34·50
based on loss of earnings over	44·90	45·70

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Retirement Pension		
Category A or B	56·10	57·60
Category B (lower)—husband's insurance	33·70	34·50
Category C or D—non-contributory	33·70	34·50
Category C (lower)—non-contributory	20·15	20·65
Additional pension	Increase by 1·8 per cent.	
Increments to basic and additional pension, contracted out deductions (from pre-April 1988 earnings) and graduated retirement benefit	Increase by 1·8 per cent.	
Contracted out deductions (CODs) and increments scheme to CODs (from post-April 1988 earnings)	1·8 per cent. paid by	
Graduated retirement benefit (unit) (pence)	7·35	7·48
Addition at age 80	0·25	0·25
Severe Disablement Allowance		
Basic rate	33·70	34·80
Age-related addition		
Higher rate	11·95	12·15
Middle rate	7·50	7·60
Lower rate	3·75	3·80
Sickness Benefit		
Over pension age	53·80	55·25
Under pension age	42·70	43·45
Social Fund		
Maternity payment	100·00	100·00
Cold Weather Payments	6·00	7·00
Capital limit		
aged under 60	500·00	500·00
aged 60 and over	1,000·00	1,000·00
Statutory Maternity Pay		
lower rate	47·95	48·80
Statutory Sick Pay		
Lower rate	46·95	47·80
Standard rate	52·50	52·50
Unemployment Benefit		
Over pension age	56·10	57·60
Under pension age	44·65	45·45
Occupational pension abatement	35·00	35·00

	Old rates 1993 £	New rates 1994 £
War Pensions		
Disablement pension (100 per cent. rates)		
private or equivalent	97·20	98·90
officer (£ per annum) maximum	5,072·00	5,161·00
Age allowances		
40 per cent. to 50 per cent.	6·50	6·60
over 50 per cent. but not over 70 per cent.	10·00	10·20
over 70 per cent. but not over 90 per cent.	14·30	14·55
over 90 per cent.	20·00	20·40
Disablement gratuity (base figures for calculation purposes only)		
specified minor injury	6,080·00	6,190·00
unspecified minor injury	3,344·00	3,404·50
Unemployability allowance		
personal	59·55	61·10
adult dependency increase	33·70	34·50
(a) increase for first child	9·80	9·80
(b) increase for subsequent children	10·95	11·00
Invalidity allowance		
higher rate	11·95	12·15
middle rate	7·50	7·60
lower rate	3·75	3·80

	Old rates 1993 £	New rates 1994 £
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	73·40	74·80
intermediate rate	55·05	56·10
normal maximum rate	36·70	37·40
part-time rate	18·35	18·70
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	15·70	16·00
lower rate	7·85	8·00
Mobility supplement	34·90	35·55
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (maximum)	36·64	37·28
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	36·70	37·40
Severe disablement occupational allowance	18·35	18·70
Clothing allowance (£ per annum)		
higher rate	124·00	126·00
lower rate	79·00	80·00
Education allowance (£ per annum) (maximum)	120·00	120·00
War widow's pension		
Widow (private)	72·90	74·70
Childless widow under 40 (private)	16·83	17·28
Childless widow under 40 (other ranks)	17·08	17·54
Widow—Officer (£ per annum) maximum	4,514·00	4,621·00
Age allowance		
(a) age 65 to 69	8·35	8·50
(b) age 70 to 79	16·10	16·40
(c) age 80 and over	23·95	24·40
Children's allowance		
(a) Increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	13·85	13·90
(b) increase for subsequent children	15·00	15·10
Orphan's pension		
(a) Increase for first child (adjusted for ChB increase)	15·45	15·50
(b) Increase for subsequent children	16·60	16·70
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (maximum)	70·85	72·65
Rent allowance (maximum)	27·75	28·25
Adult orphan's pension (maximum)	56·10	57·60
Widower's pension		
(i) Private or equivalent	72·90	74·70
(ii) Officer (£ per annum) maximum	4,514·00	4,621·00

	Old Rates 1993 £	New Rates 1994 £
Widow's Benefit		
Widow's payment (lump sum)	1,000·00	1,000·00
Widowed mother's allowance	56·10	57·60
Widow's pension		
standard rate	56·10	57·60
age-related		
age 54 (49)	52·17	53·57
53 (48)	48·25	49·54
52 (47)	44·32	45·50
51 (46)	40·39	41·47
50 (45)	36·47	37·44
49 (44)	32·54	33·41
48 (43)	28·61	29·38
47 (42)	24·68	25·34
46 (41)	20·76	21·31
45 (40)	16·83	17·28

Note: For deaths occurring before 11 April 1988 refer to age points shown in brackets.

Income Support

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of income support are presently having mortgage interest payments made on their behalf; and what is the total cost to his Department at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: Five hundred and sixty-two thousand income support recipients have mortgage interest included in their assessment; the annual equivalent of the amount so included is estimated at £1,270 million.

Source: Income support statistics quarterly inquiry, February 1993.

Ministerial Hospitality

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 November 1993 *Official Report*, columns *34-35*, if he will specify the nature of the ministerial hospitality in his Department during the financial year 1992-93 for each event, giving the cost in each case.

Mr. Hague: Information is not available in the form requested. The main items of expenditure are in the table:

Expenditure on DSS Ministerial hospitality 1992-93

	£
Minister of State's reception in honour of organisations representing disabled people	5,710·05
Ministerial hospitality at other smaller functions, totalling	6,845·84

Ministers (Private Residences)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what visits have been made by officials to private residences of Ministers in his Department since April 1992.

Mr. Hague: Officials sometimes visit Ministers' private residences mainly to collect or drop off urgent papers. Records of such visits are not kept.

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on furnishing and decorating Ministers' offices in his Department since April 1993.

Mr. Hague: There has been no such expenditure on Ministers' personal accommodation during the current financial year.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on alcohol in Ministers' offices in his Department since 9 April 1992.

Mr. Hague: The total amount spent is £6,136·79.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the Government's assessment of the level of humanitarian needs in Burundi; and what action the Government and the EC are taking to meet those needs;

(2) how much humanitarian aid has been sent from Britain and the EC to Burundi; and of this how much was designated for refugees.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have provided £463,000 to United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross movement and Y Care International in response to their appeals for assistance for some 920,000 refugees and displaced Burundis. This includes £50,000 to the International Commission of the Red Cross for those in the north and east of the country. The EC has committed over 8·5 mecu including 3 mecu for those displaced in Burundi.

We remain ready to consider any further appeals for assistance to the region in collaboration with fellow donors including EC and other NGOs.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

POLIS (Searching)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what plans he has to increase the value and sales of the parliamentary on-line information system by *(a)* extending the coverage of parliamentary questions by allowing political party to be specified in the search terms and *(b)* developing the system to allow for free text on-line searching of *Hansard.*

Mr. Gary Waller: Access by users outside Parliament to the parliamentary on-line information system (POLIS) is via a commercial service provider who markets it on behalf of the House. The House receives income in the form of royalties. The ability to search the databases by political party is not available on the public version of POLIS and there are no immediate plans to include it. The full text of *Hansard* is available for purchase on CD-ROM disk, published by HMSO and Chadwyck Healey but is not available on the POLIS public user service.

I will arrange for the hon. Member's question to be drawn to the attention of the company which will be providing the POLIS 3 public user service.

Toilet Rolls

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what is the latest available annual figure for the amount of money spent on the provision of toilet rolls, hand towels and soap in the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Ray Powell: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms.

Veal

Mr. Morley: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will list the last three occasions on which the House of Commons canteens served veal; and what was its country of origin.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: All veal purchased by the Refreshment Department is of British origin and reared by the Quantock method. Detailed operations of the Department are a matter for the Director of Catering.

HEALTH

GP Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the transaction and computing costs of general practitioner fund-holding schemes, in total and for each NHS region, both in cash terms and as percentages of total fundholding expenditure.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of regional health authorities for details.

Consultants

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the total number of finished consultant episodes within each English health region for *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Finished consultant episodes, NHS hospitals, England

(Thousands)

	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
England Total[1]	8,785·3	9,302·2	9,636·3
Northern RHA	628·5	655·3	678·2
Yorkshire RHA	722·1	751·5	784·6
Trent RHA	809·2	858·8	899·5
East Anglian RHA	361·0	379·3	388·4
North West Thames RHA	536·2	576·7	600·4
North East Thames RHA	695·2	746·6	762·2
South East Thames RHA	629·2	673·1	702·5
South West Thames RHA	457·6	500·6	522·2
Wessex RHA	526·2	562·5	573·9
Oxford RHA	383·3	404·9	431·1
South Western RHA	588·1	617·6	647·2
West Midlands RHA	959·7	1,006·7	1,029·1
Mersey RHA	487·2	519·1	541·6
North Western RHA	887·0	927·0	944·4

[1] Includes special health authorities.

Source: KP70 Returns-SD2A.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the number of consultants in the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government encourage consultant expansion in line with the "Achieving a Balance" policy agreed with the medical profession and the national health service. However, it is a matter for each employing body to determine the number of consultants needed in each specialty in the light of local needs and competing priorities. Copies of "Achieving a Balance" are available in the Library.

Midwives

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to encourage health authorities and trusts to offer midwife-only beds and midwife-only care to low-risk pregnant women in all maternity units.

Mr. Sackville: In September 1992, the national health service management executive wrote to all regional general managers listing issues needing to be kept under review. The list included the development of midwife led maternity services. More recently, in August 1993, the expert maternity group report "Changing Childbirth" emphasised that there are no legal restrictions preventing midwives from admitting women in labour to maternity unit beds. The report recommended, among other things, that the national health service should ensure that women can book with a midwife for their entire episode of care if that is what they want. This report has been the subject of wide consultation and comments on the report are being given careful consideration in the Department. Specific action to be taken in the national health service will be notified as soon as Ministers have completed their consideration of the responses to the report. Copies of both the letter and the report are available in the Library.

Perinatal Epidemiology Unit

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of a report of her Department's review of the national perinatal epidemiology unit, together with the report which the unit prepared for the review.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 26 November at columns *242-44*.

Sexual Harassment

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to counteract sexual harassment in the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: Harassment at work in any form is unacceptable and should be treated as a disciplinary offence. Management and staff representatives in the Whitley council reached agreement last year on combating harassment at work. Employing authorities in the national health service are responsible for determining their own local policies on strategies to combat harassment at work, in line with this framework.

Acute Hospital Beds

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients die each year in acute hospital beds; and what percentage of patients with cancer die in acute hospital beds each year.

Mr. Sackville: In 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, an estimated 292,000 people died in national health service hospitals from all causes. Over the same period, 143,000 people died in England from cancer, of whom an estimated 63,000—44 per cent.—died in NHS hospitals.

Departmental Budget

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the projected outturn figures for her Department's budget for 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: The forecast outturn for Government spending in 1993-94 for health and personal social services is £30,053 million, of which outturn for the national health service is £29,215 million.

Immunisation

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to include the Rubella vaccination alone among those girls who have not had the MMR vaccination in the targets for general practitioners.

Mr. Sackville: None. Rubella immunisation is recommended for schoolgirls aged between 10 and 14 years. The majority of these immunisations are given in schools as part of the schools health service. Where the vaccine is administered by a general practitioner a fee is paid. It would not, therefore, be appropriate to include rubella immunisation in the target scheme for general practitioners.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were immunisation rates for (i) BCG and (ii) rubella, which have not been part of the MMR programme, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is for numbers immunised in England for 1988-89 to 1991-92 as shown in the table. Data for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Number of Immunisations: 1988-89 to 1991-92
not part of the MMR programme

thousands

Year	*Single antigen rubella (schoolgirls)*	*BCG vaccination (Children)*
1988-89	229	409
1989-90[1]	219	197
1990-91	199	479
1991-92	221	460

[1] The school BCG programme was suspended in 1989 as there were insufficient supplies of BCG vaccine.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of targeted children receive the *(a)* DTP, *(b)* polio, *(c)* MMR and *(d)* HIB immunisation, by district health authority.

Mr. Sackville: Information available for DTP, polio and MMR for the financial year 1991-92 is shown in table 7 of statistical information on "Vaccination and Immunisation", a copy of which is available in the Library. No data are yet available about the take-up of Hib immunisation.

Notifiable Diseases

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* dysentery, *(b)* typhoid, *(c)* paratyphoid, *(d)* malaria, *(e)* tuberculosis and *(f)* jaundice were reported in 1992.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of notifications for dysentery, typhoid, paratyphoid, malaria, tuberculosis and viral hepatitis in 1992, England and Wales

	Number
Dysentery	16,960
Typhoid fever	201
Paratyphoid fever	81
Malaria	1,189
Tuberculosis	5,799
Viral hepatitis[1]	8,993

[1] Infective jaundice was redesignated viral hepatitis on 1 October 1988.

Infant Mortality

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of infant mortality in each EC country.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Infant mortality rate[1] in each European Community country for 1991

	Infant mortality rate
Belgium	[2]7·0
Denmark	7·3
Germany	6·9
Greece	9·0
Spain	[2]7·8
France	7·3
Ireland	[2]8·2
Italy	[2]8·2
Luxembourg	9·2
Netherlands	6·5
Portugal	10·8
United Kingdom	7·4

[1] Deaths under one year per 1,000 livebirths.
[2] Provisional.
Source: Eurostat Demographic Statistics 1993.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people aged *(a)* 16 or 17 years and *(b)* 18 to 24 years living in the Don Valley constituency were unemployed according to the 1991 census; what this was as a percentage of each age group; and how this compares with the 1981 census.

Mr. Sackville: The available information is shown in the table. Statistics for age groups 16 to 17 and 18 to 24 could be produced only at disproportionate cost for 1981 and, at this stage, for 1991. Final 1991 census statistics for parliamentary constituencies will be available early in 1994.

Number and percentage unemployed aged 16 to 19 and 20 to 24; 1991[2] and 1981, Don Valley parliamentary constituency (Sources: 1991 and 1981 censuses)

Year and age group	Total persons	Economically active person[1]	Unemployed persons: Total	Unemployed persons: As percentage of total	Unemployed persons: As percentage of economically active
1981					
Aged 16-19	6,887	4,405	957	13·9	21·7
Aged 20-24	7,264	5,710	980	13·5	17·2
1991[2]					
Aged 16-19	5,549	3,315	665	11·8	19·8
Aged 20-24	7,099	5,437	1,020	14·4	18·8

[1] Persons who are employees, self employed, on a Government scheme, or unemployed.
[2] Provisional figures from 1991 census produced by aggregating ward and enumeration district statistics. Statistics for wards and enumeration districts are modified slightly to protect confidentiality.

Abortion

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the number of terminations of pregnancy performed in England by regional health authority of the patient's usual residence for 1992.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not yet available centrally.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many regions of the NHS more terminations of pregnancy are performed in non-NHS hospitals than in NHS hospitals at the last date for which figures are available; what were the figures for the previous year; and what plans she has to ensure that access to the termination procedure within the NHS is consistent throughout the health regions.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is shown in the tables for England for 1990 and 1991. Arrangements for abortion services under the national health service are the responsibility of individual district health authorities in the light of their assessment of local needs and priorities.

	Total abortions	Abortions carried out or paid for by the NHS	Column 2 as a percentage of column 1
1990			
England	166,460	78,635	47·2
Northern RHA	7,289	6,145	84·3
Yorkshire RHA	10,221	4,373	42·8
Trent RHA	12,509	7,493	59·9
East Anglian RHA	5,112	3,987	78·0
North West Thames RHA	18,465	7,041	38·1
North East Thames RHA	22,015	10,725	48·7
South East Thames RHA	16,748	6,663	39·8
South West Thames RHA	11,778	3,535	30·0
Wessex RHA	8,002	3,586	44·8
Oxford RHA	8,074	3,742	46·3
South Western RHA	7,903	5,473	69·3
West Midlands RHA	18,380	8,058	43·8
Mersey RHA	7,520	2,975	39·6
North Western RHA	12,444	4,839	38·9

	Total abortions	Abortions carried out or paid for by the NHS	Column 2 as a percentage of column 1
1991			
England	160,189	79,939	49·9
Northern RHA	6,873	5,866	85·3
Yorkshire RHA	10,136	5,167	51·0
Trent RHA	12,641	8,178	64·7
East Anglian RHA	4,776	3,819	80·0
North West Thames RHA	17,929	6,833	38·1
North East Thames RHA	20,797	10,584	50·9
South East Thames RHA	15,675	6,607	42·1
South West Thames RHA	11,594	3,939	34·0
Wessex RHA	7,557	3,254	43·1
Oxford RHA	7,693	3,714	48·3
South Western RHA	7,575	5,483	72·4
West Midlands RHA	17,692	8,355	47·2
Mersey RHA	7,163	3,105	43·3
North Western RHA	12,088	5,035	41·7

Fund-holding GPs

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has received on the extent to which fund-holding patients are being seen ahead of non-fundholding patients who have greater clinical need.

Dr. Mawhinney: On investigation such allegations prove to be unfounded. Emergency and urgent cases are always given priority, and hospitals are prevented from offering contracts to one purchaser which would disadvantage the patients of another.

Geriatric Population

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the increase in the geriatric population in the next 10 years.

Mr. Sackville: There is no statistical definition of the term "geriatric population", but the population of the United Kingdom aged 75 and over is projected to rise from 3,974,000 in mid-1993 to 4,530,000 in mid-2003, an increase of 14 per cent. according to the Government Actuary's 1991-based projections.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what percentage of incidents the London ambulance service failed to meet its call-out time standards in the financial year 1992-93, and in each month to date of the current financial year.

Mr. Sackville: The percentage of calls to which the London ambulance service failed to respond within 14 minutes in 1992-93 and in each month April-October 1993, is shown in the table.

Percentage of calls not responded to within 14 minutes

	Percentage
1992-93	41·5
April 1993	32·0
May 1993	33·0
June 1993	40·0
July 1993	38·0
August 1993	35·0
September 1993	36·0
October 1993	42·0

Figures for period April 1993—October 1993 supplied by the London ambulance service.

Public Health Medical Staff

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for 1992 the number of public health medical staff by grade and sex.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table. Information relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Number of public health medical staff in England[1]
By grade and sex
30 September 1992

Grade	Male	Female	Total
Regional director of public health	13·8	4·0	17·8
District director of public health	71·8	43·5	115·3
Consultant in public health medicine	154·1	101·4	255·5
Special salary scale staff	3·1	2·0	5·1
Senior registrar and registrar	153·9	176·0	329·9
Senior house officer	10·0	17·5	27·5
Total all staff	406·7	344·4	751·1

[1] Whole-time equivalents.

Home Visits

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for 1992-93 for health visitor services *(a)* the total number of persons visited at home by age group, *(b)* the total number of visits, *(c)* the total number of whole-time equivalent staff and *(d)* the total number of health visitor students.

Mr. Sackville: Information is collected centrally only on the number of whole-time equivalent health visiting staff and the total number of health visitor students. Data for 1992-93 will be available in summer 1994.

Cortico-steroids

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes have been made by the Medicines Control Agency concerning the information available for both doctors and patients arising from its investigation into the issue of immunosuppression in patients being treated with cortico-steroids and the possibility of infections including chickenpox; and if she will publish the report of the investigation.

Mr. Sackville: No changes have been made to date. This matter is still under consideration and advice is being sought from the committee on the safety of medicines.

Waltham Forest Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to reduce the projected deficit by Waltham Forest health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The projected deficit of Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority will be managed by the

district health authority with assistance from North East Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, the chairman of the North East Thames regional health authority for details.

Key Workers (Care Programme)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for training for key workers in their duties under the care programme approach; and how this will be funded.

Mr. Bowis: Health authorities, national health service trusts, local authority social services departments, and private and voluntary organisations involved in the delivery of mental health services, are responsible for ensuring that those members of their staff likely to be identified as key workers are trained in their duties under the care programme approach. Best professional practice is covered in pre-registration training courses for mental health professionals, which are funded centrally or regionally. Employing agencies meet the costs of any post-registration training they consider appropriate.

The Department is currently considering what further training is required for key workers.

Lexie McConnell

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken arising from the report by the chief executive of the management executive into the case of Lexie McConnell; and if she will make public his report.

Dr. Mawhinney: Following an investigation by the national health service management executive into the case of Lexie McConnell, there was found to be no denial of patients charter rights. A letter setting out these findings was sent to Mr. and Mrs. McConnell in July.

Occupational Health Service

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical and nursing staff worked in occupational health in the NHS for the last five years for which figures are available; and what were the grades of those employees.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Medical and nursing staff in occupational health
England—at 30 September 1988-92

Whole-time equivalents

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Medical Staff					
Consultants and staff grades	10	20	30	30	40
Junior grades	10	10	10	10	10
Clinical assistants and others	20	30	30	30	30
Total	40	50	60	70	70
Nursing Staff					
Nurse learners	0	10	30	20	0
Day nursery staff	0	0	0	—	—
Clinical grading structure:					
Unqualified	—	0	10	10	10
Scale C	—	0	0	0	10
Scale D (2nd level enrolled)	—	10	10	10	20
Scale D (1st level registered)	—	10	10	10	10
Scale E	—	50	50	40	50
Scale F	—	80	80	80	80
Scale G	—	250	240	240	230
Scale H	—	90	90	100	100
Scale I	—	100	100	100	100
Senior nurses	80	40	30	10	—
Senior nurse (Staff Support Education)	0	0	0	—	—
Senior nurses/midwives	—	—	—	20	20
Pre-1989 grading structure	530	0	0	0	0
Others	0	0	—	—	10
Total	610	640	660	640	620
Medical and Nursing Total	650	690	720	710	690

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
2. '0' indicates figures less than five and '—' indicates no staff at all.
3. The totals may not equal the sum of components due to rounding.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when fresh guidelines will be issued, and what form the guidance will take, to ensure that psychiatric patients are not discharged from hospital inappropriately and that those who leave get the right support from the different agencies.

Mr. Bowis: The guidance, which is part of our 10 point plan for developing successful and safe community care, will draw together the principles and practices which should apply in assessing when psychiatric patients may suitably and safely leave hospital and in ensuring that the necessary care and support are provided when they do. Work on the guidance is well advanced and we shall be issuing it for consultation shortly.

Prescriptions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each health authority in South Yorkshire the number of prescriptions issued where the patient was *(a)* exempt from NHS payment charges, *(b)* required to pay the NHS charge and *(c)* was a private patient.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Numbers (thousands) of prescription[1] items dispensed in family health services authorities in South Yorkshire in 1992

FHSA	Exempt[2]	Chargeable[3]
Barnsley	1,959	392
Doncaster	2,551	535
Rotherham	1,857	376
Sheffield	4,412	838

[1] The analysis is based on a 1 in 20 sample of all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors only. Dispensing doctors, and prescriptions submitted by prescribing doctors for items personally administered, are not analysed into exempt, non-exempt or other categories.

[2] Exempt prescriptions also include prescriptions dispensed to patients entitled to charge remission under the national health service low income scheme, and prescriptions for contraceptives.

[3] Chargeable prescriptions include prescriptions dispensed to patients holding prescription prepayment certificates.

Notes:

Information is not collected on private prescriptions.

Influenza Vaccination

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority the current waiting time for people wishing to be inoculated against influenza; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) on 29 November at column *305* regarding influenza vaccine supply.

Special Needs Management Allowance

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the impact of reductions in the transitional special needs management allowance on projects providing homes for people with drink, drug and mental health problems.

Mr. Bowis: Transitional special needs management allowance is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Ambulance Service (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what considerations underlie the classification of Doncaster as a rural area for ambulance purposes.

Mr. Sackville: The formula for classification of national health service ambulance services as urban or rural was introduced following the acceptance of a recommendation made in an independent consultant's report in 1990. Those ambulance services serving an area with an overall population density of greater than 2·5 people per acre were classified as urban. Others were classified as rural. The population density formula acknowledges the higher number of longer distance journeys travelled by ambulance services in less densely populated rural areas.

Doncaster falls within the overall area served by the South Yorkshire Metropolitan ambulance and paramedic service. That area is classified as urban.

Cancer (Funding)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of funding for work on cancer is allocated to screening and prevention programmes.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chairmen of NHS trusts have not had their contracts renewed in each of the last three years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The number of chairmen of national health service trusts who have not been given a further term, or have stood down when their period of office expired, in each of the last three years is as follows:

1991 – None
1992 – 2
1993 – 14

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will replace the payment of salaries/emoluments to chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and NHS trusts with a system based on payment for loss of earnings.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the numbers of female, male and ethnic minority directors, and chairs of NHS trusts, district health authorities and regional health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information is not available centrally for executive members or directors. For non-executives, some 36 per cent.—1,429 out of 3,920 chairmen and non-executive appointees to national health service authorities and trusts—are women. Three per cent., 117 appointees, are from ethnic minority groups.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours a week a chairman of a national health service trust is required to work; and what is the hourly rate of remuneration.

Dr. Mawhinney: Chairmen of boards of national health service authorities and trusts are part-time appointments and minimum hours are not set. They are remunerated within a range £15,125 to £19,285 per annum according to the trust's turnover.

Intensive Care, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by year for the last four years, and the current year to date for the Doncaster area the number of cases in which people with life-threatening conditions and in need of intensive care have been referred to hospitals outside the Doncaster area; to which hospitals they were referred; what assessment she has made as to the adequacy of

intensive care provision in the Doncaster area for the coming winter months; what action she will be taking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. J Smith, chairman of Doncaster health authority for details.

Junior Doctors

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines she has issued on the amount of sleep junior doctors should have in each 24 hours and in each week.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the changes she has planned to the new deal for junior doctors.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have no plans at present to change the new deal for junior doctors.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to implement the new deal on junior doctors' hours.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 28 October at column *767*.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that provider units meet targets set by her in the junior doctors' new deal.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 28 October at column *767*.

Health Service, London

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will announce her final plans for the restructuring of the NHS in London.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for the future pattern of acute health care in London; and what financial arrangements have been made for the closure of hospitals in London in 1994-95.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government's strategy for the future of London's acute health services is set out clearly in "Making London Better". Proposals for a number of specific changes to the pattern of services will be put forward shortly and, where appropriate, will be subject to formal consultation. As indicated in "Making London Better", resources will be available to ensure that any changes take place in an orderly fashion and no proposal will be agreed unless it offers a sound basis for delivering a high quality and cost-effective service to patients.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to the establishment of a regional health authority for the Greater London area.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department is currently consulting on proposals to determine new national health service regions and establish new regional health authorities. Copies of the consultation document "Managing the New NHS" have been sent to all Members of Parliament and are available in the Library. In the configuration of regions shown in the document, the Greater London area is divided between the proposed North Thames and South Thames regions. This configuration was chosen after considering a range of options, including options involving the establishment of a single regional health authority for the Greater London area, because it most closely met the criteria of minimising disruption to the work of the national health service; maintaining a spread of medical schools across the regions; ensuring that individual regions would be administratively manageable; and respecting natural lines of communication such as road and rail links.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made on improving primary health care in London.

Dr. Mawhinney: In "Making London Better", the Government gave a commitment to invest £170 million on capital projects over six years. £40 million was made available in 1993-94 and has been used to fund primary health care development plans in each of the 12 family health services authorities within the London initiative zone (LIZ). It is expected that the extra LIZ moneys will fund over a hundred capital schemes this year. In addition, £7·5 million was made available over three years to fund voluntary sector projects to help prevent admission to hospital or facilitate early discharge. Thirty-one voluntary sector projects have already been approved as part of this initiative at a cost of £5 million.

Hospital Charges

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to charge hospital in-patients for food.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Winyard Report

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Winyard report.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the report of the working party chaired by Dr. Graham Winyard is to be formally published; and when the Department will issue a formal response.

Dr. Mawhinney: On 9 June 1993 I asked the medical director of the national health service management executive, Dr. Graham Winyard, to carry out a review of current medical staffing policies. The terms of reference were:

(i) To identify and consider the options available for the continued implementation of current NHS medical workforce policies including Achieving a Balance and the New Deal. This work is to be carried out in the context of the internal market, and the proposed changes in specialist training and taking into account resource constraints and managerial feasibility.

(ii) To make any recommendations to the Minister for Health for implementing any changes which may need to be made to existing policies by 31 October 1993.

Membership of the working group included representatives of the medical profession and NHS management.

Dr. Winyard has now submitted his report and we are considering a number of recommendations for changes to current medical staffing policies.

Women Consultants

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of women consultants at the latest available date.

Mr. Sackville: As at September 1992, 16·3 per cent. of hospital consultants in England were women.

Quest Cancer Test Trial

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was her decision on funding the Quest HDA cervical cancer test trial; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1988, Quest has not made a bid to the Department for research funding.

Hospital Budgets

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have overspent their budgets so far in the current year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Family Practitioner Budgets

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family practitioners have reduced their budgets for purchasing hospital treatment *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the Coventry area; what effects she expects the reduced budgets to have on patient care and on the jobs of medical staff, with particular reference to the Coventry area and on the west midlands; and what reasons she has been given for the reductions.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional health authorities are responsible for setting general practitioner fundholder budgets, under guidance issued by the national health service management executive EL(93)93, copies of which are available in the Library. These budgets are set at the beginning of the financial year and cannot be reduced mid-year.

Elderly Patients (Specialist Treatment)

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidance to both local health authorities and residential nursing homes for the elderly as to the responsibility for payment for essential specialist medical items necessary for the post-operative and continuing care of elderly patients.

Mr. Bowis: A large number of such items are available on national health service prescription.

Responsibility for prescribing drugs, dressings and appliances generally rests with the doctor who has clinical responsibility for the patient's care.

Guidance to health authorities in EL(91)127 advised that in some cases, responsibility for prescribing for discharged patients should remain with consultants rather than general practitioners, for example where drugs or appliances were only available through hospitals.

In December 1992 the Department issued guidance to both health authorities (HSG(92)50) and local authorities (LAC(92)24) about their respective responsibilities for funding community health services for people placed by local authorities in nursing and residential care homes after 1 April 1993.

Copies of EL(91)127, HSG(92)50 and LAC(92)24 are available in the Library.

Qa Business Services

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what studies he has made of the status of ex-Government employees and their pensions in the pension funds of *(a)* West Midlands regional health authority and Qa Business Services and *(b)* Harland and Wolff.

(2) what advice has been received from Government Actuaries on the surpluses in the pension funds of *(a)* West Midlands regional health authority and Qa Business Services and *(b)* Harland and Wolff.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have been asked to reply.

None so far as the West Midlands regional health authority pension fund and Qa Business Services pension fund are concerned. Information regarding Harland and Wolff is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

WALES

Travellers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to make a statement concerning his revised policies for camps for itinerants in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Government announced their revised policy on sites for itinerants on 31 March 1993.

Private Patients

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that private patients are not put in for free tests in NHS hospitals in Wales at the expense of delays for NHS patients.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is nationally agreed guidance on private practice in health service hospitals. This requires local managers and clinicians to ensure there is no conflict between private practice and NHS work and that private patients should not receive services at the expense of NHS patients. I expect all health authorities and national health service trusts to ensure that there is the fullest compliance under this guidance.

Nuclear Plants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the relationship between the operation of the nuclear plants at Wylfa and Trawsfynydd and the incidence of cancer recorded in the latest Welsh cancer register for Gwynedd.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest published registration rates for individual cancers in Gwynedd are contained in "Cancer Registration in Wales: 1984-86".

Registration rates for all cancers in Gwynedd, while not the highest, are 4 per cent. higher than for Wales as a whole, taking account of the age distribution of the Gwynedd population. The main cancers which contribute to the higher registration rates are of the stomach, colon, pancreas, lung, gall bladder, kidney, breast, uterus, ovary and prostate, and myeloid leukaemia. The pattern of a higher incidence of some cancers in Gwynedd has been known for more than 80 years.

Current expert opinion on the risks of exposure to radiation indicates that the low radiation doses to the population that may have arisen from Trawsfynydd or Wylfa could not be the cause of this higher incidence.

However, the registration data for Gwynedd are being examined currently to determine the incidence of certain other types of cancer in the vicinity of Trawsfynydd and Wylfa nuclear installations. The results will be made available in due course.

Development Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the development agencies together with their directors; and how much has been paid to each director, including expenses, in each of the past five years, and the current year to date.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is as follows:

Development Board for Rural Wales (£ per annum)

Remuneration	*Chairman*	*Members*
1989-90	25,445	5,030
1990-91	26,975	5,335
1991-92	29,290	5,790
1992-93	29,835	5,900
1993-94	31,925	6,315

Board Members:
Chairman:
Mr. Glyn Davies—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Members:
Mr. Robert Gee—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Councillor Veronica Hollis—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Councillor Andrew Leonard—1 April 1988 to 31 March 1994
Mr. Jeffrey Morgan—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Mr. Hywel Roberts—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Mr. Peter Saunders—1 May 1988 to 31 March 1994
Councillor Keith Evans—1 April 1991 to 31 March 1994
Sir Donald Walters—6 November 1984 to 31 March 1996
Councillor Roger Williams—1 April 1989 to 31 March 1995
Mrs. Christine Lewis—April 1992 to 31 March 1995
Mr. Dyfrig John—1 April 1993 to 31 March 1996
The Hon. Robin Gibson Watt—May 1993 to 31 March 1996
Mr. Ian Jones—1 April 1990 to 31 March 1993
Mr. Eddie Rea—1 April 1987 to 31 March 1993
Mr. Michael Shaw—1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991
Mr. J. Kendall Harris—1 April 1981 to 31 March 1990

Welsh Development Agency

	Remuneration (£ per annum)		
	Chairman[1]	*Deputy chairman*	*Members*
1989-90	55,424	17,900	5,065
1990-91	58,750	18,975	5,370
1991-92	63,800	20,605	5,835
1992-93	42,235	21,830	6,180
1993-94	43,455	33,680	6,315

[1] From June 1989 the chairman's time commitment was four days per week. From 1992-93 the time commitment dropped to two and a half days per week. The salary is subject to annual reviews by the Top Salaries Review Body.

Board Members:
Chairman:
Dr. Gwyn Jones—1989-90 to 30 June 1993
Mr. David Rowe-Beddoe—1 July 1993 to 30 June 1996
Deputy Chairman:
Sir Donald Walters—1989-90 to 1992-93[1]
Dr. Roy Bichan—1 January 1993 to 31 December 1995
Chief Executive:
Mr. David Waterstone—1989-90
Mr. Philip Head—1990-91 to 31 December 1993
Members:
Mr. David G. Roberts—1989-90 to 1991-92
Mr. R. P. V. (Tim) Rees—1989-90 to 1991-92
Mr. Hugh Hudson Davies—1989-90
Mr. John Foley—1989-90 to 28 February 1994
Mr. E. Glyn Davies—1989-90 to 31 March 1995
Dr. Colyn Gardner—1989-90 to 1991-92
Mr. Elfed Roberts—1989-90
Mr. A. David Malpas—1989-90 to 31 December 1995
Mr. Idwal Symonds—31 December 1989
Mr. David Cole—21 January 1990
Mr. Richard Brewster—1990-91 to 1992-93
Dr. Pamela Kirby—1991-92 to 30 November 1994
[1] Ceased as Deputy Chair 31 December 1992.

Members of the boards are reimbursed for expenses incurred in carrying out board duties; records of expenses are not held centrally.

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much he will spend in the lead-up to the European and local elections next year on promoting the use of postal and proxy votes by sick, disabled and absent voters; what arrangements are in place for this exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Nothing. The arrangements are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and he has already made a statement.

EC Cereal Aid

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the factors involved in the decision to recognise Wales as a separate harvest region for the purposes of the EC cereal aid proposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The decision to establish Wales as a separate yield region was made by the United Kingdom Agriculture Ministers in the light of circumstances relating to all four countries and having regard to the terms of Council Regulation 1765/92.

Livestock Quotas

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for measures to ensure that farmers in Wales are enabled before the end of the current year to ascertain their livestock quotas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Over 90 per cent. of sheep and suckler cow producers in Wales have been notified of their quota allocations. The remaining producers' allocations are dependent upon their application for national reserve quota and the resolution of outstanding queries, some of which require clarification from the European Commission and some from the producers themselves. It is not possible, therefore, to predict with any certainty when all the remaining producers will receive their allocations.

Premature Deaths

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many premature deaths there were in Wales in the latest year for which figures are available; what is this figure as a percentage of the total number of deaths; and what is this percentage as a percentage of the United Kingdom average.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There is no generally accepted definition of premature death. There were 6,016 deaths of Welsh residents under the age of 65 in 1992, representing 17·8 per cent. of all deaths. This was 97 per cent. of the equivalent United Kingdom figure of 18·4 per cent.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for local government revenue spending in 1994-95.

Mr. Redwood: I propose to set total standard spending in Wales for 1994-95 at £2,704·8 million. This figure includes the £86 million for care in the community announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State on 2 November. It represents an increase of 4·2 per cent. including community care resources or a 2·3 per cent. excluding care in the community.

I propose to set central government support for TSS through aggregate external finance at £2,419·2 million. The additional £86 million in community care resources the increase is 3·3 per cent., or 1·3 per cent. excluding care in the community.

Within AEF I propose to make available £1,740·1 million in revenue support grant, £464·0 million in distributable non-domestic rates and £215·1 million in specific and supplementary grants.

The non-domestic rate poundage for 1994-95 will increase by 1·8 per cent. to 44·8 pence in the pound in line with the increase in the retail prices index for the 12 months to September 1993.

My proposals constitute a realistic package. They will enable local authorities to maintain services, given the sharp fall in inflation. Local authorities will need to assess carefully their expenditure priorities and look to achieve the best value for money in providing services. I am sure that Welsh local authorities will exercise prudence in making their budgetary decisions for the coming financial year.

My Department has today written to the local authority associations to consult them on my proposals for revenue support grant in 1994-95. I will announce provisional standard spending assessments for individual Welsh authorities and my provisional capping criteria in mid-December; and my final settlement proposals early in the new year.

Moated Sites

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what action his Department is currently taking to record and preserve moated sites of archaeological interest; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the *(a)* surveys and *(b)* excavations that are currently being carried out of moated sites of archaeological interest.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency under its chief executive, John Carr. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. E. A. J. Carr to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1993:

Moated Sites of Archaeological Interest in Wales

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your two recent Parliamentary Questions about moated sites of archaeological interest in Wales.

The Secretary of State's policy on archaeological remains on land and how they should be preserved or recorded is set out in Planning Policy Guidance 16 (Wales): Archaeology and Planning a copy of which is in the Library of the House. As the guidance makes clear, archaeological remains are a finite, non-renewable resource which in many cases are vulnerable to damage and destruction. Accordingly, to protect vulnerable moated sites the Agency has completed a scheduling enhancement exercise of all known sites in Wales. 110 such sites have been evaluated, of which 65 are scheduled as monuments of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Details of both the scheduled and unscheduled sites in Wales are contained in the Sites and Monuments Records held by the four regional Archaeological Trusts in Wales.

Insofar as preservation is concerned Cadw's Field Monument Wardens keep the condition of these important monuments under close review.

While scheduled monument consent is required for works to monuments of national importance the Agency's records do not identify such activity by monument type. Works at unscheduled monuments do not require consent from the Secretary of State and consequently the Agency has no information in respect of such sites.

Gardens of Historic Value

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the applicants for European Community financial assistance under the current year's awards for the conservation of gardens of historic value and *(b)* details of the reasons for those that failed to secure such funding; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Responsibility for this subject has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. I have asked the chief executive, John Carr, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. E. A. J. Carr to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about Welsh projects submitted for consideration under the European Commission's pilot projects scheme to conserve Europe's built heritage.

Under the 1993 scheme of 'Gardens of Historic Interest', the following applications were made:

Applicant	Garden
Clwyd County Council	Gardens at Bunkers Hill Cottages, Wrexham, Clwyd
Swansea City Council	Gardens at Sketty Hall, Swansea, West Glamorgan
Welsh Historic Gardens Trust	Gardens at Hafod, Pontrhyd y Groes, Dyfed

Cadw offers the Commission a view on the merits of each application submitted under the scheme, but the decision on whether a grant will be offered is taken by the Commission itself, on the advice of an international panel of experts. It is not the Commission's practice to comment on why any of the applications fail to receive assistance.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rural Housing

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to reappraise the rural priority areas in respect of housing rural unfitness.

Mr. Atkins: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, but the chief executive has advised me

that rural priority areas—RPAs—are being reappraised as part of a wider review of the executive's rural housing policy. The executive hopes to extend RPA status to other areas, by reviewing the relevant unfitness criteria under which an area qualifies for such status. The executive will also be seeking to improve the effectiveness of action in RPAs by increasing the involvement of its district/regional offices and by closer co-operation with local voluntary groups. Existing RPA's will still be targeted for grant aid where there is a continuing need.

Terrorism

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what inquiries are being made into the involvement of the terrorist known as the Jackal in the murder of Adrian Carroll.

Sir John Wheeler: Criminal investigations into the murder of Adrian Carroll are continuing. All evidence or information which comes to the knowledge of the police is fully investigated.

Boarding Schools

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many boarders there were at each boarding school in Northern Ireland at the most recent available date.

Mr. Ancram: At the end of October 1993 the number of boarders in each boarding school was as follows:

	Number
Voluntary Grammar Schools	
Campbell College, Belfast	94
Coleraine Academic Institution	78
Dominican College, Portstewart	35
Friends School, Lisburn	44
Hunterhouse College, Belfast	82
Methodist College, Belfast	177
Portora Royal School	16
Royal School, Armagh	66
Royal School, Dungannon	39
St. Colman's College, Newry	58
St. Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	72
Victoria College, Belfast	48
Controlled Grammar Schools	
Coleraine High School	34

Countryside

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on preservation of the countryside in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are continuing their work to maintain and enhance the quality of the countryside and to protect habitats and landscape, thereby providing enjoyment and pleasure for present and future generations. This work is undertaken on a number of fronts, including the declaration of areas of special scientific interest, environmentally sensitive areas, areas of outstanding natural beauty and national nature reserves.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to extend the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Legislation broadly equivalent to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is being introduced in Northern Ireland by a series of Orders in Council.

An Order in Council containing enabling powers to deal with genetically modified organisms similar to the provisions in part VI of the Act was made in July 1991 and will come into operation by means of a commencement order once the necessary regulations enacting its provisions have been finalised.

A further Order in Council containing provisions on litter equivalent to those in part IV of the Act will shortly be laid before Parliament and should become operative early in 1994.

I have already announced my plans for two further Orders in Council to introduce provisions on air pollution and waste management control respectively, similar to those in parts I and II of the Act. These are now being prepared. I hope to lay both draft orders before Parliament by the end of 1994.

Hedgerows

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on hedgerow preservation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Government are encouraging hedgerow improvement through financial incentive schemes operated by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment. Both Departments provide advice on hedgerow management.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the hedgerow incentive scheme applies to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The hedgerow incentive scheme is operated by the Countryside Commission and applies only in England. In Northern Ireland the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Environment have schemes which provide financial incentives for hedgerow improvement and both Departments provide advice on hedgerow management.

Postal and Proxy Votes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much he will spend in the lead-up to the European and local elections next year on promoting the use of postal and proxy votes by sick, disabled and absent voters; what arrangements are in place for this exercise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The nature and extent of advertising or publicity related to the European parliamentary elections in 1994 have yet to be decided. Any advertising there might be on absent voting would not be directed at any specific groups of electors. Local elections have already taken place in Northern Ireland, in May this year.

EC Students

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total estimated cost per annum for the provision of university and third-level education for European Community students studying in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: The total costs of making provision for EC students undertaking third-level education at institutions in Northern Ireland is not available in the form requested.

However, the estimated cost to public funds of tuition fees for students in institutions in Northern Ireland from EC countries, including the Republic of Ireland, and holding mandatory or postgraduate awards in the 1992-93 academic year, was £4·586 million.

School Extensions

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made with the proposed major school extension schemes at *(a)* Comber high school and *(b)* Regent House grammar school.

Mr. Ancram: An economic appraisal recommending a new school for a long-term enrolment of 540 pupils has been approved for Comber high school and planning of this is at outline sketch plan stage.

An economic appraisal recommending the extending and refurbishing of the existing premises has been approved for Regent House school. A schedule of accommodation is being considered by the school and the South-Eastern education and library board.

Forensic Science Departments

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to provide permanent forensic sciences departments following the destruction of the forensic science laboratory at Newtownbreda in September 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: Following the serious damage to the laboratory on 23 September 1992 it was relocated at Seapark outside Carrickfergus in County Antrim. The location of the laboratory in the longer term remains under consideration.

Student Nurses

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many student nurses there are at present; how many of them originate from the Republic of Ireland; how many nurses are unemployed; and if he will make a statement on job prospects for nurses.

Mr. Ancram: At 31 October there were 2,316 student nurses in training in Northern Ireland of whom 263 originate from the Republic of Ireland, while at 14 October 1993 there were 701 unemployed claimants who last worked in the nursing profession in general.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) wrote to you in April this year about job prospects in the nursing profession. He explained that improved retention of nursing staff has reduced employment opportunities for newly qualified nurses and that the proposals for rationalisation of services will impact on nurse employment in the future. The position has changed little since April as decisions have yet to be taken on the rationalisation of the service. Until these decisions are taken, it is not possible to assess accurately the implications for the nursing profession.

Republic of Ireland (Links)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research he has commissioned into the benefits of closer trading and other links between Northern Ireland and the Republic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: None. Other bodies have, however, examined the potential benefits of increased cross-border trade and, while their estimates differ considerably, all agree that more trade is possible and can benefit both parts of Ireland. The two Governments are co-operating to promote trade in a number of ways, and are jointly organising a conference on cross-border trade in Dublin on 15 December.

Gardens of Historic Value

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the applicants for European Community financial assistance under this year's awards for the conservation of gardens of historic value and *(b)* details of the reasons for those that failed to secure such funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The following applications were received:

(1) Antrim Borough Council, Antrim Castle gardens, Co. Antrim
(2) Armagh District Council with the Armagh Regeneration Trust and the Mall Trustees, Armagh Mall, Co. Armagh
(3) Mr. B. T. Little on behalf of the Duke of Abercorn, Barons Court, Co. Tyrone
(4) Mrs. J. R. Beresford-Ash, Ashbrook, Drumahoe, Co. Londonderry
(5) Mr. J. Langham, Tempo Manor, Co. Fermanagh
(6) Mr. G. B. L. Brown, Walworth, Co. Londonderry
(7) Mr. M. G. Parkinson on behalf of Belfast City Council, Botanic Gardens, Belfast
(8) Clandeboy Estate Company Ltd., Clandeboye House, Bangor, Co. Down

All applications were forwarded to the Commission of the European Communities. The Antrim castle gardens application was the only one which was successful in being awarded financial assistance. The Commission was responsible for the assessment of all applications. I am not in a position to comment on the reasons for its decisions.

Road Schemes

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made with the new road schemes at *(a)* Comber bypass and *(b)* Forster Green junction.

Mr. Atkins: Work on the next phase of the Comber bypass scheme and on the Forster Green junction improvement will start in the 1997-98 and 1996-97 financial years respectively, subject to the availability of finance.

SCOTLAND

Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to support Paisley being awarded city status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: None. City status in Scotland can be achieved only through the granting of a royal charter. It has no statutory significance in Scotland and there has been no such grant in modern times.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his proposals for the future local government arrangements for the Dykebar area of Paisley.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* I have written to the hon. Member about this and I will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will visit the Glenburn, Hunterhill, Dykebar, Lochfield, Foxbar, Thrushcraigs and South End areas of Paisley to assess the need for public sector housing investment and economic regeneration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans to visit Paisley. Officials from the Scottish Office Environment Department recently met with representatives of Renfrew district council and Scottish Homes to discuss the housing problems in the district.

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are currently included in his Department's public appointments list; and how many of these are women.

Mr. Lang: The number of people currently on the Scottish Office public appointments list is constantly changing. At present there are in the region of 2,500 people on the list of whom some 880 or 36 per cent. are women. Until recently, the proportion of women on the list averaged 25 per cent. The higher proportion is a result of action taken by my Department to increase the number of women on the list. I am always happy to receive the names of people based in Scotland, of either sex, who are interested in undertaking public appointments work.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to how many and which organisations he is able to make appointments; and what are the top salary levels of these appointments.

Mr. Lang: The nationalised industries, non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies sponsored by the Scottish Office to which I make appointments are listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". The information includes the number of appointments I make to each body and the remuneration where appropriate. The 1992 edition is available in the Libraries of the House and the 1993 edition is scheduled to be published in mid-December.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a document, similar to the one recently published by the Secretary of State for Wales, entitled "Public Bodies: Appointments Made by the Secretary of State for Wales", listing detailed information concerning appointments made by him to public bodies in terms of *(a)* appointments, *(b)* remuneration, *(c)* occupations of appointees and *(d)* time commitment.

Mr. Lang: A list of members of bodies listed in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" whom I appoint is being updated. I am considering how the information might most conveniently be made available.

Sheltered Housing

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning private owner-occupied sheltered housing; what help is available to those living in non-regulated or non-registered accommodation; and if he will consider setting up an ombudsman scheme.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office has received a number of representations about private owner-occupied sheltered housing, most of which have alleged a lack of control over managing companies and agents operating these developments. These representations are essentially about contractual issues between the parties concerned and it would be inappropriate for the Government to intervene. Independent legal advice should be sought in such cases.

Details of various cases have been passed to the Scottish law Commission which is considering particular aspects of sheltered housing in connection with its work on the abolition of the feudal system and the law of the tenement. We shall study carefully any recommendations that the commission may make.

Written Answers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many written parliamentary questions he or his predecessors have answered in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lang: Figures before the 1980-81 parliamentary Session are not held centrally. Annual figures from 1980 onwards for House of Commons written questions answered by Scottish Office Ministers are as follows:

Year	*Annual number*
[1]1980	355
1981	1,588
1982	1,618
1983	1,750
1984	2,009
1985	2,026
1986	1,981
1987	2,928
1988	2,973
1989	2,917
1990	2,739
1991	2,432
1992	1,650
[2]1993	2,105

[1] For the period 27 October 1980 to 31 December 1980.
[2] As at 18 October 1993.
Source: POLIS.

Elderly Forums

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial support his Department has provided to elderly forums; what plans he has to develop the elderly forum movement; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office currently provides financial assistance to two elderly forums through the urban programme at an estimated cost of £149,138 in the present financial year. Grant of 75 per cent. is payable by the Scottish Office on approved expenditure. The projects cover eligible areas in

Strathclyde and Edinburgh. As for the future development of elderly forums, this is a matter for the forums themselves to take forward. In this connection, local authorities have powers under section 10(3) of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to grant aid voluntary organisations in providing social welfare in their areas.

Fox Hunting

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on fox hunting on estates and property owned or managed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Fox hunting on land owned by my right hon. Friend and managed by the Forestry Commission is permitted only where it has traditionally taken place or where the right to hunt or to grant facilities to hunt has been reserved in the title. No permissions are currently granted for the hunting of foxes on any of the remaining land owned by my right hon. Friend.

Pupils (Behavioural Problems)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his most recent estimate of the number of children of school age in Scotland who do not attend school for reasons associated with behavioural problems; and if will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Figures for non-attendance at and exclusions from schools for reasons associated with behavioural problems are not held centrally; nor is sufficient information centrally available on which to base informed estimates.

Regulations which came into force in 1993 now require education authorities to collect information on schools attendance and truancy. This information will be published in school handbooks from December 1994 and will also be the subject of report by the audit unit of Her Majesty's inspectorate. Discussions are currently proceeding with education authorities about the collection of exclusion figures across Scotland on a consistent basis.

Rents

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the average weekly rental charge for houses owned by *(a)* Renfrew district council, *(b)* Eastwood district council, *(c)* Inverclyde district council and *(d)* Scottish Homes or its predecessors since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table shows the average weekly unrebated rent for Renfrew, Eastwood and Inverclyde district councils, Scottish Homes and its predecessor, the Scottish Special Housing Association since 1983-84:

	Renfrew district council £	*Eastwood district council* £	*Inverclyde district council* £	*SSHA/ Scottish Homes* £
1983-84	8·33	10·52	8·31	11·96
1984-85	8·81	11·02	9·08	13·06
1985-86	9·81	11·50	11·30	14·23
1986-87	11·50	11·94	12·40	15·79
1987-88	12·99	12·45	13·33	17·28
1988-89	13·92	13·91	14·37	19·02
1989-90	16·73	15·10	16·85	20·88
1990-91	18·70	16·59	19·17	23·81
1991-92	20·68	18·10	21·44	26·73
1992-93	22·45	21·06	23·93	29·14
1993-94	24·41	21·73	25·94	31·76

Correspondence

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how long on average it takes his Department to reply to letters from hon. Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My Department has set a target of replying to correspondence from hon. Members and others within 17 working days of receipt. During the period 1 August 1992 to 31 July 1993—the first year of operation of the target—11,279 items of such correspondence were dealt with. Fifty-five per cent. of these letters received a substantive reply within the 17 working day target, and 86 per cent. were answered within 30 working days. Replies may be delayed because it is necessary to gather information from various sources; in such cases, the normal procedure is for an interim reply to be issued.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has further to develop the concept of infobuses on the model of that provided by Renfrew District Disability Council; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As the provision of information on disability matters is the responsibility of local authorities, it is for these bodies to determine the level and nature of the service to be provided.

HIV Education

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy on HIV education in Scottish schools.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government attach high priority to the provision of HIV education in schools. The school curriculum in Scotland is not statutorily prescribed and responsibility for the detailed curricular content, including that in relation to HIV education, rests with education authorities and individual head teachers.

The Government's policy is to encourage schools to tackle HIV education within a comprehensive programme of health and social education. This co-ordinated approach is designed to ensure that information about HIV is given not in isolation but as part of a programme that considers a number of issues relating to moral choices and healthy living.

To assist schools, national guidance is issued by the Scottish Office Education Department and the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum. Guidelines on health education were issued recently by the Scottish Office as part of the 5 to 14 programme on environmental studies. That gives health education a firm place in the curriculum and highlights AIDS as a key feature. In

addition, in 1992 the Scottish Office published a booklet entitled "HIV and AIDS: A Guide for the Educational Services in Scotland". This was distributed to all education authorities and schools in Scotland.

Homelessness

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were defined as homeless in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The most recent published information is set out in the table.

Households assessed as homeless[1] 1987 to 1991-92

	Inverclyde	*Strathclyde*	*Scotland[2]*
1987-88	178	4,509	9,595
1988-89	112	4,551	9,644
1989-90	142	5,150	11,470
1990-91	156	7,333	14,900
1991-92	146	9,663	17,600

[1] Figures do not include households assessed as potentially homeless. In 1991-92 no households in Inverclyde, 3,537 households in Strathclyde and 8,700 households in Scotland were so assessed.
[2] Figures up to 1989-90 relate to the number of case returns received from local authorities. From 1990-91 figures are based on authorities' estimates of the total number of applicants.

Abbeyfield Housing Movement

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the work of the Abbeyfield housing movement in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The work of the Abbeyfield housing movement in Scotland is consistent with the Government's care in the community policy. My right hon. Friend regards the movement as making an important contribution to the welfare of elderly people who no longer wish or who are unable to live in their own homes, or who need additional care. In 1992-93, Scottish Homes, the organisation responsible for funding registered housing associations, provided 11 locally based Abbeyfield societies with £500,000 in grant through its development programme.

Housing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of homes built by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private developers in each year since 1980 in (i) Inverclyde and (ii) Strathclyde; and what is his current estimate for such completions in 1993.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of dwellings completed in Inverclyde district and Strathclyde region by local authorities, housing associations and private developers, for the years 1980 to 1992 and the first half of 1993, is set out in the table. Further information on house completions across Scotland is available in the quarterly statistical bulletin "Housing Trends in Scotland" published by the Scottish Office.

Housebuilding in Inverclyde district and Strathclyde region House completions for the years 1980 to 1992

	Inverclyde district			*Strathclyde region*		
Year	*Local authority*	*Housing association[1]*	*Agency Private sector*	*Local authority*	*Housing association[1]*	*Private sector*
1980	8	—	87	1,593	128	4,332
1981	—	69	155	1,349	879	3,830
1982	26	32	99	712	263	4,240
1983	—	23	107	493	321	4,720
1984	—	20	199	489	420	5,316
1985	—	12	205	404	412	5,660
1986	—	74	242	315	314	6,243
1987	64	—	284	281	252	6,254
1988	—	—	201	324	274	6,458
1989	—	—	239	136	394	7,688
1990	—	—	326	114	483	7,130
1991	37	26	226	145	824	6,365
1992	—	—	57	195	851	5,811
1993[2]	—	—	118	8	188	2,561

[1] Figures for 1986 to date are provisional as data are under review.
[2] Figures are for quarters 1 and 2 only.

Advocates Depute

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many advocates depute there are; and how many are women.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 13 advocate deputes, of whom four are women.

Procurators Fiscal

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many procurators fiscal there are; and how many are women.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 42 procurators fiscal, of whom two are women. The total number of legal staff in the procurator fiscal service is 271, of whom 109 are women.

Home Insulation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a home insulation programme; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The home energy efficiency scheme is funded by the Energy Efficiency Office of the Department of the Environment on a Great Britain basis. The scheme provides grants for loft, tank and pipe insulation, draughtproofing and energy advice to low-income households in receipt of certain social security benefits and regulations have been laid to abolish the client contribution. Housing authorities have powers to give improvement and repairs grants to householders, which can include works for energy efficiency measures. Scottish Homes can also provide grants in certain designated areas.

Student Support

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of any changes in the student support and tuition fee arrangements for Scottish domiciled students in session 1994-95.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am publishing today the main rates of maintenance allowances payable under the students allowances scheme and the postgraduate students allowances scheme, including rates for those courses which do not attract student loans, together with the rates of various supplementary allowances payable to both undergraduate and vocational postgraduate award holders.

The support available to undergraduate students in 1994-95 through the main rates of maintenance grant and loan, taken together, will be 4 per cent. higher than in 1993-94, thus maintaining its value in real terms. Within that total, the main loan rates will be on average 44 per cent. higher than in 1993-94, offset in part by a reduction in the main rates of maintenance grant. The Government believe in principle that a higher share of the maintenance costs of higher education should be borne by graduates, now that student numbers have expanded so rapidly. No students will, however, be required to begin paying back their loans until after they leave their course and are earning more than 85 per cent. of national average earnings —currently about £14,000 per annum.

Tuition fees will continue to be reimbursed to institutions through the student support system on behalf of eligible students. The maximum rate of reimbursement will be reduced by 45 per cent. in each of the three subject bands for undergraduate courses in order to ensure that planned numbers are not exceeded. Higher education institutions will be compensated through grant in aid payable by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

These changes are consistent with those for England and Wales announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education. Details have been placed in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce details of the 1994-95 Scottish local government finance settlement.

Mr. Lang: Following is the information.

Government Supported Expenditure

I propose that Government-supported expenditure—GSE—for 1994-95 should be set at £6,013·6 million. This is an increase of 3·52 per cent. on the current year's figure after adjusting for the transfer of responsibility for the careers service from local to central Government. Excluding the further transfer of resources to local authorities for their care in the community and independent living fund responsibilities, the increase is 2·25 per cent.

Grant-Aided Expenditure

I estimate that the local authorities will incur £753·5 million on loan and leasing charges in 1994-95. This amount is top-sliced from GSE leaving a residual amount for grant-aided expenditure—GAE—of £5,260·1 million. This figure is 3·42 per cent. higher than that for the current year—again after adjusting for the careers service transfer —or 2·23 per cent. after taking account of transfers to local authorities next year. I shall announce GAE figures for individual local authorities as soon as possible.

Aggregate External Finance

I further propose that Government-determined support for local authority current expenditure—aggregate external finance—should be set at £5,272·0 million for 1994-95. This is an increase of 2·41 per cent. on the current year's figure—again including an adjustment for the careers service transfer—or 0·97 per cent. excluding resources being transferred to local authorities to meet the cost of additional responsibilities, especially care in the community. In determining this AEF figure, I have assumed that local authorities will contribute £12·5 million to the next stage of unified business rate policy. I am announcing separately today details of the total reduction which I plan to make in Scottish business rates next year.

Provisional Capping Principles

To assist local authorities in their budgeting process, I have again decided to announce provisional capping principles for the year ahead. I have the power to cap a Scottish local authority either where I consider that its planned expenditure is excessive or where there is an excessive increase in its planned expenditure as compared with the previous year. My intended capping principles for 1994-95 are:

1. any increase in budget between 1993-94 and 1994-95 of more than 1·75 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is above the local authority's grant-aided expenditure—GAE—assessment for 1994-95;
2. any increase in budget between 1993-94 and 1994-95 of more than 1·25 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is over 5 per cent. above the local authority's GAE assessment for 1994-95;
3. any increase in budget between 1993-94 and 1994-95 of more than 0·75 per cent. will be an excessive increase if the resulting budget is over 10 per cent. above the local authority's GAE assessment for 1994-95; and
4. any budget for 1994-95 more than 12·5 per cent. above the local authority's GAE assessment will be excessive save that:
   (a) if that budget is 30 per cent. or less above the authority's GAE assessment for 1994-95 and that budget is no greater than the budget set by that authority for 1993-94, the authority will not be capped;
   (b) if that budget is not more than 60 per cent. or less above the authority's GAE assessment for 1994-95 and that budget is at least 5 per cent. below the budget set by that authority for 1993-94, the authority will not be capped;

(c) if that budget is at least 10 per cent. below the budget set by the authority for 1993-94, the authority will not be capped.

These principles are necessarily provisional. Before taking my decisions on capping, I will, of course, take into account all appropriate considerations.

Council Tax Transitional Relief Scheme

In the current year, provision was made for a transitional relief scheme to ensure that during the phasing-in of the council tax no household faced too great an increase in its bill as a result of the change in the tax system. I intend that this scheme will continue in 1994-95 so that those taxpayers who faced the largest increases in the current year will continue to receive assistance at an appropriate level. In general, they will receive the amount of relief granted in 1993-94 less an amount ranging from £67 a year for band A to £137 a year for band H. I estimate that this scheme will cost approximately £5 million and this will be funded in addition to the AEF sum announced above.

In determining the local government finance settlement for next year, I have taken full account of the views the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has expressed to me. However, as I made clear to the convention at a meeting on 29 October, I regard its proposals as unrealistic, especially given the Government's view that increases in pay for public sector employees next year would require to be funded by efficiency savings. I made it clear to COSLA at the above meeting that I expected this policy to apply to Scottish local authorities and the settlement I am announcing today has been determined on that basis. The settlement includes provision for additional burdens being placed on local authorities next year including the introduction of devolved school management, child care and preparing for local government reform and water and sewerage restructuring.

Having regard to the low level of inflation and the Government's approach to public sector pay, this is a realistic settlement. I hope that in the light of it, local authorities will budget sensibly for next year. If they do not, I shall not hesitate to use my capping powers.

Rates

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on non-domestic rates for 1994-95.

Mr. Lang: The Government remain firmly committed to the objective of reducing Scottish business rates to the level of the English national non-domestic rate—NNDR. I intend to prescribe rate poundages for 1994-95 at a level which will mean that Scottish businesses will pay £60 million less than they would otherwise have done next year. This reduction takes account of the business rates measure which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget speech earlier today. I have decided that the most effective way to apply this measure to Scotland is to make a reduction in rate poundages next year which is £10 million greater than would otherwise have been possible.

As a result of the Government's unified business rates policy and our earlier decision to limit increases in poundages to no more than the rate of inflation from 1989-90 onwards, the total reduction in Scottish business rates is now around £500 million.

The table shows the 1994-95 rate poundages which I intend to prescribe for each local authority in an order which I shall lay before the House very shortly. On the basis of those poundages, ratepayers in Berwickshire, Tweeddale, Moray and Gordon will join those in Kincardine and Deeside, Orkney and Shetland in being levied rates at the English NNDR level. Businesses in all other areas will have a cash reduction in their rates. All businesses benefit from the fact that, because of the low level of inflation, 1993-94 poundages have been uprated by only 1·7 per cent. I have again decided to make larger reductions to those poundages furthest from the English NNDR. As a result, the poundage reductions in real terms range from over 9·5 per cent in the case of Glasgow to 0·25 per cent. in the case of Gordon.

Local authorities are being asked to contribute by means of efficiency savings £12·5 million to the £60 million reduction in business rates. The remaining £47·5 million reduction in non-domestic rate income will be offset by an increase in revenue support grant within the total of aggregate external finance for Scottish local authorities for 1994-95 which I have announced separately today.

I have decided that the reduction in poundages should again be accompanied by a reduction in industrial derating. The level of derating will be reduced from 17·5 per cent. in the current year to 10·0 per cent. next year.

Non-domestic rate poundages
1994-95

Local authorities	*1994-95 poundages*
Borders	36·5
Central	42·3
Dumfries and Galloway	38·9
Fife	46·8
Grampian	34·7
Highland	41·9
Lothian	48·2
Strathclyde	46·7
Tayside	43·6
Berwickshire	5·8
Ettrick and Lauderdale	6·2
Roxburgh	6·7
Tweeddale	5·8
Clackmannan	5·8
Falkirk	4·6
Stirling	7·2
Annandale and Eskdale	5·2
Nithsdale	5·2
Stewartry	4·6
Wigtown	4·4
Dunfermline	1·1
Kirkcaldy	2·2
North East Fife	1·7
Aberdeen City	8·4
Banff and Buchan	7·8
Gordon	7·6
Kincardine and Deeside	7·6
Moray	7·6
Badenoch and Strathspey	2·2
Caithness	3·7
Inverness	2·7
Lochaber	4·5
Nairn	2·2
Ross and Cromarty	3·7
Skye and Lochalsh	3·6
Sutherland	2·6
East Lothian	1·8
Edinburgh City	1·6
Midlothian	1·8
West Lothian	1·1
Argyll and Bute	3·3
Bearsden and Milngavie	1·2

Local authorities	1994-95 poundages
Clydebank	3·5
Clydesdale	2·5
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	2·5
Cumnock and Doon Valley	2·7
Cunninghame	3·8
Dumbarton	3·3
East Kilbride	1·7
Eastwood	0·2
Glasgow City	6·2
Hamilton	3·0
Inverclyde	2·3
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	2·5
Kyle and Carrick	2·7
Monklands	3·0
Motherwell	2·5
Renfrew	3·0
Strathkelvin	2·3
Angus	3·2
Dundee City	5·9
Perth and Kinross	3·4
Orkney	42·3
Shetland	42·3
Western Isles	48·5

EDUCATION

Schools, Castle Point

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children in Castle Point will be educated in grant-maintained schools in the primary sector and in the secondary sector by 1 January 1994; and what outstanding grant-maintained status applications there are for schools in Castle Point.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on schools by parliamentary constituency is not collected centrally.

It is estimated that by January 1994 11 per cent. of primary and 61 per cent. of secondary pupils in Essex will be in self-governing schools.

On 29 November 24 schools—17 primary, seven secondary—in Essex had applications for grant-maintained status awaiting a decision, of which seven had a proposed incorporation date of 1 January.

Literacy

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information he has on the proportion of those in social classes IV and V who are assessed as having difficulties with literacy and other basic skills.

Mr. Boswell: Information on the incidence of literacy and numeracy difficulties by social class is not currently available, but the Government-funded adult literacy and basic skills unit is currently working on an analysis of relevant research data, the results of which are expected to be published in the new year.

Education and Training

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will provide a table showing for each standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region, the total expenditure in 1992-93, and the budgeted expenditure in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 in respect of grants for education support and training, part to be included in single regeneration budget.

Mr. Forth: The only part of the grants for education support and training to be included in the single regeneration budget from 1 April 1994 will be the programme, "Raising Standards in Inner City Schools." The allocations made under this programme in 1992-93 and 1993-94 are shown in the table. Expenditure figures for 1992-93 are not yet available. Allocations for 1994-95 have not yet been decided and will be announced in due course. The programme ends in 1994-95.

GEST: Raising standards in inner city schools

Allocation by region	1992-93 £	1993-94 £
Greater London	2,262,729	3,658,000
Metropolitan boroughs	3,776,920	4,622,400
Shire counties	581,120	1,846,500

Student Loans

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will give details of the support that will be given to students through mandatory awards and loans in the academic year 1994-95.

Mr. Patten: I have laid before Parliament today the Education (Mandatory Awards) (No. 2) Regulations 1993 and, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Education (Student Loans) (No. 2) Regulations 1993. The regulations include the new rates of grant and loan for the academic year 1994-95.

The rates of loan available to students in 1994-95 will be 44 per cent. higher on average than in 1993-94. Taken together with the reduction in grant which I announced separately today, that will provide for a total level of support available through the main rates of grant and loan together which will be 4 per cent. higher than this year, thus maintaining its value in real terms.

The main rates of grant and loan set out in the regulations are as follows:

£	Grant	Loan (full year)	Total
Students living away from parents' home:			
In London	2,560	1,375	3,935
Elsewhere	2,040	1,150	3,190
Students living at parents' home	1,615	915	2,530

Note.—The loan rates shown here apply to students throughout the United Kingdom. The grant rates apply to students from England and Wales. The equivalent arrangements for Scotland and Northern Ireland are being announced separately.

In addition, the parental and spouse's contribution scales are adjusted so that the contribution from a parent or a spouse whose residual income rises in line with average earnings will continue to fall in real terms. The supplementary allowances payable as part of the mandatory award are increased by 4 per cent. Loan rates for final year students are increased in proportion to the full-year rates of loan.

The number of students in higher education is now higher than ever before: the participation rate of young

people has more than doubled in the past five years. Against that background, the Government believe in principle that graduates—as the main beneficiaries of higher education—should contribute a higher share of its costs. But no student will need to begin paying back their loan until after they have left their course and their income is higher than 85 per cent. of national average earnings—that is nearly £14,000 in today's prices. The Government will continue to keep the level of repayments under review.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about his Department's expenditure plans for the financial years 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Mr. Patten: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement today, the Department for Education and OFSTED's spending programme in 1994-95 will total £10,487 million. That total is £670 million or 6·8 per cent. higher than equivalent expenditure in 1993-94.

Total expenditure in 1995-96 is planned to be £11,059 million and in 1996-97 £11,392 million.

Within these totals the Government have given priority to improving standards in schools through the self-governing—grant-maintained—schools programme. The planned growth in further education student numbers announced last year, to take the 16 to 18-year-old participation rate to record levels, will be sustained. Participation by young people in higher education will be stabilised at its present record level while higher education capital spending will be enhanced to meet the needs created by the recent rapid expansion in HE student numbers. In one of the most stringent public expenditure surveys for many years, the Government are reinforcing their commitment to education with 4·9 per cent. real terms growth in their expenditure on education over the next three years.

Self-governing schools

More than 1,000 schools have voted yes to self-governing status in ballots. The Government's expenditure plans provide for continuing growth in the sector in line with the forecast in the White Paper "Choice and Diversity" (Cm 2021) that, by 1996, most maintained secondary schools, as well as a significant proportion of maintained primary schools, would be self-governing.

The great bulk of recurrent funding for self-governing schools is found within the totals for local authority expenditure. Central Government will increase their recurrent and capital grants to self-governing schools substantially over the next three years as their numbers grow. Central Government expenditure on self-governing schools is planned to total £157 million in 1993-94 and £244 million, £446 million and £595 million in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97. The plans also allow for the Funding Agency for Schools, which will be established from 1 April 1994.

Capital Expenditure on Schools

Total central Government provision for capital expenditure on self-governing, voluntary-aided and LEA-maintained schools is £600 million, £606 million and £643 million in 1995-95, 1994-96 and 1996-97. Further details of annual capital guidelines and allocations to voluntary-aided and self-governing schools will be announced later.

Further Education

Total recurrent spending is planned to rise from £2,549 million in 1993-94 to £2,679 million, £2,872 million and £2,920 million in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97.

Last year I announced that the Government were giving a high priority to the launch of the new sector of further education. We set ourselves to increase the number of students in FE by 25 per cent. between 1992-93 and 1995-96, taking the United Kingdom to the top of the international league for participation in education among 16 to 18-year-olds, and representing a substantial step towards the achievement of the national targets for education and training. We are on target to meet that projection.

In a demanding public spending round the Government must look to the further education sector for some increase in efficiency in this period of dramatic growth. The plans announced today allow for the forecast increase in student numbers up to 1995-96 to be met in full, with an additional increase of 3 per cent. between 1995-96 and 1996-97 to maintain the 16 to 18-year-old participation rate.

Capital expenditure is planned to be £157 million, £159 million and £159 million in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97. This will enable the Further Education Funding Council to continue to improve the state of accomodation and the stock of equipment.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement of 14 September 1993 set out the Government's approach to public sector pay in the year now beginning. I shall set as a condition of my grant to the FEFC that it requires the institutions it funds to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement, and in particular of the need to cover higher pay costs from within efficiency improvements, in 1994-95. I shall in addition hold back £50 million of grant from the FEFC, to be released when there has been satisfactory progress within colleges towards more flexible contracts of employment.

Higher Education

Student Numbers

The number of students in higher education has grown even faster than expected in the Government's spending plans last year. The proportion of young people entering higher education is now around 30 per cent.—close to the projection of one in three for the year 2000 set out in the Government's Higher Education White Paper in May 1991.

This represents a remarkable achievement. But there is a limit to the burden of funding for higher education which the taxpayer can bear. The student numbers underlying the Government's spending plans announced today accordingly assume that the proportion of young people entering higher education will remain at the current record level for the next three years before rising to one in three by the end of the decade.

Because of demographic trends, this means reductions of nearly 3·5 per cent. in the number of new entrants to higher education next year, with a smaller reduction the year after, followed by increases from 1996-97 onwards. If trends in A-levels and equivalent qualifications are maintained, there is likely to be a further small tightening in standards of entry to higher education.

In order to allow for the rising number of entrants enrolled in recent years, the expenditure plans provide for total full-time equivalent student numbers in higher education in England to rise by 90,000 or 10 per cent. between 1993-94 and 1996-97.

The rapid growth in student numbers has imposed a large extra burden on the taxpayer. The Government believe that a fairer distribution of this burden is needed between the taxpayer and those who benefit from higher education. They have therefore carried out a review of the funding of higher education, as have the university vice-chancellors. The expenditure plans announced today reflect the outcome of that review. There will be changes in funding to remove the incentive to expand and in student support, as described below.

Tuition Fees

The Government will continue to reimburse the tuition fees charged to students up to the maxima specified through the mandatory awards system. In order to stay within the expenditure plans, it is essential that student numbers are now maintained at the planned level. To that end, the maximum tuition fees reimbursed through the mandatory awards system in 1994-95 will be reduced by 45 per cent. for each fee band. The new maxima for each band are as follows:

	£
Classroom-based courses	750
Laboratory and workshop-based courses	1,600
Clinical courses	2,800

In addition, I have stressed to the Higher Education Funding Council for England the importance of delivering through its funding methodology for universities and colleges the planned numbers of students.

The reduction in tuition fees will have no effect on the planned level of funding per student in higher education. Some £474 million will be transferred in 1994-95 from mandatory awards to Funding Council grant to compensate for the lower yield from tuition fees. If universities and colleges recruit the numbers of students assumed in the Government's plans, they will suffer no loss of income as a result of the reduction in fees.

Funding Council Grant

Recurrent grant for the HEFCE—including compensation for the reduction in tuition fees—is planned at £3,096 million, £3,350 million and £3,342 million in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 respectively. The increase next year in the recurrent funds available to universities and colleges, including both grant and tuition fees, will be 6·7 per cent.

Capital grant will be £322 million, £381 million and £424 million in 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 respectively. This is a rise in real terms of 20 per cent. between 1993-94 and 1996-97. This substantial increase reflects the need for capital investment to help with the growth of student numbers in recent years and later in the decade, together with the reorganisation of medical education and research in London following the Tomlinson report.

As with the FEFC, I shall set as a condition of my grant to the HEFCE that it requires the institutions it funds to take account of the principles set out in the Chancellor's statement of 14 September, and in particular of the need to cover higher pay costs from within efficiency improvements.

Student Support

For 1994-95, the Government will continue to maintain the real value of the funds offered to students through the main rates of grant and loan and supplementary grants, which together will increase by 4 per cent. in cash. Reductions in the main rates of grant of 10 per cent. against their 1993-94 levels will be offset by increases in loan entitlements. Similar adjustments will be made over the next two years; on present estimates they will bring the grant and loan into broad balance in 1996-97. This shift from grant to loan represents an acceleration of the Government's existing plans.

The contribution of parents whose income rises at the same rate as average income will continue to fall in real terms. Loan rates for final year students will increase in proportion to the full year rates of loan. As now, students will not have to begin to repay their loans until they leave their courses and their incomes are higher than 85 per cent of national average earnings: that is nearly £14,000 in 1993 prices. The Government will keep the level of loan repayments under review.

Following a review of the access funds which help students who might otherwise have difficulty in completing their courses, we have increased the funds to £27 million in each year.

British Council

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress has been made towards the merger between the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges and the British Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: The merger between the central bureau and the British Council will take place on 1 December. This is a most welcome development. In approving it the Government have taken steps to ensure that the central bureau will maintain its own distinct identity within the British Council. Besides the organisational benefits inherent in the merger, the central bureau's wealth of experience and its internationally respected position in the field of education will complement the British Council's work in promoting Britain and in supporting education and training projects around the world. In its turn the central bureau will be able to draw on the British Council's worldwide network in promoting the international dimension in schools and colleges all over the United Kingdom.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hills and Uplands

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands is complete; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The incomes of hill farmers have risen for two years and are forecast to rise for a third. Figures produced for the autumn review and agreed with the farming unions show that the average net farm incomes

of cattle and sheep farms in less-favoured areas rose in real terms by 33 per cent. last year and are forecast to rise by a further 28 per cent. this year. This is good news for the hill farming community. It results from a combination of factors, but in particular total direct livestock subsidy payments to hill farmers are forecast to have increased substantially over the two years to 1993-94. This demonstrates the Government's firm commitment to farming in the hills and uplands. I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the statistical tables which formed the basis of the autumn review this year.

Hill sheep farmers have benefited through increases in the rates of sheep annual premium arising from the currency movements following the United Kingdom's departure from the exchange rate mechanism in September last year. Suckler cow producers will benefit from the agreed substantial increases in suckler cow premium which, taking into account the extensification premium, will total over £93 per head for 1993 compared with £59 per head under the 1992 scheme. These are very real benefits for the hill farming community.

The economic situation is such that I am able to reduce the rates of allowances for the 1994 HLCA scheme without adversely affecting the long-term viability or well-being of the industry. The rates of allowance for the severely disadvantaged areas will be reduced by £15·80 to £47·50 for cattle, by £0·75 to £5·75 for hardy breed ewes and by £0·60 to £3·00 for other ewes. Rates in the disadvantaged areas will be reduced by £7·90 to £23·75 for cattle and by £0·42 to £2·44 for ewes. I have today laid regulations before Parliament to give effect to these new rates.

The substantial increase in net farm incomes to which I referred earlier represents almost an extra £100 million a year overall to hill farmers in 1993-94. Even after the reductions in rates which I have announced, hill farmers will continue to be better off and will have achieved a net gain. This is partly accounted for by the fact that direct subsidies to cattle and sheep farmers in the less-favoured areas are estimated to total at least £550 million in 1994.

While I acknowledge that HLCAs continue to play a vital role in the viability of hill farms it is indisputable that the continued rise in the level of other subsidies available to hill farmers has reduced the relative importance of HLCAs. The Government remain committed to the future of hill farming in the United Kingdom and will act as necessary to ensure the viability of this vital sector of the United Kingdom agricultural industry.

Priorities Board

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she has received a report from the priorities board for research and development in agriculture and food; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The priorities board for research and development in agriculture and food has submitted its report to Agriculture Ministers and the chairman of the Agricultural and Food Research Council and it is published today.

In producing its report the board has taken into account the recommendations of its six advisory sectoral groups. It has developed its recommendations on the basis of level funding and has therefore balanced recommendations for increased funding in support of high priority work with others suggesting areas where work could be reduced.

The board has recommended that funding of the horticulture and food sectors should be increased, that a new programme of research into non-food crops should be initiated, and that to provide funding for these recommendations, research in the animals sectors, particularly on ruminants, and in the arable crops area should be reduced. The board has also recommended that research in the environmental sector should be maintained at its present level. The board has recommended considerable re-direction of funding within all the sectors to provide for new high priority research.

The board has also recommended that the agriculture departments and the Agricultural and Food Research Council should continue to provide a forum in which scientists, policy makers and industrialists can meet to ensure that publicly and privately funded research and development align effectively. However, having fulfilled its present remit it has said that it considers another full-scale review of priorities unnecessary for a while. As a non-departmental public body the board is due for periodic review in 1994. With this in view, the Government have therefore decided to dissolve the board, with effect from the end of this year.

We are grateful to Sir Anthony Tennant and all the members of the board for the work they have put into this report. The recommendations contained in it will, subject to a full consideration of the resource implications, help to guide the allocation of resources in the future research and development programme. Discussion will be held between the agriculture departments and the Agricultural and Food Research Council to plan the implementation of the recommendations.

Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

Potatoes

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether she has reached a decision concerning the future of the potato marketing scheme, and whether she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Pursuant to my answer of 29 November 1993, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I have carefully considered the representations made to us since we were given powers in the Agriculture Act 1993 to revoke the scheme.

Having considered all the arguments with great care, we have concluded that the scheme must come to an end, on trading and deregulatory grounds. We are persuaded of the benefits of the free market for the whole of our industry —growers, processors and also for consumers.

Timing, however, is very important. We accept the arguments of the board and the union that our growers, having been tightly regulated for 60 years, are not ready to be thrust immediately into a totally free market. We consider that three years is a reasonable period to allow for transition, and are therefore prepared for the scheme to continue in modified form for the marketing years 1994-95, 1995-96 and 1996-97 and then end. We will, however, take a further look at the potato market before the consultation on the order to revoke the scheme which is required by the Act.

In the meantime, we need transitional arrangements in order that the industry can adapt towards the free market in the most constructive way.

The proposals made by the PMB and NFU form a very good basis for such a transition. On this basis we propose the following modified arrangements:

Quota flexibility should be introduced, allowing a registered producer's plantings to vary by up to 5 per cent. above or below quota without penalty.

Planting threshold for registration in the scheme should be raised from 0·4 to 1 hectare, exempting more growers from the need to register.

The special schemes for encouraging growing on contract should continue at their present level of uptake.

Intervention buying should cease, except for intervention on seed potatoes, funded by seed producers themselves.

The levy on growers should be reduced to the level appropriate for funding the board's other activities such as research, promotion and provision of market information.

The board membership should be reduced, and means be found of broadening representation on it.

Licensing and registration of potato merchants should cease.

Some of these changes would require amendments to the scheme, but the most significant changes could be introduced for the 1994-95 season, if not sooner.

This package of measures will allow our industry to move in an organised way towards a free market, which will be of benefit to growers and purchasers of potatoes and to our competitiveness in markets abroad.

Water (Pesticides)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what communications she has had with the European Community Environment Commissioner this year on the European Community limits on pesticides in drinking water.

Mr. Soames: My Department works closely with the Department of the Environment which has lead responsibility for drinking water. I have had no direct contact with the Environment Commissioner this year on the EC limits for pesticides.

Flood Warnings

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action her Department is taking in providing and maintaining flood warning sirens; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Following the decision last year by my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary that the obsolete national air raid warning siren system should be closed as soon as possible, local authorities which used the system for flood warning purposes were invited to take over the equipment and be responsible for its upkeep. I understand that discussions subsequently took place between the Home Office, local authorities and British Telecom about the maintenance of these systems. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wrote to the chairman of British Telecom on 9 November seeking his support in ensuring that the siren systems used for flood warning purposes are maintained by them in an operational state at least until the end of the present winter storm tide season in March-April 1994. It is anticipated that the authorities concerned will have alternative arrangements in place before winter 1994-95.

Food Trade Fair

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the British Food Organisations that exhibited at the recent food trade fair held in Cologne.

Mr. Jack: The bodies principally concerned with organising the substantial British presence at Anuga 1993 were:

Food From Britain
Meat and Livestock Commission
Milk Marketing Board
Potato Marketing Board
Rural Development Commission
Trade Promotions Scotland
Seafood from Shetland
Welsh Food Promotions
Welsh Lamb Enterprise
Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland.

Nuclear Waste (Dumping at Sea)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether Her Majesty's Government intend to file a declaration of non-acceptance in relation to the London convention decision in favour of a permanent worldwide ban on nuclear waste dumping at sea; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We are currently considering our position in relation to the recent London convention decision to introduce a permanent ban on the disposal of radioactive waste at sea.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations underlay the United Kingdom's abstention at the London convention on nuclear waste dumping at sea and the proposal for a permanent worldwide ban on such dumping.

Mr. Jack: We believe that the option of sea disposal for large bulky wastes arising from the decommissioning of nuclear power stations and submarines should not be foreclosed as it may represent the best practicable environmental option for these wastes. The United Kingdom has no immediate plans to dump such wastes at sea and is actively pursuing a land-based option.

Bovine Embryos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans she has to bring forward detailed regulations on bovine embryo collection and transfer.

Mr. Soames: Regulations to govern bovine embryo collection and transfer have been laid before Parliament today—30 November—to come into operation on 21 December 1993.

Orange Juice

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount of sugar is permissible in one litre of *(a)* orange juice and *(b)* pure orange juice before it has to be listed as an ingredient; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Any orange juice to which sugar has been added must declare "sugar" in the ingredient listing. The word "pure" must not be used if it is likely to mislead the consumer.

Countryside Survey

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether she has discussed with the Secretary of State for the Environment the results of the countryside survey 1990 and the implications of these results for his Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have regular contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The results of the survey will be taken fully into account in the continuing development of our policies for the countryside.

Forestry Commission (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list for each separate piece of land currently owned or leased by the Forestry Commission in Nottinghamshire *(a)* its name and *(b)* its area in hectares; and if she will place a map in the Library which names and identifies each of these pieces of land.

Mr. Jack: The Forestry Commission manages 5,644 hectares of land in Nottinghamshire. A map showing the location of the individual areas has been placed in the Library.

The more detailed information requested on the individual areas is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Fur Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* mink and *(b)* arctic foxes have been kept on fur farms in the United Kingdom in each year since 1984; and how many there are at present.

Mr. Soames: The Mink (Keeping) Order 1992, which requires that mink farms be licensed by Agriculture Departments, does not require regular returns of the number of mink kept. However, best estimates suggest that the number of mink being kept in the United Kingdom has fallen from approximately 100,000 in 1987 to some 47,000 in 1992. Information is not collected on the keeping of arctic foxes.

Sheep Quota

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she will be laying an order to enable the opening of the sheep quota national reserve; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The relevant legislation will be made very shortly. Our aim is to begin allocations in the early part of next year.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to be able to confirm the size of the sheep quota national reserve, to announce arrangements for its allocation and to settle outstanding claims; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* The relevant legislation will be made shortly. Applications to the reserve will then be invited. I hope to be able at that stage to give details of the amounts of quota currently available in the reserve, but as I have made clear on previous occasions, the size of the reserve will be limited. Our aim is to begin allocations in the early part of next year.

ENVIRONMENT

City Pride

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had regarding city pride.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has had constructive discussions with the three city pride cities, London, Birmingham and Manchester, about taking forward this new initiative.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will tabulate the capital financing element, the equivalent budgeted net revenue expenditure on capital financing, the differences between them, the relevant population, and the difference per head of that population for each local authority in England for each of the financial years 1992-93 and 1993-94, in a manner similar to those tables published in the *Official Report,* 19 February 1992, columns *193-200.*

Mr. Baldry: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his proposals for the appropriate level of aggregate local authority spending in 1994-95, and the level of central support for that spending.

Mr. Gummer: I propose that total standard spending —TSS—for 1994-95 should be £42·664 billion for England, £1·496 billion above this year's figure. This total includes the new transitional community care special grant of £736 million announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 29 October. After adjusting for changes in local authority functions and excluding community care, TSS in 1994-95 represents an increase of 2·3 per cent. over this year.

I propose that the level of aggregate external finance —AEF—distributed to local authorities in England in 1994-95 should be £34·3129 billion, £1·0385 billion higher than this year. This figure also includes the £736 million transitional community care special grant.

I also propose that the non-domestic rate poundage for 1994-95 in England should rise by 1·7 per cent. to 42·3p, reflecting the annual increase in the retail prices index to September. This will ensure that the benefit of the Government's success in tackling inflation will once again be passed on in full to businesses.

I propose to set the distributable amount of non-domestic rates at £10·685 billion. I propose that the total of revenue support grant should be £18,496,837,001. Specific and special grants within AEF will amount to £5,131,062,999.

I shall announce shortly my proposals for the distribution of Government grants, including the outcome of my review of standard spending assessments. At the same time, I shall announce my current capping intentions. I shall also set out my proposals for the second year of transitional assistance to those households which faced significant increases in their local tax bills following the introduction of the council tax, and for meeting the transitional costs of local government reorganisation.

It is essential that local and central Government continue to play their part in restraining expenditure. Our

overriding priority is to reduce the public sector deficit. My proposals for total standard spending, aggregate external finance and the non-domestic rate poundage represent a balanced approach to the funding of local authority services in 1994-95. I look to local authorities to take the same responsible attitude in determining their spending priorities and setting their budgets in 1994-95.

Housing Association Grant

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what he expects to be the average percentage housing association grant payable in England in *(a)* 1993-94 and *(b)* 1994-95.

Sir George Young: The average housing association grant rate set for:

(a) 1993-94 was 67 per cent.; and

(b) 1994-95 is 62 per cent.

The average actually paid to associations will not be known until after the end of the financial year in question. However, I would expect that, as in 1992-93, the average will be lower than that set, as a result of efficiency gains and associations' willingness to contribute to developments from their own resources.

Waste Water

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has recently had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer in regard to the new estimated increase in costs needed to meet the EC waste water directive.

Mr. Yeo: These matters have in the usual way been the subject of collective discussion.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received from the European Environmental Bureau in regard to the United Kingdom's environmental protection policies.

Mr. Yeo: I have seen the proposals from the European Environmental Bureau for a declaration on sustainable development by the European Council. I expect to meet United Kingdom members of the EEB on 6 December.

Docklands Light Railway

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the extension of the docklands light railway to Beckton to commence services.

Mr. Baldry: The opening of the extension of the docklands light railway to Beckton is being delayed by the late delivery of operating software for the new Seltrac signalling system being supplied by Alcatel. All other elements are in place and fully functional. It is anticipated that the opening should take place early next year, once Docklands Light Railway Ltd. is confident that the contractor has delivered a system that will provide a fully reliable service to the public.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the docklands light railway.

Mr. Gummer: I welcome the Chancellor's announcement in his Budget statement today that a new extension of the docklands light railway to Lewisham will be built and financed by the private sector.

Private sector companies will be invited to bid during 1994 for a concession to construct the extension. Construction on the £100 million project is expected to start soon after and the extension should open in 1997-98.

This is another major step toward improving London's infrastructure and I am pleased to give it my approval. This scheme, together with the £1·9 billion Jubilee line extension, highlights the Government's commitment to public transport in London. The Government have already confirmed that a new east-west link, the crossrail scheme, will go forward as a joint venture with the private sector.

The extension of the docklands light railway under the Thames to Greenwich, Deptford and Lewisham will help reduce the barrier effect of the Thames, providing an important new public transport link. It will also provide tourists with a new connection between the City and Greenwich and will benefit Kent commuters by providing a new interchange for travel into the City and east London. It will boost the regeneration of both the docklands and of the areas the new extension will serve. I am asking DLR Ltd. and its owners—the London Docklands development corporation—to give this project top priority.

The extension, which received parliamentary approval in May this year, will go through a new tunnel under the Thames south of the Isle of Dogs and terminate at Lewisham where it will connect with British Rail. The journey time from Lewisham to the City will be less than 25 minutes; from Lewisham to Canary Wharf about 15 minutes. The costs of the project have been closely examined and initial indications are that for the project to proceed, it may be necessary to omit two planned stations at Island Gardens and Cutty Sark. Consultation will take place before a final decision is taken.

The project is a joint venture under the Government's private finance initiative which encourages private sector investment in capital projects which have traditionally been carried out by the Government. Lewisham council will contribute £5 million towards the joint venture.

The Lewisham line will enhance the docklands light railway's commercial standing and help it prepare for privatisation, which will bring yet further improvements in the service to passengers. I am considering the options for privatisation in the light of expert advice and will announce my decision soon.

Housing Grants

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the number and value of home improvement and renovation grants paid to private owners and for tenanted properties in England since 1989.

Sir George Young: Information about home improvement and renovation grants paid in England for each year from 1989 to 1992 is shown in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics 1982-1992".

Total numbers and values of grants paid to private owners and tenants under the Housing Act 1985, the previous grants system, is shown in table 7.2. Similar information about activity under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the present grants system, is shown in tables 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5. Information about the sector

receiving renovation and disabled facilities grants is shown in table 7.8. Most common parts grants and all houses in multiple occupation grants will be for tenanted properties.

A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities have applied for Exchequer subsidies to help with costs associated with the option of reduction, clearance and closure of properties whose house prices are so low as to make renovation uneconomic; and how much these subsidies have been.

Sir George Young: When a property is found to be unfit, a local authority must determine the action necessary to deal with it. Its options include renovation, clearance and closure. The cost of renovation is one of the issues the authority should consider. Exchequer subsidy is available at 60 per cent. of the cost to the authority of the action determined on. In 1992-93 £18,466,309 was paid to 122 authorities in respect of clearance activity.

Council House Sales

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings have been sold by each local authority in England over the last five years *(a)* under the right to buy and *(b)* on any other basis.

Sir George Young: Tables showing the available information on right-to-buy sales and total council house sales for each English local authority in the period April 1979 to June 1993 were placed in the Library recently.

Housing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing association properties have been built in each local authority area in England over the last three years for *(a)* general need and *(b)* sheltered housing; and how many properties have been acquired by housing associations and renovated for renting over the same period.

Sir George Young: Estimates of the total numbers of housing association housebuilding completions within each local authority area in England for the latest three years are published in "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1990, 1991 and 1992 are in issues 103, 105 and 106 respectively.

The Department collects information about special types of housing for the elderly, including sheltered dwellings. Figures for housing association completions of sheltered dwellings for each local authority area in England are also published in "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1990, 1991 and 1992 are in issues 99, 102 and 106 respectively.

Figures showing renovation work completed by housing associations on dwellings for rent are available only for standard statistical regions. They are also shown in "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1990, 1991 and 1992 are in issues 101, 105 and 106 respectively.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate his Department has made of *(a)* the time or *(b)* the financial resources needed to resolve the housing problems in each local authority area of England.

Sir George Young: No such estimate is possible. However, local authorities are responsible for drawing up comprehensive housing strategies for their areas, taking account of priority needs and available resources.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many families for whom the London borough of Wandsworth has a housing responsibility were living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation on 1 November;

(2) how many people were on the Wandsworth council housing list on 1 November.

Sir George Young: The latest data available within my Department relate to the beginning of the current financial year when Wandsworth reported 407 households in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and 6,913 households on its waiting list.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new dwellings have been *(a)* built and *(b)* bought by each local authority in England over the past five years for (i) general need and (ii) sheltered housing.

Sir George Young: Estimates of the total numbers of local authority house-building completions within each local authority area in England in each calendar year 1988 to 1992 are in the publication "Local Housing Statistics". Figures for 1988, 1989 and 1990 are in issue No. 103, for 1991 in issue No. 105 and for 1992 in issue No. 106.

The Department collects information about special types of housing for the elderly, including sheltered dwellings. Figures for local authority completions of sheltered dwellings for each local authority area in England are in certain issues of "Local Housing Statistics". Annual data for 1988 to 1992 are in issues Nos. 90, 94, 99, 102 and 106 respectively.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

The Department does not collect data on how many new dwellings are bought by local authorities for either general need or sheltered housing.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions have been made to assist authorities with clearance procedures for new house building; and if he will list what help has been given to each local authority in England over the last five years.

Sir George Young: It is for local housing authorities, in preparing comprehensive housing strategies for their areas and in performing their enabling role, to identify the problems and the solutions, working together with housing associations and the private sector. My Department helps where it can. Subsidy is available to help meet the costs of clearance activity.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many clearance projects in England have been delayed due to the problems of rehousing those that will be displaced in the process.

Sir George Young: The Department of the Environment does not collect statistics on delayed clearance projects.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present strategic guidance for the

provision of new dwellings in Doncaster, South Yorkshire; what meetings he has held with Doncaster metropolitan district council on this matter; and what allowance has been made for the need for more *(a)* student and *(b)* single-person accommodation in Doncaster.

Sir George Young: Regional planning guidance note 5 for South Yorkshire, issued in December 1989, indicates that Doncaster metropolitan borough council should, in the period between 1986 and 2001, plan for 14,000 dwellings to be provided in its area, either through new construction or by conversion of existing buildings. No further strategic guidance has been issued since 1989; but local planning authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside, including Doncaster MBC, are in the process of preparing regional planning advice which they hope to submit jointly to the Secretary of State around the end of the year. The Secretary of State will then prepare and issue for consultation draft regional planning guidance and, in doing so, will take into account the advice provided by the authorities.

Officials have regularly attended meetings of the regional planning conference as observers and the Department helped to fund a study of population trends in the region in order to assist in the formulation of advice on housing provision.

Allowance for single person and student accommodation is usually included within the overall estimate of dwellings to be provided, although it is noteworthy that in its 1993 housing strategy statement Doncaster MBC has identified no significant need for more single-person or student dwellings.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he proposes to his estimates of local authority capital provision for housing set out in figure 80 of his Department's annual report 1993.

Sir George Young: Information on the Government's public expenditure plans for housing is contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", to be published by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon. Separately, the Department will issue a press notice this afternoon, giving information on the programmes for which it is responsible. I will write to the hon. Member shortly when more detailed information becomes available.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has recently had with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and Wales with respect to English counties.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Boundary Commission for England was abolished by section 24 of the Local Government Act 1992 which, by virtue of the Local Government Act 1992 (Commencement No. 1) Order 1992, was brought into force on 31 October 1992. Local government in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Drainage Boards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by valuation tribunal the number of council tax appeals that have been received to date in respect of internal drainage boards; how many have been heard; what was the decision of the tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Appeals to valuation tribunals in respect of internal drainage boards concern the valuation of agricultural land and buildings for purposes of drainage rates rather than of council tax. The information relates to valuation tribunal offices, which can cover one or more tribunals. The decisions of the tribunals are not available centrally.

Information is provided below in respect of those offices reporting these appeals:

Land Drainage Appeals to Valuations Tribunals in England by Tribunal Office: April—September 1993

Office	*Received*	*Resolved*
Avon and Gloucestershire	21	21
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	3	1
Cambridgeshire	33	10
Dorset and Somerset	79	0
East Sussex	106	1
Hereford and Worcestershire	43	43
Humberside	72	41
Kent	60	7
Lincolnshire	251	65
Leicester, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire	4	0
North Yorkshire	28	[1]4
Norfolk	31	0
Suffolk	20	0
West Sussex	113	0
TOTAL	864	193

[1] To July.

Special Needs Allowance

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of reductions in the transitional special needs management allowance on projects providing homes for people with drink, drug and mental health problems.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation is currently reviewing the funding arrangements for special needs schemes run by housing associations, including schemes for people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems, in the context of the new arrangements for community care. To assist with the introduction of community care, levels of transitional special needs management allowance funding are continuing unchanged during 1993-94. No decisions have been taken yet on funding for future years.

Regent's Park Barracks

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations and individuals who have so far written to his Department opposing the erecting of a multi-storey car park at the Regent's Park barracks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has received five letters about this proposal, including one from the London borough of Camden.

Urban Areas

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to assist shopping provision and infrastructure within urban areas which are currently poorly provided for.

Mr. Baldry: The recently revised planning policy guidance note 6—PPG6—"Town Centres and Retail Developments" sets out our planning policies for retail development. A major aim of the guidance is to sustain or enhance the viability and vitality of town centres.

The urban block of grants, particularly city challenge, will continue to provide assistance for local shopping schemes.

The single regeneration budget, which will be introduced on 1 April 1994, will provide flexible support for regeneration and development in England in a way that meets local needs and priorities.

World Conservation Monitoring Centre

Mr. Llew Smith To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he has recently held, or plans to hold, with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge.

Mr. Yeo: None. We value highly the centre's work on biodiversity and the wildlife trade and wish it well in its new headquarters, opened by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh on 25 November.

Seal Products

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will itemise the legislation of the last 10 years at national and EC levels which has implemented the EC agreement to ban the importation of seal products.

Mr. Yeo: Relevant legislation is as follows:

EC directive 83/129, which required member states to ban the importation of the skins of whitecoat pups of harp seals and pups of hooded seals—blue-backs—or articles made from them, for a period of two years from 1 October 1983;

the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 (Modification) Order 1983 (No. 1609), which implemented the directive by adding skins of harp and hooded seals to schedule 3 to the Act;

EC directive 85/444, which extended the ban on importation to 1 October 1989;

the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 (Variation) Order 1985 (No. 1502), which restricted indefinitely the import and export of skins and skin articles;

EC directive 89/370, which extended the ban on importation indefinitely.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has received on moves to allow the importation of seal products into the United Kingdom and other parts of the EC.

Mr. Yeo: I understand that the European Commission may propose the amalgamation of a number of measures, including the EC directive which bans the importation of certain seal products. We shall consider the implications of any such proposals very carefully.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to lay before Parliament regulations to abolish the client contribution payable towards the cost of work which is grant aided under the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Yeo: Regulations to abolish the client contribution payable by those receiving grant under the home energy efficiency scheme were laid before the House of Commons on 18 November. Subject to parliamentary approval, they are expected to come into force on 9 December.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amendments he proposes to make to the estimates of output for the Housing Corporation's approved development programme set out in figure 78 of his Department's annual report 1993.

Sir George Young: I shall be considering what revisions are needed to the figures in table 78 of the 1993 annual report in producing the Department's 1994 report early next year.

Housing Revenue Account

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total amount of housing revenue account subsidy payable to local housing authorities in England in 1992-93, and his estimates for 1993-94 and 1994-95 indicating separately the housing and the housing benefit components, and showing the difference between the actual subsidy payable and the amount which would have been payable if expenditure on rent rebates had qualified in full for subsidy.

Sir George Young: The latest estimates for total housing revenue account subsidy payable are contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", to be published by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon. I will write to the hon. Member shortly when the more detailed information requested becomes available.

Air Monitoring (London)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many air monitoring units there are in *(a)* the Greater London area and *(b)* north and north-west London.

Mr. Yeo: The number of the Department of the Environment's air quality monitoring sites in both Greater London and north and north-west London are given in the table.

Site type	*Greater London*	*North and north-west London*
Automatic Samplers	6	5
Smoke/SO_2 Network[1]	15	11
NO_2 Diffusion Tubes[1]	17	14
Toxic Organic Micro Pollutants	1	1
Multi-Element and Lead	3	3
Total	42	34

[1]Monitoring undertaken in collaboration with local authorities.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment where the air monitoring units for north London are sited.

Mr. Yeo: The location of my Department's air quality monitoring sites in north London are given in the table.

Site type	Location
Continuous:	
Enhanced Urban Site	Camden (Bloomsbury)
Hydrocarbon Site	Camden (University College)
NOx, O_3, CO, SO_2	Westminster (Victoria)
NOx, CO	Kensington and Chelsea; Earls Court
NOx, CO, SO_2	Kensington and Chelsea; Cromwell Road
Smoke/SO_2[1]	Ealing (2)
	Enfield
	Hackney
	Harrow
	Islington
	Kensington and Chelsea
	London (City)
	Redbridge
	Tower Hamlets
	Westminster
NO_2 Diffusion Tubes[1]	Barking
	Barnet
	Brent
	Camden
	Ealing
	Enfield
	Hackney
	Havering
	Hillingdon
	Islington
	Kensington and Chelsea
	London (City)
	Waltham: Forest
	Westminster
Toxic Organic Micropollutants	Westminster
Multi-Element and Lead	Brent
	Kensington and Chelsea
	Westminster

[1]Monitoring undertaken in collaboration with local authorities.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effect on the private finance initiative of the present rules governing the treatment by local authorities on *(a)* capital expenditure, *(b)* capital receipts, *(c)* leasing, *(d)* transactions involving local authority companies, *(e)* guarantees, *(f)* equity investment by local authorities and *(g)* competition for public sector contracts; and what proposals he has to amend these rules in order to increase local authorities' ability to participate in the private finance initiative.

Mr. Gummer: The rules to which the hon. Member refers provide a framework within which local authorities can collaborate with the private sector. Within them, authorities have developed excellent plans under, for example, city challenge and urban regeneration programmes. I am always willing to consider suggestions which would help authorities to collaborate with the private sector without undermining the necessary constraints on public expenditure.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many projects involving local authorities and the private sector have been materially assisted by the private finance initiative since November 1992; and if he will list those projects showing for each *(a)* the estimated value of the project, *(b)* the expenditure to date, *(c)* the nature of the material assistance from the private finance initiative and *(d)* all the sources of funding for the project and the amount from each source.

Mr. Gummer: The Department and its sponsored bodies attracted over £2 billion of private investment in support of departmental programmes in 1992-93, and similarly expects to lever in up to £3 billion of private funding in 1993-94. This will assist the implementation of a wide variety of projects, most notably in housing, inner cities and urban regeneration, with many directly or indirectly involving local authorities. Separately, many authorities are pursuing local initiatives and partnerships with the private sector. It is not practicable for the Department to collect information on each project.

Nirex Repository

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proportion of the waste to be stored in the proposed Nirex repository, including decommissioning materials, would come from *(a)* the thermal oxide reprocessing plant and *(b)* Magnox reprocessing on the assumptions made in drawing up the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory;

(2) if low-level organic radioactive waste will be dumped in the proposed Nirex repository.

Mr. Yeo: The types of waste disposed of in Nirex's repository will depend on the authorisations granted by the regulators.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specifications he has issued as to the minimum depth of the proposed Nirex radioactive waste repository at Sellafield.

Mr. Yeo: None. It will be for Nirex to demonstrate the safety of its design.

Fair Rents

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action has been taken to encourage greater exchange of information and views between rent officers and rent assessment panels to encourage general consistency of approach, following the recent announcement on the outcome of the consultation exercise on increases in fair rents.

Sir George Young: The educational trust of the Institute of Rent Officers has established a working party comprising rent officers and rent assessment panel members, to consider and clarify issues affecting the registration of fair rents in the light of changes in the market for rented housing. The working party aims to produce a report by next spring, which it hopes will assist rent officers and members of rent assessment panels in exercising their functions under the Rent Act 1977.

Wind Energy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the Government subsidy paid to developers of wind turbine farms is for decommissioning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

The extent to which the price paid by the regional electricity companies, for electricity supplied under a contract entered into by them under the non-fossil fuel obligation, contributes to the particular generator's capital, operating or decommissioning costs, is a commercial matter for the generator.

Countryside Survey

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has discussed with the Secretary of State for the Environment the results of the countryside survey 1990 and the implications of these results for his Department.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman today by my hon. Friend the Minister of the Environment and Countryside.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has discussed with the Secretary of State for the Environment the results of the countryside survey 1990 and the implications of these results for his Department.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have been asked to reply.

Regular contact is and will continue to be maintained with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on matters such as this.

Departments are committed to integrating environmental concerns into all policy areas. By 1997 the Countryside Council for Wales expects also to have completed the inventory of habitats in Wales at a phase 1 level of detail.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had on the implications of the countryside survey 1990 for Government policy with *(a)* the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *(b)* the Secretary of State for Transport, *(c)* the Treasury, *(d)* the Secretary of State for Scotland and *(e)* the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend maintains regular contact with his right hon. Friends on these matters and will continue to do so. They are as committed as he is to integrating environmental concerns into all policy areas.

Doncaster Drainage Act 1929

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amendments that have been made to date to the Doncaster Area Drainage Act 1929; what consideration is given to a new Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised that most of the Doncaster Area Drainage Act 1929 was repealed by the Doncaster Area Drainage Act 1933. The other amendments known to have been made before 1974 are set out in the "Chronological Table of Local Acts", published in 1985 by the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission. The "Chronological Table of Acts of Parliament"—1992 edition—shows no specific amendments since 1974, but there will, of course, have been changes made by public general legislation. I am not aware of any new private Bill being prepared.

Drainage Boards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by each internal drainage board the representation of district council members who are *(a)* councillors and *(b)* non-councillors; and what their percentage of representation is of the whole membership per internal drainage board.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with legislation which took effect on 1 April 1993, local authorities are entitled to appoint members to internal drainage boards in proportion to their financial contributions to the board's income, subject to their number not exceeding the number of members elected by agricultural drainage ratepayers by more than one. There are nearly 250 internal drainage boards in England and Wales and information about local authority representatives is not held centrally.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

13. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which TECs have met all the targets set down by his Department for two consecutive years.

Miss Widdecombe: Two training and enterprise councils met all their targets for performance-related funding in both 1991-92 and 1992-93, Stockport and High Peak TEC and Northumberland TEC.

24. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to make the training and enterprise councils more accountable to their local communities.

Miss Widdecombe: TECs are already accountable to their local communities in a number of ways. They consult all local interests in preparing their strategies and plans. They publish summaries of these plans and hold public meetings at least annually. They also publish an annual report.

26. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much public funding has been provided for the South West TEC based in Plymouth; and how many people are currently having help and training there to find work.

Miss Widdecombe: The Employment Department has agreed a budget of £64·2 million for 1993-94 with Devon and Cornwall TEC.

The TEC helps many people in many different ways. Numbers currently include 6,305 young people on youth training, 3,871 adults undertaking training for work and 127 participating in learning for work.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of accumulated reserves was held in total and by each TEC in England at 1 April 1992 and at 1 April 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The level of reserves held by each training and enterprise council—TEC—is contained within the TECs' published accounts. A full set of accounts for all 75 English TECs, for the year ending 31 March 1992, has already been placed in the House of Commons Library. Each TEC's accounts for the year ended 31 March 1993 is being placed in the Library as they become available to the Employment Department.

TECs are allowed to generate a surplus and create a reserve by subcontracting at a lower unit price than negotiated with the Department. A surplus may also be generated where a TEC's administrative costs are kept below the management fee paid by the Department. The surplus is available to the TEC, with the agreement of the Secretary of State for Employment, for further expenditure on programmes—and TEC administrative costs—for initiatives outside the programmes but within the TEC's articles and memorandum of association, or as a contribution to the TEC's general reserves.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what powers training and enterprise councils have to switch their allocation of funds between various parts of their budgets; how much each TEC in England has transferred from the budgets it was allocated for youth training and employment training; to what purposes the funds were subsequently allocated; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Training and enterprise councils —TECs—may switch their allocation of funds between youth training, training for work—which replaced employment training—compacts, education business partnerships, and business and enterprise support, so long as no budget is increased or decreased by more than 5 per cent. TECs may also increase their learning from work budget by up to a maximum of 5 per cent.

During the current financial year, five TECs have used this facility to transfer funds out of either their youth training or training for work budgets. Details are shown in the table.

TEC	*Amount £*	*Additional provision purchased*
Switches from youth training		
Avon	258,000	Training for work
Birmingham	928,000	Training for work compacts
		Education business partnerships
		Business and enterprise support
Central England	216,000	Training for work compacts
		Education business partnerships
		Business and enterprise support
Wolverhampton	149,000	Training for work
		Business and enterprise support
Switches from training for work		
Wearside	251,000	Youth training

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which TECs are using adult training credits within their training for work provision; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The following training and enterprise councils in England are currently using adult training credits within their training for work provision with assistance from the Department:

Barnsley and Doncaster;
Bedfordshire;
Bradford;
Cambsetc;
Hertfordshire;
Milton Keynes and North Bucks;
North London;
Rotherham;
South Thames;
Stockport and High Peak.

In addition, a number of other TECs are issuing adult training credits within their training for work provision using other resources.

Older Workers

14. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Government are taking to improve the employment prospects for people aged 50 years and above.

Miss Widdecombe: With inflation and interest rates lower than for many years, our economic policies are improving employment prospects for everyone. For older people, building on the work of my advisory group, I recently launched "Getting On"—a drive to combat ageism in the workplace and encourage employers to recognise the skills, experience and commitment older people offer.

Youth Training

15. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds are on waiting lists for youth training places in the east midlands.

Miss Widdecombe: On 11 November there were 197 young people covered by the youth training guarantee who had been waiting for the offer of a YT place for eight weeks or longer in the Employment Department's east midlands region.

Disability

16. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures his Department is taking to improve access to work for disabled people.

19. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to improve the job opportunities for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A new scheme, called access to work, will improve the range and type of help currently available under the Department's special schemes and proposals have been published for improving the help available through the sheltered employment programme.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what consultations he has had with employers' organisations about the likely impact of changes in funding for access to work schemes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has had from charities concerned with disability and employment on the proposals that employers should pay half the cost of employing people with disabilities who have been working for them for over six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my noble Friend Lord Henley have been in correspondence with, and have met, a number of leading employer and disablement organisations about access to work, about which my right hon. Friend made a statement to the House on 22 June 1993, *Official Report*, column 102. When my right hon. Friend has reached decisions on details of access to work, including the employer contribution, a statement will be made to the House.

Youth Unemployment

17. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what further measures he intends to take to reduce youth unemployment in Nottinghamshire.

Miss Widdecombe: The local employment service and training and enterprise councils deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training programmes to help young unemployed people in Nottinghamshire find the best and quickest route to employment. The Government's plans are kept continually under review. Any plans will be announced in the normal way.

Wages Councils

18. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the effects on wage levels of the abolition of wages councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Abolition of the wages councils will enable the introduction of much greater flexibility in pay rates and more variation in pay structures. It is therefore not possible to make firm forecasts of the overall effect of abolition.

Civilian Employment

20. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how the total of civilian employment in the south-eastern region has changed in the last 10 years.

Miss Widdecombe: Between June 1983 and June 1993, the civilian work force in employment in the south-east rose by 169,000 or 2 per cent.

Training

21. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people leaving employment training got a job in the last quarter for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest quarter for which figures are available is October 1992 to December 1992. Thirty-one per cent. of all employment training leavers in that quarter went into a job—slightly more than in the same period in 1991. In April 1993, employment training was replaced by training for work.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people were participating in *(a)* training for work—employment training/employment action, *(b)* community action, *(c)* learning for work, *(d)* workstart pilots, *(e)* North Norfolk Action, *(f)* the business start-up allowance, and *(g)* youth training for each region and for Great Britain as a whole in each month since March; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what number and percentage of those leaving employment training—training for work—were immediately on leaving, three months after leaving, and then six months after leaving, either *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, (i) unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else, in each region and for Great Britain as a whole.

Miss Widdecombe: As the information is contained in a large number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a table showing for each standard region, with Greater London shown as a separate region, the total expenditure in 1992-93, and the budgeted expenditure in 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96, in respect of *(a)* programme development fund, *(b)* education business partnerships, *(c)* teacher placement service, *(d)* compacts/inner-city compacts, *(e)* business start-up scheme, *(f)* local initiative fund and *(g)* TEC challenge.

Miss Widdecombe: Total expenditure for 1992-93 and budgeted expenditure for 1993-94 are shown in the following tables, table 1 for programmes delivered through training and enterprise councils—TECs.

Training, enterprise and education directorate—TEED—regional offices are currently finalising contracts with TECs for TEC challenge and the information requested is not yet available.

Programme development funds are administered through the Employment Service whose regional boundaries are different from those of TEED. The information for these funds is shown in table 2.

Budgets for 1994-95 and 1995-96 will be the responsibility of the Department of the Environment following the announcement on 4 November of integrated regional offices.

Table 1
Total expenditure for 1992-93 and programme plans for 1993-94

	Education business partnerships		*Teacher placement service*		*Compacts/Inner city compacts*	
	Total expenditure 1992-93	*Programme plans 1993-94*	*Total expenditure 1992-93*	*Programme plans 1993-94*	*Total expenditure 1992-93*	*Programme plans 1993-94*
South East	271,471	175,000	388,568	364,178	114,459	315,000
London	274,652	290,668	237,950	292,014	918,915	825,000
Eastern	154,953	115,000	184,065	247,697	110,210	230,000
South West	172,991	129,730	208,369	217,719	246,551	317,250
West Midlands	220,830	232,000	264,759	267,186	643,424	501,500
East Midlands	140,930	115,000	215,871	195,995	256,363	392,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	189,346	165,000	221,173	244,957	729,518	592,844
Greater Manchester	144,330	147,000	157,967	162,000	782,052	466,800
North West	132,460	143,000	190,624	225,000	697,298	818,000
Northern	105,251	120,001	127,161	133,427	661,576	689,000
England Total	1,807,214	1,632,399	2,196,507	2,350,173	5,160,366	5,147,394

	Local initiative fund		*Business start up scheme*	
	total expenditure 1992-93	*programme plans 1993-94*	*total expenditure 1992-93*	*programme plans 1993-94*
South East	7,410,321	4,616,703	6,965,460	8,579,810
London	7,433,386	5,461,092	7,430,643	11,769,267
Eastern	2,337,807	2,844,697	2,542,104	5,719,354
South West	6,369,115	4,598,444	6,949,773	9,342,602
West Midlands	4,531,111	3,696,004	7,485,364	9,683,651
East Midlands	4,369,307	3,145,000	6,136,123	7,418,052
Yorkshire and Humberside	5,123,362	8,558,600	8,743,013	11,199,176
Greater Manchester	3,479,910	2,844,697	6,023,815	5,719,354
North West	2,320,109	2,740,000	6,158,712	8,113,254
Northern	6,325,669	3,567,248	3,789,207	5,290,509
England total	49,700,097	42,072,485	62,224,214	82,835,029

Total expenditure for 1992-93 and programme plans for 1993-94

	Programme development fund	
	Total expenditure 1992-93	*Programme plans 1993-94*
London and South East	591,164	744,987
South West	362,774	325,000
West Midlands	454,464	375,000
East Midlands	322,718	979,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	512,022	500,000
North West	491,330	460,000
Northern	712,836	555,000
England Total	3,447,308	3,938,987

Employment Creation

22. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the differences between British employment creation measures and those of our EC partners.

Mr. David Hunt: Other EC Governments are increasingly coming to share the United Kingdom's Government view that only competitive industries and flexible labour markets generate new jobs.

Full Employment

23. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his definition of full employment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I do not believe it is possible or sensible to define a particular unemployment rate as "full employment". The aim of the Government's policy is to achieve high levels of employment, consistent with low inflation.

Adult Unemployment

25. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage and number of adult male and female registered unemployed in the area including the Ilford, South constituency in October 1978 and October 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: On the basis of the available information, unadjusted male and female claimant unemployment for over 18-year-olds in Ilford, South stood at 2,432 and 1,099 respectively in October 1983, and 3,926 and 1,228 respectively in October 1993.

Rural Areas

27. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives his Department is taking to create job opportunities in rural areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The promotion of enterprise, economic diversity and employment in rural areas is primarily the role of the Rural Development Commission and Scottish Enterprise. But acting through the Employment Service and training and enterprise councils, the Department has a range of facilities and programmes available to people in rural areas, to help equip them for work and enable them to take advantage of employment opportunities as they arise.

Workstart Schemes

28. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been made in the workstart pilot schemes being run by his Department.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The programme is being piloted in four areas. Just over 100 long-term unemployed people are now involved in workstart.

Benefit Payments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many offices responsible for the payment of unemployment benefit have changed the day of the week on which payments are made *(a)* in the past 12 months and *(b)* in the past five years;

(2) what is the total amount of money which has so far been withheld from claimants of unemployment benefit as a result of changes to the day on which benefit payments are made;

(3) what is his latest estimate of the total amount of money withheld from claimants of unemployment benefit as a result of changes to the day on which benefit payments are made in each year since 1989-90 and in the current financial year to date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. David Blunkett, dated 30 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions to him about the number of offices that have changed the day of the week on which payments are made in the last 12 months and the last five years; and, as a result of this, how much money has been withheld from claimants of unemployment benefit together with an estimate of the total amount of money withheld in each year since 1989-90 and in the current financial year to date. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I am sorry that information is not available in the form you requested.

The allocation of signing days is arranged individually by each ES local office. I am unable to say how many offices have changed clients' signing days in the last 12 months and in the last five years because this information is not collated or published.

I can state however that no unemployment benefit (UB) has been withheld from clients due to a change in the day on which UB payments are made.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Work Permits (St. Helena)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what he proposes to do to reduce the impact of phasing out the special work permit arrangements for St. Helenians coming to work in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The dependent territories quota scheme will be phased out by 1995. Discussions are continuing between Employment Department officials and other Government Departments about how St. Helenians might be helped to benefit from the training and work expereience provisions of the work permit scheme.

Applications for work permits for St. Helenians outside the quota arrangements will continue to be considered against the normal work permit scheme criteria.

Job Clubs

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have joined job clubs; how many have left; how many leavers got jobs; how many entered another positive outcome, in the year to April 1993, and since April 1993 for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; what is the average duration of time that people spend participating in job clubs and how many people are currently in job clubs; what information he has on the wage rates and conditions that apply to the jobs obtained by job club leavers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 30 November 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about Jobclub performance and the wage rates and conditions for Jobclub leavers. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The attached table shows for each region and nationally the number of Jobclub entrants, leavers, job entries and other positive outcomes for the whole of 1992/93 and from 1 April 1993 to 31 October 1993. Those who are shown as going into other positive outcomes will have moved on to either training, full-time education or self-employment.

The average length of time people spend in Jobclub is not routinely recorded. A sample study in March 1993 showed that 60 per cent. leave within 12 weeks, 81 per cent. leave within 21 weeks and 8 per cent. leave after a stay of more than 26 weeks.

Records of the number of people in Jobclub at any one time are not kept. However, the attached table shows that 142,370 people joined the programme in the first seven months of the 1993/94 operational year, an average of 4,592 a week.

The wage rates that apply to jobs found by Jobclub members were last examined in January 1991, based on a postal survey of individuals who joined in Autumn 1989. At that time, 26 per cent. of respondents went into jobs with a wage of up to £80 per week and a further 60 per cent. went into jobs which paid £81 to £160 per week and 15 per cent. received over £160 per week.

The Employment Service is planning a wide ranging evaluation of its programmes and services which lead to jobs. This should begin in spring 1994 and will examine, amongst other things, the wage rates of leavers going into employment.

No information has been collected about the conditions of employment for those leaving Jobclub.

Jobclubs continue to be both popular with the people who join and an effective way of helping them back to work. We are now able to help more members than at any time before and 47 per cent. of leavers are successful in finding jobs.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Jobclub Performance Information

	Entrants		Leavers		Job entries		Other positive outcomes	
	April 1992 to March 1993	April 1993 to October 1993	April 1992 to March 1993	April 1993 to October 1993	April 1992 to March 1993	April 1993 to October 1993	April 1992 to March 1993	April 1993 to October 1993
Northern	14,135	8,342	14,003	8,594	5,625	3,614	1,523	860
Yorkshire and Humberside	19,071	12,337	18,477	11,886	8,722	5,573	2,771	1,606
East Midlands and Eastern	19,895	12,466	19,426	12,191	9,310	5,987	3,050	1,551
London and South East	65,316	45,922	63,769	41,936	26,048	18,349	9,585	5,446
South West	16,036	10,383	15,301	9,945	7,327	4,996	2,259	1,422
Office for Wales	12,666	8,274	12,084	7,914	6,355	4,530	1,693	1,121
West Midlands	21,080	12,456	21,198	12,304	9,379	5,937	3,507	1,981
North West	31,920	19,258	31,530	19,767	13,948	8,919	3,843	2,190
Office for Scotland	20,878	12,932	20,891	12,795	10,211	6,377	2,722	1,718
National	220,997	142,370	216,679	137,334	96,925	64,282	30,953	17,898

Investors in People Award

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers in each training and enterprise council area in England have been given the investors in people award; how many have made a commitment to meeting the standard; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The number of investors in people awards and commitments at 26 November by English training and enterprise council area is shown in the table.

	Awards	Commitments
Avon	10	128
AZTEC	6	40
Barnsley and Doncaster	6	37
Bedfordshire	8	85
Birmingham	8	18
Bolton-Bury	4	39
Bradford	2	74
CAMBSTEC	2	27
CEWTEC	9	28
CILNTEC	1	27
Calderdale and Kirklees	1	44
Central England	8	23
CENTEC	4	30
County Durham	8	32
Coventry and Warwickshire	5	39
Cumbria	2	53
Devon and Cornwall	24	73
Dorset	14	79
Dudley	1	24
ELTEC	7	106
Essex	5	23
Gloucestershire	26	345
Greater Nottingham	3	66
Greater Peterborough	1	13
HAWTEC	6	49
Hampshire	14	184
Heart of England	9	41
Hertfordshire	3	28
Humberside	7	98
Isle of Wight	0	8
Kent	2	41
LAWTEC	3	56
Leeds	7	78
Leicestershire	0	44
Lincolnshire	1	68
London East	3	30
METROTEC	5	28
Manchester	4	79
Merseyside	7	118
Milton Keynes	1	11
NORMIDTEC	7	50
Norfolk and Waveney	8	19
North Derbyshire	7	36
North London	1	62
North Nottinghamshire	6	36
North West London	2	30
North Yorkshire	7	73
Northamptonshire	5	43
Northumberland	4	12
Oldham	0	18
QUALITEC	0	12
Rochdale	1	10
Rotherham	5	31
SOLOTEC	1	27
Sandwell	1	22
Sheffield	3	51
Shropshire	4	31
Somerset	4	53
South and East Cheshire	7	48
South Thames	3	53
Southern Derbyshire	12	104
Staffordshire	4	17
Stockport and High Peak	0	59
Suffolk	4	48
Surrey	6	37
Sussex	8	84
Teesside	7	42
Thames Valley Enterprise	20	99
Tyneside	12	85
Wakefield	2	22
Walsall	2	27
Wearside	2	14
West London	1	44
Wiltshire	8	53
Wolverhampton	3	27

At 26 November 1993, over 470 organisations in the United Kingdom had achieved the investors standard while over 4,330 had formally committed to achieving the standard.

This is encouraging progress and demonstrates that employers are serious about their most valuable resource —their people. Over 10 per cent. of employees in employment are now covered by organisations recognised as or committed to investors in people.

Training (Accidents)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* major and *(c)* minor accidents have occurred on youth training and on training for work for each available quarter since April in each region and in Great Britain as a whole; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The table gives the accident figures for the quarter April to June 1993, which are the latest available, for youth training and training for work.

Region	Youth training			Training for work		
	Fatal	Major	Minor	Fatal	Major	Minor
South East	0	8	21	0	4	1
London	0	4	13	0	0	7
Eastern	0	7	32	0	2	6
South West	0	5	15	0	1	4
West Midlands	0	13	39	0	3	7
East Midlands	0	3	26	0	1	10
Yorkshire and Humberside	1	7	57	0	0	35
North West	0	9	46	0	1	16
Northern	0	5	43	0	4	25
Scottish Enterprise	0	12	45	1	3	9
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	0	0	2	0	0	0
Wales	0	4	25	1	3	22
National totals	1	77	364	2	22	142

Notes:

1. Employment Department figures for trainees have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for employed persons. However, the Employment Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments, and road traffic accidents, which would not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.
2. Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurences Regulations 1985.

Agriculture Gangmasters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether agricultural labour gangmasters are required to register as employment agencies; and how many gangmasters are registered in Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Whether individual agricultural gangmasters are required to be licensed under the Employment Agencies Act 1973 depends upon their method of operation. If the hirer of workers exercises the control and supervision of workers hired out by a gangmaster, the gangmaster should be licensed. If the gangmaster retains control and supervision of the workers, his or her activities are those of a subcontractor and are outside the scope of the Act. There are currently two licensed gangmasters in Lincolnshire, five in Cambridgeshire and 17 in Norfolk.

Learning for Work

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many learning for work places and what budget has been allocated to each training and enterprise council in England; how many people are currently on learning for work in each area; what monitoring information is collected about learning for work participants and the subsequent destinations they will be entering; how he plans to evaluate the programme; and if he will make a statement about its extension beyond 1994.

Miss Widdecombe: The number of learning for work places agreed with training and enterprise councils in England for 1993-94 and approximate numbers of participants reported by them as at 27 September are given in the table. Places will be allocated for 1994-95 in December. The budget the Department of Employment allocates to TECs to meet fees and expenses is commercial in confidence. However, £54 million is available in England for fees, allowances and other costs during the year ending August 1994.

Monitoring and evaluation arrangements will provide information about starts, participants and qualifications. We are also monitoring take-up by gender and disability. The destinations of individuals leaving courses is being followed up. Information will also be analysed on costs and benefits.

Learning for work is scheduled to continue until August 1994 when TECs will be free to use their experience of the arrangements to offer similar provision within training for work.

Learning for work position at 27 September 1993

National TEC name and TEED region (RO)	Region—TEC position Places contracted and agreed (region-TEC) for 1993-94	Starts
Suffolk	193	57
CAMBS	171	45
Greater Peterborough	167	60
Norfolk and Waveney	623	40
Essex	818	200
BEDS	315	51
HERTS	450	180
Total EASTERN RO	2,737	633
Southern Derbyshire	317	106
Leicester	457	100
Greater Nottingham	490	40
Northamptonshire	294	51
North Derbyshire	179	0
Lincolnshire	216	20
North Nottinghamshire	225	14
Total EAST MIDS RO	2,178	331
Manchester	916	195
Stockport and High Peak	155	13
Oldham	139	27

National TEC name and TEED region (RO)	Region—TEC position Places contracted and agreed (region-TEC) for 1993-94	Starts
Rochdale	129	34
South and East Cheshire	119	13
Bolton and Bury	231	41
Metrotec	0	10
Total NW (GM) RO	1,689	333
Aztec	375	220
Centec	730	146
Cilntec	508	49
Letec	752	n/a
Nltec	395	250
Nwltec	360	50
Solotec	528	130
Sttec	1,109	550
Wltec	602	177
Total LONDON RO	5,359	1,572
Durham	320	43
Northumberland	149	30
Teesside	479	1
Tyneside	660	82
Wearside	242	n/a
Total NORTHERN RO	1,850	156
Cewtec	360	20
Cumbria	210	34
Eltec	359	60
Lawtec	410	71
Merseyside	1,030	121
Normid	227	47
Total NORTH WEST RO	2,596	353
Hampshire	680	122
Heart of England	367	74
Wight	25	0
Kent	1,350	386
Milton Keynes	120	50
Surrey	345	24
Sussex	330	n/a
Thames Valley	448	60
Total SOUTH EAST RO	3,665	716
Avon	660	90
Devon and Cornwall	875	85
Gloucestershire	258	39
Dorset	360	42
Somerset	224	48
Wiltshire	252	86
Total SOUTH WEST RO	2,629	390
Birmingham	420	0
Central England	343	53
Coventry and Warwickshire	532	193
Dudley	400	10
Hereford and Worcester	162	62
Sandwell	312	75
Shropshire	166	5
Staffordshire	466	0
Walsall	222	27
Wolverhampton	268	0
Total WEST MIDS RO	3,291	425
Humberside	580	17
North Yorkshire	160	69
Wakefield	142	12
Leeds	443	92
Bradford	325	11
Calderdale and Kirklees	306	31
Sheffield	372	33
Rotherham	190	22
Barnsley and Doncaster	300	27
Total Y and H RO	2,818	314
National Total	28,812	5,223

Labour Statistics

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the change in unemployment so far in 1993; what are the comparable figures for the rest of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Internationally comparable unemployment figures based on the International Labour Organisation definition of unemployment are published by EUROSTAT in its monthly "Unemployment Bulletin", copies of which are available in the Library. These show that the United Kingdom is one of only two European Community countries where the rate of unemployment is now below what it was at the beginning of the year.

Coal Miners (Retraining)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he proposes to take to meet the costs of retraining for former coal miners; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has made available £75 million to training and enterprise councils and the Employment Service to provide additional training and retraining provision for unemployed people in pit closure areas, including former miners.

British Coal Enterprise also has substantial resources to retrain and provide other opportunities to help ex-mineworkers.

The £75 million forms part of the larger £200 million Government package to help the regeneration of pit closure areas.

Careers Services

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy that inspectors' reports following careers service inspections be made public.

Miss Widdecombe: This is already current policy throughout Great Britain.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. David Davis: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Departmental Expenditure

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what expenditure will be incurred by the Office of Public Service and Science in the period 1994-95 to 1996-97.

Mr. Waldegrave: Spending on the areas covered by the Office of Public Service and Science—OPSS—HMSO and Central Office of Information will be £1,318 million in 1994-95, £1,354 million in 1995-96 and £1,359 million in 1996-97.

Planned expenditure on public service tasks—OPSS, COI, HMSO—is £76 million in 1994-95, £70·9 million in 1995-96 and £70·2 million in 1996-97.

Provision for science is £1,242 million in 1994-95, £1,283·1 million in 1995-96 and £1,288·8 million in 1996-97. These figures include £154 million, £157 million and £157 million respectively to cover the additional responsibilities of the research councils for projects which they support in higher education institutions, which under previous arrangements would have been the responsibility of the higher education funding councils. After adjusting for this transfer, the science provision will be 4·2 per cent., 7·9 per cent. and 8·4 per cent. higher in cash terms than the estimated outturn in 1993-94.

I shall be announcing the allocation of the 1994-95 science budget in due course.

Market Testing

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the worth of civil service work market-tested by September; what proportion has been competed for by in-house teams; and what proportion was awarded to the private sector without in-house competition.

Mr. Waldegrave: Provisional estimates show that by 30 September 1993 around £700 million of civil service work has subjected to a process of examination and review to improve value for money under the competing for quality initiative. Of this, about £624 million was market tested or strategically contracted out. Excluding the contractorisation of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment—value £275 million—about 66 per cent., or £232 million was competed for by in-house teams. The remaining 34 per cent., or £117 million, together with the AWRE contractorisation, was awarded to the private sector without in-house competition.

DEFENCE

Senior Officers

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* field marshals, *(b)* admirals of the fleet, *(c)* air chief marshals are currently on (i) the active list and (ii) the retired list; at what cost in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: All admirals of the fleet, field marshals, and marshals of the Royal Air Force—five-star officers—remain on the active list. Normally, only the Chief of the Defence Staff, currently a marshal of the Royal Air Force, is actually a serving officer. Unusually, we have two serving officers at this level at present. The other is chairman of the NATO military committee, an international appointment. They are on a salary of £112,084·20.

The remainder are in effective retirement. Those promoted in the early 1980s to date are in receipt of a pension of 48·5 per cent. of active service pay—£54,361. Those promoted before then receive pension or half pay—£56,042.

Current numbers of five-star officers are:

	Full pay	*Half pay*	*48·5 per cent.*	*Total*
Royal Navy	—	5	3	8
Army	1	—	7	8
RAF	1	—	5	6
Total	2	5	15	22

These figures do not include His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, who holds five-star rank in all the armed forces, and His Royal Highness the Duke of Kent, who holds the rank of field marshal.

Horizon 2000

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his intention that foreign-built hulls will be permitted in tenders for the future anti-aircraft frigate—Horizon 2000 project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The intention for the future air defence frigate is that each nation will build its own ships in its own country.

Landing Platform Helicopter

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds the bidding of foreign hulls was excluded from the tendering arrangements for the landing platform helicopters.

Mr. Aitken: In the absence of progress towards the opening of the market for warship building within the EC on a fair and equitable basis, we decided the most appropriate course was to restrict invitations to tender to United Kingdom shipyards.

Minehunters

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what grounds foreign-built hulls were permitted as part of the last invitation for Sandown class single role minehunters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The last competition for Sandown class single role minehunters in 1990 permitted prime contractors to include foreign-built hulls in their bids to ensure as wide a competition as possible in order to maximise value for money for the defence budget and the taxpayer.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his intention to permit foreign-built hulls in the forthcoming tender for a further batch of Sandown class minehunters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: We expect to make an announcement on future orders for the Sandown class shortly.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's minehunting capability.

Mr. Hanley: The Government are committed to retaining a capable and effective mine countermeasure fleet. We therefore intend to continue over the next decade with our modernisation programme, which will entail the procurement of further Sandown class single-role minehunters and a mid-life update for the Hunt class. The 1993 Statement on the Defence Estimates makes clear our intention to build up to a fleet of 25 of these highly capable vessels. We expect to make an announcement on future orders for the Sandown class shortly.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to issue an invitation to tender for a further batch of minehunters.

Mr. Aitken: We expect to make an announcement on future orders for the Sandown class shortly.

Glass-reinforced Plastic

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what in current prices has been his Department's total investment in glass-reinforced plastic in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has invested a total of £6 million in capital facilities for the production of GRP mine countermeasure vessels. This has been offset by receipts due under various agreements which total £4·7 million to date. Both figures are at current prices.

Submarine Movements

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which VHF station will broadcast details of the movements of submarines to the fishing fleet in Irish seas area VIIA; and if he will make a statement about arrangements for this service in this submariner exercise area.

Mr. Hanley: I have been asked to reply.

Irish sea area VIIA north of 54 deg. north forms part of the Clyde exercise areas and is covered by the Subfacts scheme, under which advance notification of dived submarine movements is broadcast in certain coastal areas. Changes in the existing broadcasting arrangements for Subfacts are being planned and consultations about these changes have taken place with representatives of the fishing industry, including the Northern Ireland Fishermen's Federation. I hope to make an announcement soon.

Trident

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if it is his Department's policy to restrict the explosive firepower of Trident to that deployed on the Polaris force prior to Polaris having been updated with Chevaline;

(2) if it is his Department's policy to restrict the explosive firepower of Trident to that of the Polaris/Chevaline force currently deployed.

Mr. Hanley: The Government's policy is to deploy the minimum nuclear capability necessary to provide an effective deterrent in the circumstances of the time. On current plans, the total explosive power to be carried on each Trident submarine when they enter service will not be much changed from the total explosive power currently deployed, following the Chevaline development, in each Polaris submarine.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department has reached its calculation that when Trident is fully in service the explosive power of the United Kingdom's operational nuclear inventory will be more than 25 per cent. down on the 1990 figure.

Mr. Hanley: The calculation compared the explosive power of the United Kingdom's operational stockpile of Chevaline and WE177 warheads in 1990 with the explosive power of the planned future operational stockpile of Trident and WE177 warheads when Trident is fully in service.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department will demonstrate that it has not deployed more than 96 warheads on each of the Trident submarines when they enter service.

Mr. Hanley: In keeping with the practice of successive Governments, we do not make public the number of warheads actually deployed on our submarines. The question of verification does not arise.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what negotiations or studies his Department is carrying out into possible future use of cruise missiles on board Trident submarines.

Mr. Hanley: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change took place in the explosive firepower of the deployed Polaris force in connection with the deployment of Chevaline.

Mr. Hanley: The introduction into service of Chevaline brought with it a reduction in the total explosive power deployed on each Polaris submarine.

Anti-ballistic Missiles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what account is taken of the ability to overcome existing anti-ballistic missile defences in determining the size of the United Kingdom's minimum deterrent.

Mr. Hanley: All relevant factors are taken into account in assessing the minimum level of capability necessary to provide effective deterrence.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the accuracy of a nuclear weapon is a significant factor in determining its destructive effectiveness.

Mr. Hanley: Accuracy of delivery is a significant factor in determining the likely effectiveness of a nuclear warhead against its intended target and therefore has a bearing on our assessment of the minimum capability necessary to provide effective deterrence.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish an open government document on Her Majesty's Government's policy on nuclear weapons and non-proliferation following the speech he made to the Centre for Defence Studies on 16 November.

Mr. Hanley: No. A copy of my right hon. and learned Friend's speech has been placed in the Library of the House.

Military Vehicles

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the financial and administrative consequences of the non-established status of the 39 all-terrain mobile platforms held and maintained by 5 Airborne Brigade; what dedicated Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and associated support is available; when consideration of the future requirement for such vehicles for 24 Airmobile Brigade is due to be completed; what vehicles capable of deployment by support helicopter are currently held by 24 Airmobile Brigade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There are no financial or administrative consequences resulting from the non-established status of the 39 all-terrain mobile platforms held and maintained by 5 Airborne Brigade.

The brigade has a dedicated Combat Service Support Battalion comprising a general support squadron—which includes REME personnel—a close support squadron and a REME workshop. There are also REME personnel with the infantry battalions.

We expect consideration of 24 Airmobile Brigade's all-terrain mobile platform requirement to be completed in the course of next year.

24 Airmobile Brigade currently holds the following vehicles capable of deployment by support helicopter:

Trucks Utility Light/Medium
Trucks Utility Heavy
JCB Rough Terrain Fork-Lift Trucks
Motorcycles
Four-Tonne Trucks
Trailers

Piers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of piers previously owned by his Department which have been sold in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years; and if he will list the the purchaser and the selling price in each case.

Mr. Hanley: Details of the piers previously owned by the Ministry of Defence which have been sold in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years and the purchaser in each case are set out in the table. The sale prices are commercial in confidence.

Location	*Purchaser*	*Date sold*
Chatham Dockyard	Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust	20 January 1988
Milford Haven	Preseli Pembrokeshire District Council	23 December 1991
Arrochar	Clydebank Developments	21 January 1993
Invergordon	The Bannerman Company	31 May 1993
Inveraray	I. Turner	2 June 1993
Holy Loch (Ardnadam)	G. R. Thompson	11 June 1993

In addition, offers for the purchase of two further piers at Holy Loch—Sandbank—and Gourock are at an advanced stage of consideration.

Royal Navy Ships

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ships are currently in full-time service in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Hanley: On 30 November, there were 130 commissioned surface vessels and submarines in service with the Royal Navy. There are also 21 vessels in service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, whose supporting role is essential to the provision of the Royal Navy's overall capability.

Manpower Service Personnel

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many air marshals are currently on full-time service in the Royal Air Force;

(2) how many other ranks are currently on full-time service with the Royal Air Force;

(3) how many generals are currently on full-time service in the Army;

(4) how many other ranks are currently on full-time service with the Army;

(5) how many admirals are currently on full-time service in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Hanley: I refer the hon. Member to the 1 October 1993 issue of the tri-service personnel statistics publication No. 9—TSP9—"Rank Structure of UK Regular Forces", which is available from the House of Commons Library.

Nuclear Shelters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of *(a)* nuclear shelters, *(b)* nuclear bunkers, *(c)* command shelters and *(d)* command bunkers previously owned by his Ministry which have been sold in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years; and if he will list the purchaser and the selling price in each case.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested less the sale prices, which are commercial in confidence, is set out in the table:

Location	Purchaser	Date sold
Bowsey Hill, Warren Row, Berkshire (Temporary Regional Seat of Government—Bunker No. 6)	The Document Storage Co. Ltd.	31 August 1988
Sopley, Hampshire (Command Bunker)	The Document Storage Co. Ltd.	12 August 1993

RAF Greenham Common

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Russian Government still have inspection rights under the disarmament treaty at RAF station Greenham Common; what was the date of their last visit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Russian Government will retain inspection rights at Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth under the intermediate range nuclear forces —INF—treaty until the year 2001. The last visit to RAF Greenham Common by a Russian inspection team took place on 16 April 1992.

Western European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy, when strengthening the operational role of the Western European Union to ensure that there is no weakening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or the transatlantic link; what effect he expects his proposals to have on the course of the NATO summit on the future of NATO; and what plans he has to publicise progress on his proposals for the Western European Union.

Mr. Hanley: It has always been United Kingdom policy that development of the operational role of the Western European Union should strengthen NATO, including the transatlantic link. Discussions are continuing with allies on the preparations for the NATO summit, which will provide an important opportunity for the alliance to continue and enhance its adaptation to the new security environment. Progress in developing the Western European Union is made public in a variety of ways, including communiqués issued following meetings of the WEU Council of Ministers. The most recent of these took place in Luxembourg on 22 November.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional resources will be made available this winter to British service men serving in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hanley: Additional resources for British forces in Bosnia include specialist arctic winter clothing for all troops, heaters for Warrior armoured vehicles and cold weather food supplements.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all nuclear-powered submarines that have visited *(a)* Liverpool, *(b)* Southampton, *(c)* Cardiff, *(d)* Portsmouth, *(e)* Torbay and *(f)* Portland during the last 12 months; and if he will list the dates concerned.

Mr. Hanley: The following nuclear submarine visits have been made over the last 12 months at the locations in question:

Location	Names	Dates
Liverpool	HMS Spartan	28 April to 4 May
Southampton	—	—
Cardiff	—	—
Portsmouth	USS Flying Fish	10 to 15 March
	FS Amethyste	10 to 14 May
	USS San Juan	20 to 26 May
	HMS Spartan	13 to 18 October
	USS Pargo	22 to 27 October
Torbay	—	—
Portland	—	—

Search and Rescue

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what RAF operations the search and rescue service would be supporting from RAF Brawdy in the event of the search and rescue Sea Kings being based there from April 1994.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Army Sales Team

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the function of the Army sales team; when it was established; and what was its budget in each year since then.

Mr. Aitken: The Army sales teams organise and conduct demonstrations, training and trials of British defence equipment in the United Kingdom and overseas; and assist companies with sales promotion material and provide specialist advice. An Army sales team was first formed in the late 1960s. Budgetary details going back to that time could not be provided without disproportionate cost and effort. Their budget was £1·3 million in 1991-92, £1·4 million in 1992-93, and is forecast at £1·6 million in 1993-94.

US Submarine (Incident)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring of foreign submarines he will introduce following the Department of Transport's marine accident investigation branch report of the snagging of the fishing vessel Lupina C by a United States navy nuclear submarine to ensure that submarines adhere to the submarine code of conduct when steaming through United Kingdom territorial waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The code of practice governing the conduct of submarines when operating in the vicinity of fishing vessels applies to all foreign submarines operating dived within United Kingdom territorial waters. Since the incident involving the USS Sturgeon, efforts have been made to improve foreign submarines' awareness of the code's requirements, and it is clear that they take these very seriously and observe the rules to the letter.

Lesbians and Gay Men

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries he has made as to the effect of lifting the ban on lesbians and gay men serving in the armed forces of those countries in which the ban has been lifted; and if he will name the countries concerned.

Mr. Hanley: We are aware that some countries allow homosexuals to serve in their armed forces and that the Australian and Canadian armed forces have recently lifted their ban on homosexuals.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the position of lesbians and gay men in the armed services; when he will bring forward legislation to decriminalise homosexuality in the armed forces; and if in the interim he will refrain from pursuing criminal proceedings in respect of homosexuality.

Mr. Hanley: Homosexuals are precluded from service in the armed forces. The Ministry of Defence has accepted that homosexual activity of a kind that is legal in civil life should no longer constitute an offence under service law. The amendment to the law will be made as soon as the legislative programme allows. In the meantime, it is not intended to prosecute service personnel who engage in homosexual activity that is legal in civilian law unless there are other grounds for prosecution under service law. Personnel who engage in homosexual activity that is lawful under civilian law will, however, continue to be administratively discharged from the services.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 1 December 1993

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

GATT

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the current proposals on the Multilateral Trade Organisation being negotiated at the GATT talks.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the Government's position on the current proposals for the Multilateral Trade Organisation being discussed at the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government support the establishment of the proposed Multilateral Trade Organisation (MTO). This is intended to provide a vehicle for the effective implementation of the results of the Uruguay round, and an institutional framework for the conduct of future trade negotiations. The Government have consistently endorsed the idea that the round should be a single package, with participants required to accept the results of the negotiations in their entirety. The proposed MTO agreement will be the means to implement the total package.

Belize

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guarantee has been provided to the Government of Belize that Britain will safeguard Belize's territorial integrity in the event of external aggression.

Mr. Goodlad: We have made it clear to the Belize Government that we are fully prepared to play our part in any consultations leading to an appropriate response should the security of Belize be threatened in the future.

Arms Embargo

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which are subject to a United Kingdom arms embargo *(a)* as part of or *(b)* independently of (i) United Nations or (ii) EC policy.

Mr. Goodlad: We observe arms embargoes imposed by the United Nations on the following countries: Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Liberia, Haiti, South Africa and the former Republic of Yugoslavia. We also observe arms embargoes imposed by the European Union on China, Syria, Burma and Zaire and by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe on Armenia and Azerbaijan. In addition, as a matter of declared national policy we refuse to supply arms to Argentina, Iran and Israel.

We consider applications for the export of arms to other countries on a case-by-case basis. We refuse applications for exports which in our view would not be consistent with our established criteria, including the common criteria for arms transfers agreed with EU partners at Luxembourg in 1991 and at Lisbon in 1992 and the guidelines agreed by the permanent five in London in 1991.

Security (Visits)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list by year and by date for the last 10 years and for the current year to date the occasions when a Minister from his Department has visited *(a)* the headquarters of MI6 and *(b)* GCHQ, Cheltenham; and what were the subjects discussed on each occasion;

(2) when he next expects to make a visit to *(a)* the headquarters of MI6 and *(b)* GCHQ, Cheltenham.

Mr. Hurd: Contacts with the agencies are close and frequent and Ministers visit periodically. I do not propose to provide full details of dates or subjects discussed or to give advance notice of such visits. I last visited the headquarters of GCHQ on 25 January 1991 and of SIS on 1 July 1993. The most recent FCO ministerial visit to GCHQ was by my right hon. and noble Friend the Baroness Chalker of Wallasey on 28 September 1993 and to SIS by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 21 October 1993.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Goodlad: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Israel

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the arms embargo against Israel was defined; what items it included; and if he will set out the precise terms and date of each change in his policy on applying the embargo since 1982.

Mr. Goodlad: We announced in June 1982, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, that we would withhold approval of licences for the export to Israel of all British military equipment until further notice. In 1983 it was decided to allow the export of electronic and other small non-lethal components, provided that they did not form part of equipment due to be put into immediate service with the Israeli forces in Lebanon.

Entry Clearance Applications

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the list of posts abroad designated to accept entry clearance applications.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are three significant changes to the list. Since 17 November the consulate-general in St. Petersburg has provided an entry clearance service, for

the present to residents of its consular district only. In early December, the embassy in Tallinn will accept applications from residents in Estonia. In Cameroon we have centralised our visa operation in Yaounde; Douala no longer accepts applications.

I am placing copies of the revised list in the Library of the House.

Coastal Pollution

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the United Kingdom is to contribute to the cost of sewage treatment and other anti-beach pollution measures in other European Union-member states; what contribution it is to receive from the EU towards the cost of similar measures in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The cohesion fund assists the poorest member states to improve their transport and environment infrastructure including sewerage systems. We contribute only 5 per cent. of the cohesion fund, substantially less than France, Germany or Spain. We benefit from the EC structural funds and expect to receive about £10 billion from 1994-99. Investments in sewerage improvements can be supported by these funds.

Civil and Political Rights

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list policy and legislative changes which have been introduced by successive British Governments to comply with the international covenant on civil and political rights since it came into force on 23 March 1976; whether the Government intend to allow citizens of the United Kingdom to petition the United Nations Human Rights Committee by ratifying the optional protocol to the international covenant on civil and political rights; and what are the reasons for his decision.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

Comprehensive accounts of the action taken by successive Governments to comply with the international covenant on civil and political rights (ICCPR) are provided in the periodic reports which are submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee every five years, copies of which are in the Library.

The United Kingdom has accepted the right of individual petition under the European convention on human rights since 1966. The Government do not believe that becoming a party to the optional protocol to the ICCPR would enhance the protection of human rights in the United Kingdom.

Nigeria

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes Her Majesty's Government have made in its policy regarding arms and military sales to Nigeria following the recent military coup.

Mr. Goodlad: All aspects of our policy towards Nigeria are currently under review. We shall announce the outcome shortly.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Chad.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our relations with Chad are cordial, but not substantial. United Kingdom exports to Chad in 1992 were £1·36 million. There is no bilateral aid programme, but we contribute to European Community aid programmes, which amount to over 10 million ECU this year. Diplomatic relations are covered by Her Majesty's Ambassador in Yaoundé, Cameroon, on a non-resident basis.

South Africa

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Britain's role in the monitoring of elections in South Africa in 1994; and in what ways the Government are contributing to a fair and democratic transition in that country.

Mr. Goodlad: We intend to play a full part in helping to ensure that the South African elections are free and fair. We are discussing with the European Community, Commonwealth and United Nations the best ways in which to assist. The precise details of South Africa's election monitoring needs are unlikely to become clear until the Independent Election Commission has been established. This is expected shortly.

Our entire aid programme which is currently over £11·5 million a year plus a similar sum as a share of EC aid, is designed to support the transition to a democratic and non-racial society in South Africa.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Stonemasonry and Woodcarving

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to encourage the use of British stonemasons and woodcarvers in the restoration of Windsor castle.

Mr. Brooke: Management of the restoration of Windsor castle is the responsibility of the Royal household and so, therefore, is the selection of craftsmen. However, there is no reason to suppose that the craftsmen used will not be British.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will seek to provide funds to the National Trust, the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish Heritages and the Churches to recruit and train apprentices in stonemasonary and woodcarving and to employ them subsequently.

Mr. Brooke: I have no plans to provide specific funding on the lines proposed. English Heritage has recently established its own training centre for conservation skills at Fort Brockhurst, Hampshire. My Department also part-funds the conference on training in architectural conservation (COTAC), which aims to ensure that formal training and practical experience in conservation skills is available to all sectors of the construction industry, and works through a national network of training institutions to achieve this. Funding for such activities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Chief Justices' Clerks

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations the Lord Chancellor has received concerning the appointment of chief justices' clerks.

Mr. John M. Taylor: One hundred and twenty responses were received to a consultation paper on the role of chief justices' clerks, issued in February 1993. In addition, 10 magistrates and other interested persons have made written representations directly to the Lord Chancellor or his Department on the subject of chief justices' clerks, and 62 hon. Members have received representations which have been conveyed to me on behalf of the Lord Chancellor.

The Lord Chancellor attended the annual general meeting of the Magistrates' Association on 9 October where he discussed various aspects of the White Paper. He also received written representations from the association following this meeting.

Crown Courts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list, for the last 12 months and by individual Crown court, *(a)* the occasions of scheduled individual sittings of separate courts within a Crown court complex that have been unable to sit due to the absence of a judge or recorder, *(b)* the specific reason for each cancellation *(c)* the date of the maximum number of cancellations occurring on any single day and *(d)* the estimated cost to public funds on that day.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sittings of the House

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to put proposals before the House to implement the report of the Select Committees on Sittings of the House.

Mr. Newton: As I indicated in the debate on the Address on 25 November, I am continuing to seek agreement on a balanced package of measures that can be brought before the House.

TRANSPORT

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the modernisation of the west coast main line infrastructure.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget statement that the Government have decided that the modernisation of the west main line will be taken forward as a privately managed and financed investment as part of the private finance initiative. The investment made by the private sector will be additional to the investment which Railtrack will be able to fund under the public expenditure plans announced in the Budget.

Principles for using private sector management and finance have been agreed between the Department of Transport and Railtrack following a study carried out by Hambros Bank Ltd. Under these:

Railtrack will be responsible for project definition and will draw up performance standards for the line in association with the private sector. Railtrack will be inviting expressions of interest in the next few days.

Once the new performance standards have been set, a competition will be held in late 1994 to select a private sector consortium to modernise the line and to maintain it for a defined period. The responsibility for project management and design will also rest with the successful consortium.

The successful consortium will be remunerated by service payments from Railtrack during the contract period. These payments will be subject to penalties and bonuses linked to the performance of the consortium in meeting the new performance standards and the consequential impact this will have on revenue losses and gains on the line.

The new standards will stipulate minimum performance criteria. Where commercially justified, the InterCity west coast franchisee (and, possibly, other train operators) will be able to contract for linespeed and other improvements in exchange for increased access payments.

To facilitate this the InterCity west coast franchise will be let at the earliest practicable date.

The principles have been devised to transfer risks out of the public sector to those who can control them best. The risk that the infrastructure fails to perform to specification will be transferred to the private sector consortium. That consortium will also bear revenue risk insofar as it is affected by the performance of the infrastructure. The bulk of the remainder of the revenue risk will be transferred to the train operating companies and the providers of private sector funds.

This approach will bring together private and public sector expertise to modernise the line in a way which will ensure that its full potential is realised without the capital cost coming out of public funds.

M11 Link

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost to his Department in respect of the demonstration on 6 November opposing the M11 link at George Green, Wanstead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Cost will arise directly from the destruction of a fence and damage to other works and from the need to reinstate them and prevent recurrence of the damage. Indirectly costs will arise from delay to the contractor's programme. The works have yet to be reinstated. No claims have been received from the contractor, and so the amount of cost which may be borne by the Department is unknown. We intend to make further progress with the work as soon as possible.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the advantages he expects to arise from the M11 link at George Green, Wanstead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The link road will relieve existing unsuitable roads of through traffic between the M11/North Circular road at Redbridge and the A102(M) Eastway approach to Blackwall tunnel at Hackney Marsh. The amenities of George Green, Wanstead, will be improved by the removal of this traffic from adjacent local roads and maintained by the provision of a tunnel for the link road. Some disruption is, however, unavoidable while the tunnel is constructed by the cut-and-cover method. The works have begun on site and are programmed to take four years to complete.

Railway Stations (Violence)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents of violent crime and sexual assault were recorded at British Rail stations in each year since 1990; what were the figures for Network SouthEast; and how many of these incidents occurred when a station was unstaffed.

Mr. Freeman: The tables show the recorded incidents of violent crime and sexual assault at British Rail stations since 1990. Figures for incidents occurring at unstaffed stations are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

All British Rail stations

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*[1]1993*
Crimes of violence	1,630	1,584	1,586	1,212
Sexual offences (excluding indecent exposure)	556	474	437	352

[1] January to September 1993.

Network SouthEast

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*[1]1993*
Crimes of violence	n/a	713	692	502
Sexual offences (excluding indecent exposure)	n/a	269	219	205

[1] January to September 1993.
n/a—not available.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated net cost to public funds of railway privatisation.

Mr. Freeman: It is impossible to estimate the net effect of privatisation at this stage because the process will take some years to complete. Nevertheless, for any given level of public funding key factors such as investment and quality of service are expected to improve as a result of greater efficiency from increasing private sector management and competition.

Concessionary Travel Schemes

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the local authority areas by political control which operate concessionary travel schemes for pensioners.

Mr. Freeman: According to a survey of local authorities done by the Department of Transport in 1992, there were concessionary fare schemes for pensioners in 96 per cent. of districts in Great Britain, some operated by district councils and some by county councils or passenger transport executives. In London the scheme is funded by the boroughs.

It is therefore less cumbersome to list the small number of local authorities that had no schemes for pensioners. These were: Caradon, Carrick, Eden, Hambleton, Kennet, Kerrier, North Cornwall, Orkney Islands, Penwith, Rhuddlan, Salisbury, Scarborough, South Holland, Stratford-on-Avon, West Somerset, Woodspring.

Of the 16 authorities listed, most of those in England and Wales not covered by a scheme were rural areas served by little public transport. Some of those authorities do support voluntary organisations which provide community transport or social car schemes. In Scotland, Orkney Island Council does not provide a formal concessionary fare scheme, but a subsidy is provided for inter-island air and sea travel.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications were received annually for exemption from vehicle excise duty on the ground of disability, from 1988 to 1992 inclusive; and how many of these were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful.

Mr. Key: The Benefits Agency deals with applications for certificates of entitlement for exemption from vehicle excise duty (VED), because exemption is linked to certain Benefits Agency allowances, chiefly the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance. In 1988, 320,000 people received exemption from VED on the grounds of disability, in 1989 350,000, in 1990 375,000, in 1991 420,000,and in 1992 465,000. No figures for unsuccessful applications for exemption certificates are available.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total cost of exemptions from vehicle excise duty in 1992.

Mr. Key: In 1992, 465,000 people were issued with exempt vehicle excise duty (VED) discs on the grounds of disability. The value of those discs was £57 million. 425,000 other vehicles (such as emergency vehicles) were also exempt from VED in 1992. Had they been required to pay VED, the revenue raised would have been at least £47 million.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he will take to compensate disabled persons, following the abolition of exemption from vehicle excise duty for persons with mobility problems.

Mr. Key: There are no plans to introduce compensation. The Government introduced provisions to ensure that those disabled people benefiting from the exemption at the time of its repeal on 13 October 1993 (approximately 20,000) will continue to benefit from the exemption for as long as their disability remains. The repeal does not affect entitlement to exemption from vehicle excise duty granted under the war pensioners mobility supplement or the higher rate mobility component of DLA. Some 400,000 people currently benefit from exemption through this route.

M20 Widening

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what penalties have been incurred by Balfour Beatty, the contractors, for the widening of the M20 at Maidstone, for late completion of the contract; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of whether the reasons so far published for delays in completion of the M20 widening contract around Maidstone are complete; and if he will carry out an investigation into them.

Mr. Key: The contract contains provisions for payment of liquidated damages if the contractor overruns the final contract completion date, This will be determined by the engineer to the contract when all the relevant facts of this complex issue are known to him and have been fully assessed. It is too early to say what penalties will be imposed.

Goods Vehicles (Mirrors)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what improvements to large goods vehicles' mirrors he plans to reduce the risk of accident to cyclists and others caused by left turning lorries' blind spot.

Mr. Key: None. The Government have already amended national regulations to require close proximity mirrors on goods vehicles weighing over 12 tonnes and first used from 1 October 1988. These mirrors are specifically designed to provide the drivers of such lorries with improved vision to the side of their vehicles and make them more aware of cyclists and other road users.

Tachographs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the types of vehicle required to have tachographs; what information such equipment records; and what is the penalty for operating such vehicles with the equipment disconnected or non operational.

Mr. Key: EC regulations require the fitment of tachographs to most heavy goods vehicles over 3½ tonnes, to domestic passenger carrying vehicles with more than 17 seats unless on regular scheduled services and to vehicles with 10 or more seats on international journeys within the European Community.

The tachograph records the driver's activities (driving, rest and periods of other work) as well as vehicle speed and time. The resultant records allow retrospective checking by enforcement authorities. The maximum penalties for producing a false tachograph chart by tampering with the device are, on summary indictment, a fine of £5,000 and, on conviction on indictment, two years imprisonment. Convictions may be taken into account by Licensing Authorities in deciding whether to grant or renew an operator's licence or an HGV/PCV driver's licence.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will require all heavy goods vehicles to display the name, address and telephone number of the user of the vehicle for each journey; and if he will apply the same requirements to hired vehicles.

Mr. Key: I do not propose to extend the requirements already laid down in the goods vehicle operator licensing provisions. These apply to users of heavy goods vehicles, including hired vehicles, over 3·5 tonnes and require that a vehicle specified on an operator licence display a disc showing the name of the licensed operator, a trading name if applicable, the registration number of the vehicle and the type of licence held by the operator.

A361

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will review his Department's policy regarding 60 mph repeater speed limit signs on the A361 north Devon link road;

(2) if he will review the overtaking arrangements on the A361 north Devon link road;

(3) if he will make a statement about the upgrading of parts or all of the A361 north Devon link road to dual carriageway;

(4) if he will review the lighting arrangements at, and layout of, junctions on the A361 north Devon link road;

(5) if he will arrange for an official from his Department to visit north Devon and meet representatives of the local county, district and parish councils, and other concerned parties, to discuss safety of the A361 north Devon link road.

Mr. Key: A number of accident reduction measures have already been implemented. Officials of the Department's South West regional office have arranged urgent discussions with our agent authority, Devon county council, and the police on possible further measures. This will include consideration of some of the suggestions put forward by the hon. Member.

I will write to the hon. Member as soon as I have the outcome of the discussions.

Great Western Network

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been made to him about the successors to 125 diesel locomotives for operating the InterCity service of the Great Western network; and if he will make a statement on the implications of the Railways Act 1993 for this particular service.

Mr. Freeman: I have received a number of representations about replacing the fleet of 125 diesel locomotives currently in use on the Great Western main line with electric traction. There are no plans to electrify the line at present, but this does not rule it out as an option when the existing diesel fleet reaches the end of its economic life.

Under the franchising proposals in the Railways Act, services on the Great Western main line will be among the first to be transferred to private sector operators. To this end, British Rail will begin shadow running from next April.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many speed restrictions apply to the Great Western railway network west of Reading; what stretches of line they apply to; whether they are caused by deficiencies in track maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held by the Department. These are operational matters for British Rail.

London Underground

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding London Underground has received over the past 10 years; what assessment he has made of the amount of money which will need to be invested in the underground to bring its services to a reasonable standard; and what assessment he has made of whether safety work on the Underground is being delayed because of lack of investment.

Mr. Norris: The Government do not fund London Underground Ltd. (LUL) directly, but makes an annual grant to LUL's parent body, London Transport (LT). London Transport's grant settlement for the three years from 1994-95 was announced on 30 November, and it is currently in the process of allocating this settlement between its subsidiaries. Decisions on the need for and the timing of investment projects are for LUL to make, but safety remains a key priority, and there is no question of it being jeopardised. The amounts LUL has spent on investment over the last 10 years are shown in the table.

LUL investment 1984-85—1993-94

£ million 1993-94 prices

Year	LUL (CORE)	JLE	Crossrail	Total
1984-85	188	0	0	188
1985-86	206	0	0	206
1986-87	253	0	0	253
1987-88	298	0	0	298
1988-89	269	0	0	269
1989-90	376	0	0	376
1990-91	470	45	6	521
1991-92	317	64	13	394
1992-93	649	65	27	741
[1]1993-94	465	200	50	715

Source of figures (for all years up to 1992-93)—LT annual reports.
[1]Latest forecast figures.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the Northern line on the London Underground is due to be modernised.

Mr. Norris: Decisions on the implementation of capital investment projects, such as the modernisation of the Northern line, are for London Transport and London Underground Ltd. to make. However, I understand that the Northern line is the next line due to be modernised after the Central line, which is on schedule for completion in 1995.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the current year's contribution to site costs and overheads at each operating unit of *(a)* the construction programme, *(b)* the network management and maintenance units, *(c)* the London regional office and *(d)* the headquarters directorates of his Department.

Mr. Norris: The figures below relate to the highways safety and traffic command of the Department of Transport, excluding the traffic area offices. The current pay, non-pay, accommodation and administrative capital budgets are:

	Pay £ million	Non-pay £ million	Accommodation £ million	Administrative capital £ million
Construction programme division OUs	18·255	2·567	3·712	0·392
Network management and maintenance OUs	16·588	3·822	4·290	0·380
London regional office	6·756	0·333	1·648	0·052
HQ directorates	23·492	3·971	6·064	[1]1·800

[1] The administrative capital figure for HQ directorates includes the IT budget of £1·5 million which is held centrally for use throughout highways safety and traffic command.

Budgets for individual operating units (OUs) are not now monitored centrally as the directors in charge of the construction programme divisions, network management divisions, London regional office and HQ directorates have discretion to switch funds between OUs in the interests of efficient administration. The figures shown vary during the course of the year as directors switch funding into or out of other budgets.

Railtrack

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the reports produced by Coopers and Lybrand and other consultants on access charging prices for Railtrack.

Mr. Freeman: No. The reports contain commercially confidential information.

Trains (WC Facilities)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail about its finance and the running of trains without WC facilities; and what provisions of the passengers charter apply to these facilities.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* The provision and cleaning of toilet facilities on trains is an operational matter for the board. Although the passengers charter does not refer specifically to this aspect of service, the provision of clean toilets on longer distance services is an important aspect of BR's commitment to provide a high quality of service. For this reason, BR regularly monitors customer satisfaction with this aspect of its service.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Reorganisation

13. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to issue new guidance to the Local Government Commission for its work on reorganising the structure of local government in England.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued revised policy guidance to the Local Government Commission on 2 November. We published revised procedure guidance on 22 November and directed the commission to begin on 13 December all its remaining shire reviews, including that of Cumbria.

Copies of both sets of guidance have been placed in the House Library.

21. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the cost to local authorities in England of preparing for local government reforms.

Mr. Gummer: I have made no such estimate.

Eco-Labelling

14. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board.

Mr. Yeo: The United Kingdom Ecolabelling Board awarded the first European Community ecolabels to a British manufacturer, Hoover Ltd, for three washing machines in its New Wave Range on 25 November.

The board, which has recently been strengthened by the appointment of two environmental experts, continues to play a leading role within Europe in the development of ecolabelling.

Contaminated Land

15. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends taking to help the construction industry counter the problems posed by the present regulations on contaminated land.

Mr. Baldry: There are no regulations. The Government are reviewing policy and contributing about £1·5 million a year towards research into decontamination and building on contaminated land.

Energy Efficiency

16. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to improve energy efficiency standards in buildings.

Mr. Yeo: In recent years the budget for my Department's Energy Efficiency Office (EEO) has substantially increased, and for 1994-95 will be over £100 million, over 17 times the real level of expenditure in 1979-80. Much of this will relate to buildings.

THORP

17. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will convene a full and independent public inquiry into the commissioning of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Responses to the consultation are still being assessed. When they have all been carefully considered, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I will decide whether to afford a hearing or inquiry and, if we decide not to do so, will take final decisions on the authorisations.

Solent

18. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the criteria that will be used for the classification of the Solent in respect of estuarine status for use under the urban waste water treatment directive.

Mr. Yeo: The two different bases used for defining the outer limits of estuaries in the United Kingdom were set out in draft guidance to accompany draft implementing regulations for the directive. Both drafts were issued for public consultation in April of this year.

29. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he expects a change in the classification of the Solent for the purposes of water quality.

Mr. Yeo: I shall be announcing my decision on the classification of the Solent for the purposes of the UWWTD in due course.

Right to Buy

19. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps he is taking to help council tenants to buy their houses.

Sir George Young: We introduced our new rent to mortgage scheme on 11 October. This will extend new opportunity of home ownership to council tenants who are financially secure, but cannot quite afford to buy their homes outright. My right hon. Friend also announced yesterday a £30 million boost to the cash incentive scheme, which helps council tenants to buy their own home in the private sector. Similar grants are also available to housing association tenants.

22. **Sir Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homes have been sold under right-to-buy legislation.

Sir George Young: In England, a total of 1·17 million homes have been sold under the right to buy. The figure for Great Britain as a whole is almost 1·5 million.

Council Tax

20. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local councils which charged the highest rate of council tax this year.

Mr. Baldry: The 10 local councils in England with the highest headline band C council taxes are:

Authority	£
Newcastle upon Tyne	704
Greenwich	696
Manchester	656
Haringey	646
Liverpool	645
Harlow	644
Camden	638
North Tynside	628
Salford	628
Derwentside	626

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against council tax

valuation there have been since the original council tax valuations took place, *(a)* in total *(b)* by local authority and *(c)* by standard region; and what was the average cost of processing those appeals in the financial year in which they occurred.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave her on 25 November, at columns *190-205.*

Standard Spending Assessments

23. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce changes to, and the level of, standard spending assessments.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend will make a statement to the House shortly on the provisional revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95, including details of proposals for standard spending assessments.

Local Government (Suffolk)

24. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent he is taking into account local opinion in determining the future of local government in Suffolk.

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Commission will begin its review of local government in Suffolk on 13 December. The commission must take into consideration all relevant representations made to it. We shall take local views fully into account when considering the commission's recommendations.

Hazardous Waste

25. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek powers to strengthen the regulations for the importation of hazardous waste.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is considering the need for additional provisions to implement the EC Waste Shipments Regulation.

Council House Sales

26. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities have sold off all of their council housing stock.

Sir George Young: The following 23 councils have transferred all or most of their housing stock to housing associations:

Breckland DC
Broadland DC
London Borough of Bromley
Chiltern DC
Christchurch BC
East Cambridgeshire DC
East Dorset DC
Hambleton DC
Medina BC
Mid Sussex DC
Newbury DC
North Bedfordshire DC
Rochester upon Medway City C
Ryedale DC
Sevenoaks DC
South Buckinghamshire DC
South Wight BC
Suffolk Coastal DC
Surrey Heath BC
Swale BC
Tonbridge and Malling BC
Tunbridge Wells BC
West Dorset DC

A further eight councils on the 1993-94 disposals programme have won tenant support for transfer and are expected to submit applications for permission to transfer by March next year.

I am also pleased that the public expenditure provision for housing announced yesterday will enable the programme to be expanded in future. Fourteen authorities have applied for inclusion in next year's programme and I hope to announce the successful applicants in the next couple of weeks.

Homelessness

27. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of homeless families in the west midlands.

Sir George Young: In the 12 months ending June 1993 the number of households for which local authorities in the west midlands accepted responsibility for securing permanent accommodation under the provisions of part III of the Housing Act 1985 was 17,570. This is some 300 (1·7 per cent.) less than the number accepted in the previous year ending June 1992.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total number of households *(a)* applying and *(b)* accepted by each of the London boroughs as homeless under the provisions of part III of the Housing Act 1985 in each year from 1979; and how many homeless households were accommodated in (i) bed and breakfast hotels and (ii) other temporary accommodation at the end of each of those years.

Sir George Young: I have today placed in the Library a table giving the numbers of households which each local authority in England reported as having accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 in the years 1979 to 1992.

Information on applications, for 1991 and 1992 only (this was not collected prior to 1991), and the numbers of households in the various types of temporary accommodation at the end of the year reported by London boroughs can be found in the following editions of "Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales".

Year	*Table number*	*Edition number*
1979	14	54
1980	13	62
1981	7	63
1982	9	66
1983	12	70
1984	12	74
1985	9*(b)*	78
1986	9*(b)*	82
1987	9*(b)*	86
1988	9*(b)*	90
1989	9*(b)*	94
1990	9*(b)*	98
1991	9*(b)*	102
1992	8*(b)*	106

Copies of all these publications are in the Library.

Social Security Spending

28. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution he is making to the Government's review of social security spending.

Mr. Gummer: Ministers and officials in the Departments of the Environment and of Social Security are in regular contact about issues of mutual interest. A formal working group has been established to discuss matters relating to housing and benefits policy.

Local Government (North Yorkshire)

30. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given to the Local Government Commission about the review of local government in North Yorkshire.

Mr. Baldry: The review of local government in Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire is being conducted in accordance with the original policy and procedure guidance which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State issued to the commission in July 1992. Copies are in the Library of the House.

Construction Industry

31. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he has taken within his Department to support his sponsorship of the construction industry.

Mr. Baldry: A new construction sponsorship directorate has been set up within the Department of the Environment with the aim of helping all sectors of the United Kingdom construction industry to succeed in their domestic, European and world markets. It is the advocate within Government and the European Union for the industry.

Derelict Land Grants

32. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the Association of Metropolitan Authorities to discuss derelict land grants.

Sir George Young: I have no immediate plans to meet the AMA but if it has specific concerns about derelict land grants, I am happy to take note of them.

Responsibility for the derelict land grant programme will pass next spring to English Partnerships, about which the AMA has been fully consulted.

Conservation Areas (Protection of Premises)

33. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the use of powers of local authorities to restrict traders' rights to protect their premises in conservation areas.

Mr. Curry: Installation of shutters or other security devices which would materially affect the external appearance of a commercial building in a conservation area requires planning permission. In considering applications for planning permission, local planning authorities—or on appeal the Secretary of State—must take into account appropriate local plan policies and other material considerations. In the case of applications relating to a building in a conservation area, security considerations have to be balanced against the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.

My Department's draft circular "Planning and Crime Prevention", currently subject to public consultation, encourages planning authorities to adopt a sympathetic approach where the security of listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas is concerned and to explore with applicants the scope for a mutually acceptable solution to their requirements. A copy of the draft circular is available in the Library.

Local Government Commission

34. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet Sir John Banham to discuss the progress of the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Gummer: I am next scheduled to meet Sir John Banham on Tuesday 18 January.

Concessionary Fares (London)

35. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the provision made in calculating standard spending assessments and grant distribution to London authorities to reflect expenditure on concessionary fare schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As part of the review of standard spending assessments for 1994-95 we have considered carefully the case for including specific provision for spending on concessionary fares in London. My right hon. Friend will announce his proposals for SSAs shortly.

Bury Metro

36. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in relation to the calculation of the standard spending assessment for Bury Metro; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have received representations from the metropolitan borough of Bury on a number of standard spending assessment issues and on the assessment for education in particular. My right hon. Friend will announce his proposals for SSAs for 1994-95 shortly.

Private Rented Sector

37. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to boost the private rented sector.

Sir George Young: We have already taken action to boost the private rented sector by introducing deregulation measures in the Housing Act 1988 to encourage landlords to bring their property on to the market. Landlords are now able to let property under assured and assured shorthold tenancies and charge market rents.

Specific initiatives launched last year include the rent-a-room scheme, under which householders no longer have to pay tax on rent from a lodger in their home if the gross amount of the rent is no more than £3,250, the flats-over-shops scheme, under which £25 million is being

made available through local authorities over three years to bring flats over shops back into residential use, and, the housing associations as managing agents scheme, which allows housing associations to act as an intermediary between potential private landlords and tenants in order to encourage more empty property to be let.

Rents

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the average rent for *(a)* council tenancies, *(b)* housing association assured tenancies, *(c)* housing association fair rent tenancies and *(d)* other regulated tenancies in each of the London boroughs in each appropriate year since 1979; and if he will express the increases as an index, taking 1979 as 100, to compare with the increase in (i) average earnings and (ii) the retail prices index over the same period.

Sir George Young: I have placed today in the Library tables showing for each London borough *(a)* the average local authority weekly unrebated rent, *(b)* the mean housing association annual registered fair rent, and *(c)* the mean annual registered fair rent for private tenancies, for each financial year from 1988-89 to 1992-93. The rents are also expressed as an index with 1988-89 equal to 100. The tables include a comparison between average rent indices for Greater London, male earnings, and retail prices. The information for London boroughs could be provided for the years before 1988-89 only at disproportionate cost.

Reliable information on average rents for housing association assured tenancies is not held centrally.

Information on local authority rents for Greater London from 1979 to 1989 is available in the publication "Housing and Construction Statistics 1979-89". Information on rents for housing association fair rent and other regulated tenancies for the same period can be found in the publication "Statistical Note for Rent Officers: Statistics of Rent Registrations by Rent Registration Area and Rent Assessment Committee Determinations by Panel Area".

From 1990, information on registered fair rents can be found in the publication "Rent Officer Statistics". Information on new lettings by registered housing associations can be found in the National Federation of Housing Associations quarterly bulletin; and information on rents for the whole housing association stock can be found in the report "Housing Associations in 1992" published by the Housing Corporation.

Copies of all these publications are available in the Library.

Planning Applications

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will undertake a review of the fees structure relating to planning applications for agricultural buildings to bring the fees charged more closely into line with the overall cost of each project.

Mr. Curry: No. The purpose of planning application fees is to cover local authorities' costs in determining planning applications. They are not related to project costs. There is no evidence that the fees payable in respect of agricultural buildings are too high.

Trans-European Route Network (Wing Bypass)

Mr. Walden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether the public inquiry into the Wing bypass will now be reopened;

(2) what information was given to the public inquiry into the Wing bypass regarding the full implications of the TERN decision for the route;

(3) what assessment he has made regarding the adequacy of the information about the adoption of the A418 as a trans-European route by TERN that was made available to the public in the course of consultations about this route.

Mr. Baldry: We are currently considering the inspector's report on the planning applications by Buckinghamshire county council for the Wing bypass. Those applications were called in by the Secretary of State for his own determination and a public local inquiry held. A post-inquiry statement on behalf of Sir Evelyn de Rothschild has been received, which raises, inter alia, the proposed inclusion of the Wing bypass as a route within the Trans-European Route Network (TERN). We have referred that statement to the parties involved with the inquiry into the Wing bypass to give them an opportunity to comment.

We have no proposals to reopen the inquiry into the Wing bypass at the present time. We will consider, in the light of the comments received on the statement made on behalf of Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, both whether the status of the Wing bypass within TERN is material, and, if so, whether we have sufficient information on it to reach a conclusion.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list by valuation tribunal the targets set for *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93; and whether they were short of or exceeded their targets;

(2) if he will list by valuation tribunal the targets set for 1994-95;

(3) if he will list by valuation tribunal the targets set for 1993-94; and whether they are currently *(a)* on target, *(b)* below target or *(c)* above their target.

Mr. Baldry: Valuation tribunals are independent judicial bodies. The president of each tribunal has the statutory responsibility for making the necessary arrangements for the hearing of appeals or their disposal by written representations. There is no requirement on tribunals to seek to decide specified numbers of cases within given periods, and the numbers actually decided depend on a range of factors, many of which are outside presidents' control. My Department now discusses each year with national representatives of the tribunal service and with the Valuation Office Agency the number of cases in each major category which could realistically be expected to be settled nationally over the coming year, and the resources that would be required to bring this about. Indicative figures are issued to each tribunal office to show the rate of progress locally that would be consistent with these national expectations, and staff complements for each office are determined in the light of these. The figures do not, however, have the status of formal targets. This process has not yet been completed for 1994-95.

For 1992-93, the first year of this procedure, the number of non-domestic rating appeals resolved nationally by the

Valuation Office Agency and the tribunal service in England was 336,900, compared with an expected 290,000. Progress in 1993-94 has been encouraging to date.

Housing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of the housing investment programme bids his Department has authorised in respect of each local authority in England over the last three years in relation to their bid; and what is the cash figure in each case.

Sir George Young: A table setting out information on housing investment programme (HIP) bids, allocations, and allocations expressed as a percentage of bids, for each authority in England over the last three years, has been placed in the Library of the House.

The levels of local authorities' bids for housing investment programme resources reflect, in part, the competition for these resources and therefore often exceed the amount of resources likely to be available.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has on *(a)* the homeless figure, *(b)* the general waiting list figures and *(c)* the sheltered housing waiting list figures for each local authority in England over the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I would refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) earlier today for the numbers of households reported by individual local authorities in England as accepted for permanent rehousing under the homeless provisions of the Housing Act 1985.

Information on the numbers of households on council housing waiting lists on 1 April are collected on the annual housing investment programme (HIP1) return. Figures for each authority in England for the years 1991 to 1993 can be found in the "HIP1 All Items Print" for these years, copies of which are in the Library—column B5 gives the overall size of the waiting list and column B6B gives the numbers of households requiring specialised dwellings.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the value of the capital receipts accumulated by each local authority in England *(a)* for the last three years and *(b)* the total of such resources available in each local authority for use if such use were to be permitted.

Mr. Baldry: I have arranged for information on the value of usable capital receipts held by each local authority at 31 March in each of the last three years to be placed in the Library of the House. Local authorities may use all of these receipts.

Local authorities are not required separately to identify the reserved part of capital receipts from other amounts set aside as provision for credit liabilities (PCL). No separate figures are available for the unapplied balance of PCL which has originated from set aside capital receipts.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the capital receipts income for each of the London borough councils from the sale of council housing in each of the last five years.

Sir George Young: The information requested, as reported by each of the London borough councils, is as follows. The figures exclude the element of lending by the local authorities for council house purchase.

Capital receipts from the sale of council dwellings in London (excluding lending for council house purchase)

£ thousand

Local authority	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Barking and Dagenham	41,176	29,829	12,251	10,062	6,298
Barnet	21,183	16,156	8,934	6,122	4,153
Bexley	10,313	8,866	4,931	3,203	3,705
Brent	7,868	17,699	19,991	7,437	6,024
Bromley	28,091	14,778	6,556	7,491	110,805
Camden	0	0	31	13,293	n/a
City of London	2,599	2,492	872	615	410
Croydon	27,012	18,405	8,726	16,250	5,249
Ealing	17,150	21,958	16,746	12,270	9,032
Enfield	31,648	26,928	13,222	8,419	5,011
Greenwich	22,951	31,780	15,500	10,007	8,487
Hackney	9,349	28,210	0	14,917	7,900
Hammersmith and Fulham	15,838	10,681	13,706	6,357	3,670
Haringey	19,816	26,695	16,715	10,070	6,913
Harrow	11,876	7,396	4,471	4,272	3,562
Havering	17,136	15,366	6,971	3,565	3,926
Hillingdon	23,116	16,440	14,279	9,783	13,393
Hounslow	16,869	20,164	19,981	0	8,194
Islington	24,239	0	29,546	15,934	11,384
Kensington and Chelsea	6,369	8,012	7,208	4,419	3,545
Kingston upon Thames	6,196	7,247	3,650	3,153	2,310
Lambeth	12,774	13,956	30,247	20,376	10,656
Lewisham	21,312	40,300	25,563	12,887	10,437
Merton	16,124	15,705	8,091	4,969	4,130
Newham	20,850	24,694	17,414	8,506	4,745
Redbridge	6,930	12,272	9,364	3,999	3,357
Richmond upon Thames	12,516	8,729	5,230	5,171	3,395
Southwark	31,354	37,644	0	12,706	8,801
Sutton	13,164	9,266	6,297	4,170	3,029
Tower Hamlets	25,536	54,597	21,196	12,783	12,002
Waltham Forest	13,801	17,002	7,706	5,195	3,659

Local authority	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Wandsworth	63,531	70,671	36,457	24,874	21,375
Westminster	41,973	60,771	19,178	14,376	11,531

Home Insulation

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase home insulation schemes.

Mr. Yeo: I am delighted to announce that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor was able to announce on 30 November an extra £35 million per year for the home energy efficiency scheme. This will be targeted on pensioners and disabled people and will provide grants for more than 200,000 extra households per year throughout the United Kingdom, bringing the total number of households receiving grants to almost half a million a year.

Local Authorities (Debt)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities in England and Wales which are debt-free for the purposes of the capital control system.

Mr. Baldry: Information received from local authorities indicates that the English authorities listed below were debt-free for capital control purposes at 30 September 1993. Information from Welsh authorities is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Barking and Dagenham
Bedford
Bracknell
Breckland
Broadland
City of London
Chiltern
Christchurch
Corby
Devon and Cornwall Police Authority
Dorset CC
East Cambridgeshire
Lincolnshire CC
Medina
Mid Sussex
Newbury
Ryedale
Sevenoaks
South Bucks
South Wight
St Edmundsbury
Suffolk Coastal
Swale
Tunbridge Wells
West Sussex CC

Local Government Review

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the findings of MORI polls carried out during the Local Government Commission's public consultation exercise on proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the Local Government Commission. However, I understand that it will be publishing the results of the MORI polls in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset shortly.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the Local Government Commission's final recommendations for Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, following the public consultation exercise carried out earlier this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Local Government Commission is currently drawing up its final recommendations to my right hon. Friend on local government structure in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset. It is due to complete this final report by 23 January 1994.

Smokeless Coal

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what date the United Kingdom will conform to the EC conditions on the use of domestic smokeless coal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: There are no EC conditions on the use of domestic smokeless coal.

Sewage Works, Braunston

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the proposals to erect a multi-screen cinema on the old sewage works at Braunston, Leicestershire; and if he will call in the proposals.

Mr. Baldry: These proposals form an application for planning consent for reserved matters made to Blaby district council. The council resolved to grant outline planning permission in 1991, subject to the completion of a planning agreement covering highway works. An acceptable use of the land has therefore been established and the circumstances do not justify the unusual step of calling in this application.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average unrebated rate-community charge-council tax in *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association tenancies in each year since 1978 at current prices, at constant April 1993 prices, and using an index with 1978=100.

Mr. Curry: This answer can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Construction Products Directive

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is calling to enforce the construction products directive.

Mr. Baldry: The directive was implemented by the Construction Products Regulations in December 1991. In Great Britain enforcement of the legislation is the responsibility of trading standards officers and in Northern Ireland of environmental health officers. Provision for the additional costs falling on local authorities has been made

in the appropriate local authority spending assessments since 1991-92. The Department is working with the European Commission and other member states to complete the technical development of the directive as soon as possible.

Notting Hill Housing Trust

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to improve the administration of the Notting Hill housing trust; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The statutory responsibility for the regulation of registered housing associations rests with the Housing Corporation, which monitors associations' performance to ensure they are effectively managed. If my hon. Friend has specific concerns about the management of an individual association, it would be appropriate for these to be referred to the Housing Corporation to consider.

County Hall, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to pass the proceeds from the sale of county hall and other ex-GLC property and assets to the London boroughs; how much money is expected to be involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The distribution of such proceeds is a matter not for my right hon. Friend but for the London residuary body. The riverside building has been sold to the Shirayama Corporation, but the residuary body is still seeking to dispose of the remaining buildings on the county hall site. Certain moneys are to be distributed by 31 December 1993 to the City of London and the London boroughs under the terms of an order which my right hon. Friend has laid before Parliament. The total sum involved will become clear when the distribution is made.

Carbon Dioxide

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to strengthen the Department's building regulations advisory committee with a technical and commercial expert in thermal insulation to keep under close specialist review carbon dioxide emissions.

Mr. Baldry: None. Expertise on thermal insulation matters was increased earlier this year with the appointment to the committee of Professor Pat O'Sullivan of University College, London.

Drainage Boards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration his Department is giving in respect of the council tax valuation category for internal drainage boards in respect of intensive livestock units; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

Following representations from the National Farmers Union and the British Poultry Federation, the Ministry issued a consultation paper on 15 October seeking views from a range of interested parties on proposals to abate the drainage rates payable by certain intensive livestock and glasshouse enterprises. Responses were requested by 22 November and a decision as to whether to proceed with the proposals will be made shortly in the light of those responses.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration his Department is giving in respect of the council tax valuation category for internal drainage boards to changing intensive livestock units from paying the internal drainage boards' valuation rate to a business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has no plans to do this.

City Pride

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional resources will be made available for city pride.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on Thursday 25 November at column *187*.

Bathing Water Quality

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the results of this year's bathing water quality monitoring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The monitoring carried out during the 1993 season shows that 80 per cent. of the 457 identified bathing waters in the United Kingdom met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC bathing water directive. This compares with 79 per cent. in 1992 and 76 per cent. in 1991.

Rain influences results, but in spite of poor weather in many places during the bathing season this year overall compliance has improved.

This slow but steady increase is a satisfying indication that the works being undertaken to improve bathing water quality are having the desired effect. Some waters which invariably failed in previous seasons are now up to standard.

The main results for the United Kingdom are summarised with details for English and Welsh bathing waters. This information will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses today and will be supplemented by a report with more detailed results in due course.

Bathing waters survey
1993 results for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
(Compliance with Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): Coliform Standards)

	Pass		*Fail*		*Total*	
	1993	*1992*	*1993*	*1992*	*1993*	*1992*
England and Wales						
NRA Regions						
Northumbrian[1]	25	20	9	14	34	34
Yorkshire[1]	21	20	1	2	22	22
Anglian	28	31	5	2	33	33
Thames	3	3	0	0	3	3
Southern	58	51	9	16	67	67
Wessex[1]	35	36	7	3	42	39
South West[1]	107	117	26	17	133	134
North West	13	11	20	22	33	33
Welsh	42	39	9	12	51	51
Total	332	328	86	88	418	416

	Pass		Fail		Total	
	1993	1992	1993	1992	1993	1992
Scotland	18	15	5	8	23	23
Northern Ireland	15	15	1	1	16	16
Grand Total	365	358	92	97	457	455

[1] Northumbrian and Yorkshire, and South West and Wessex NRA regions have amalgamated, but results are recorded separately here for the purposes of comparison.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Heavy Electrical Products

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further action he intends to take to improve exports of heavy electrical products.

Mr. Sainsbury: Substantial new measures to help exporters have already been introduced this year. ECGD support has been extended and premia reduced. The Overseas Projects Board has set up a number of sectoral working groups, including one on power, to help improve the United Kingdom's share of major products overseas. The Department is already supporting exporters of heavy electrical products through its export services. Sixty additional staff have been assigned to export promotion and 100 export promoters are being seconded from the private sector. There are no plans to introduce further help, but, as always, we would be happy to consider any requests from the industry for such help.

Insolvency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many complaints the Insolvency Service agency received about its work in 1991, 1992 and so far in 1993.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Insolvency Service's chief executive has received four complaints following introduction by the agency in February 1993 of a formal procedure under this Government's citizens charter initiative. The agency does not keep any other record specifically relating to complaints, but receives a range of correspondence relating to official receivers and insolvency practitioners. This correspondence should be considered in the context of the 8,368 companies wound up compulsorily and 22,632 individuals entering bankruptcy in 1991, 9,734 liquidations and 32,106 bankruptcies in 1992, and 7,004 liquidations and 26,627 bankruptcies to 31 October 1993.

Mr. Peter Joyce, the agency's chief executive, answered letters about the administration of insolvencies which did not arise out of the published standard but sometimes contained criticism of the service, totalling 26 in 1991, 85 in 1992 and 49 to 31 October 1993.

In addition, I and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade have responded to letters from hon. Members concerning specific insolvencies totalling 399 in 1991, 355 in 1992 and 314 to 31 October 1993. Officials have answered on our behalf 207 letters in 1992 and 147 to 31 October 1993. Information on how many of these letters contained criticism of the service could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

No central record is kept of complaints made direct to official receivers.

Colliery Equipment

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will give details of all machinery and equipment currently earmarked for removal from Silverdale colliery, North Staffordshire, to the Nottinghamshire coalfield; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the machinery and equipment at Silverdale colliery on 20 November.

Mr. Eggar: The deployment of machinery and equipment is a matter for British Coal.

Postage Stamps

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consideration he has given to the future use of royal emblems on postage stamps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that the Post Office has no plans to change the present arrangements.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Eggar: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Ships

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether launch aid support is available in respect of the construction of novel ship designs or ship engines.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. Launch aid is available, under the Civil Aviation Act 1982, to assist specifically the design, development and production of civil aircraft.

Post Boxes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reasons underline the absence of the royal cipher from the new Post Office postal boxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand from the Post Office that all cast iron post boxes installed by Royal Mail continue to bear the royal cipher or Scottish crown. Royal Mail has, however, introduced a range of polypropylene boxes without these emblems. These boxes are installed in street locations to assist postal delivery staff and are not normally intended to have any public posting function. On occasions, however, these boxes have been installed on a temporary trial basis to assess particular posting needs. Where it is subsequently decided to introduce a permanent facility a cast iron box is installed.

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Eggar: The annual cost of the car service for Ministers is about £380,000, including VAT, for seven cars.

British Gas

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to respond to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into British Gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is currently considering the representations which he has received as part of the consultation process on the MMC's report on gas. He recognises the need to avoid delay; but it is also important not to take precipitate decisions on the important matters raised by the report.

Electricity

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding proposals to harmonise electrical plugs and sockets throughout the European Community; and what response he has made to the Commission regarding such proposals.

Mr. Sainsbury: Several trade associations and other bodies have expressed their respective points of view on the harmonisation work currently being carried out by CENELEC. My Department has commissioned an independent analysis of the costs and benefits for the United Kingdom, and the results of this study will be published in the new year; written evidence has also been submitted by the Department to the Trade and Industry Committee. We have assured the European Commission that the United Kingdom will continue to participate actively in the work of the various technical committees and working groups that have been established by CENELEC.

Concessionary Coal

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those individuals and organisations who replied to his consultative document on concessionary coal; and if he will place copies of their submissions in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: The following have submitted views on the Government's consultation paper on the concessionary fuel entitlements of past and present British Coal employees and their dependants following privatisation of the corporation:

British Association of Colliery Managers
British Coal Retired Staff Association (Cannock and District)
British Coal Retired Staff Association (North Staffordshire District)
Bruce Lindsay Coal Ltd
R J Budge (Mining) Limited
The Chamber of Coal Traders Limited
Currell, Lewis & Martin Limited
Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain
D J Freeman—Solicitors
Legal and Venture Joint Ventures Limited
The Miller Group Limited
National Association of Colliery Overmen Deputies and Shotfirers
The National Association of Licensed Opencast Operators
National Union of Mineworkers
National Union of Mineworkers (COSA)—The Ex-COSA Section—Region 3
Pascoe Fuels Limited
Ryan Mining Limited
Small Mines Association of Wales
Southampton Institute of Higher Education—Law Research Centre
Union of Democratic Mineworkers
Union of Democratic Mineworkers (Nottinghamshire Section)

I have also received a number of responses from individuals.

It is a matter for the organisations and individuals concerned whether they wish their correspondence to be made public.

British Coal (Pension Funds)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those individuals and organisations who replied to his consultive document on the future of British Coal's pension funds; and if he will place copies of their submissions in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: The following have submitted views on the Government's consultation paper on British Coal pensions following privatisation of the corporation:

British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme Committee of Management
Mineworkers' Pension Scheme Committee of Management
British Coal Corporation
British Association of Colliery Management
GMB/APEX Partnership
National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS)
National Union of Mineworkers
National Union of Mineworkers (COSA)
National Union of Mineworkers (COSA)—The Ex-COSA Section—Region 3
Federation of Small Mines of Great Britain
Small Mines Association (South Wales)
British Coal Retired Staff Association (North Staffordshire District)
British Coal Retired Staff Association (Cannock and District)

I have also received some 1,400 responses from individuals.

It is a matter for the organisations and individuals concerned whether they wish their correspondence to be made public.

Offshore Installations

Dr. Godman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proposals he has to modify the Petroleum Act 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list the offshore installations and pipeline networks which have been dismantled and removed in the past six years and those scheduled to be demolished and withdrawn from the United Kingdom continental shelf; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how many programmes involving the abandonment of *(a)* offshore installations and *(b)* submarine pipeline networks he has approved over the past five years; if he will outline the maintenance and inspection regulations concerning such abandoned structures and pipelines; what advice is given to commercial fishermen associations and other users of the maritime environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and his predecessor the Secretary of State for Energy have approved the following abandonment programmes for offshore installations and pipelines:

Year	*Facilities*
1988	Piper Alpha
1991	Crawford
1992	Argyll, Duncan & Innes Blair
1993	Angus
	Forbes
	Part of Staffa—Ninian pipeline

In each case, except Piper Alpha and the Blair pipeline, the abandonment programme provided for complete removal of the facilities.

Maintenance and inspection requirements are decided on a case by case basis in the light of the circumstances of each abandonment proposal and after consultation with other Government Departments. In each case, the President of the Board of Trade has required consultations to be carried out with interested parties, including representatives of fishermen's organisations, and that the results of the consultations be reported in the abandonment programme. My officials meet representatives of fishermen's organisations at regular intervals for discussions on a range of subjects, including abandonment.

I have no proposals at present to modify the Petroleum Act 1987.

Nuclear Industry

Sir John Hannam: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current status of the terms of reference for the pending review of the nuclear industry; and what consultations are taking place.

Mr. Eggar: Options for the scope and format of the nuclear review are under consideration within Government. I cannot prejudge the terms of reference. It remains the Government's intention to make a further announcement as soon as possible.

Energy Demand

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the disaggregated breakdown of energy demand by sector and region; and if he will indicate the current energy supply availability in Wales by fuel type.

Mr. Eggar: Figures for energy demand are not available in the detail requested. Energy consumption by final user for the United Kingdom in 1992 was:

	Billion therms
Industry	15·0
Transport	19·5
Domestic	17·4
Other final users	8·2
Total final users	60·2

Source: Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics.

The latest available figures for energy supply in Wales are as follows:

	Million tonnes
Coal (available for home consumption, 1992)	8·3
Petroleum (inland deliveries, 1991)	4·0
	Terrawatt hours
Gas (total available 1991)	31·8
Electricity (net supplied, 1992)	18·3

Sources: Digest of Welsh Statistics, 1993 and Welsh Economic Trends, 1993.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to require fuel and power companies to use the interest accrued on VAT payments collected from customers for energy conservation within customers' properties.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* Both the Director General of Gas Supply and the Director General of Electricity Supply have a duty to promote energy efficiency. This is primarily a matter for the Energy Efficiency Office.

Fireworks

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to keep a record of the countries which export fireworks to Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have been asked to reply.

I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for controls on importation of fireworks. The Health and Safety Executive already keeps records of countries which export fireworks to Britain and will continue to do so.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Budget Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) of 19 November, *Official Report*, columns 4-6,

what were the voting figures on *(a)* the revised expenditure ceilings for 1994 and *(b)* the letter of amendment to the draft supplementary and amending budget for 1993 recorded in the meeting of the European Community's Budget Council held on 15 November; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: The Council agreed unanimously to the adjustment of the expenditure ceilings for 1994 which had been determined in the context of the new inter-institutional agreement.

The presidency concluded that the necessary majority existed to establish the letter of amendment to the draft supplementary and amending budget for 1993; and no formal vote was therefore taken.

Financial Services Act 1986

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the practical benefits to the private investor of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the regulatory regime which it created.

Mr. Nelson: The implementation of the Act in 1988 has brought significant benefits for the private investor. For example, firms carrying on investment business must be properly authorised. The regulators have taken action against firms not complying with their rules of conduct. A sizeable number have been found unfit to deal with private investors and prevented from doing so. A further example is the establishment of the investors compensation scheme, from which some 5,000 private investors have benefited to date.

State Pension

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of national average earnings the basic state pension will be in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010, *(c)* 2020, *(d)* 2030, *(e)* 2040 and *(f)* 2050 if earnings rise faster than prices by (i) 1·5 per cent. and (ii) 2·5 per cent.

Mr. Portillo: The information is in the table.

Year	1·5 per cent. real earnings growth	2·5 per cent. real earnings growth
1993	17·7	17·7
2000	16·0	14·9
2010	13·7	11·6
2020	11·8	9·1
2030	10·2	7·1
2040	8·8	5·6
2050	7·6	4·3

Notes: The baseline for the calculation is April 1993. The basic retirement pension was uprated to £56·10 per week on 1 April 1993. National average earnings in April 1993 were £316·90 (*Source:* the Department of Employment's new earnings survey).

National Debt

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the national debt of each EC country, Japan and the United States of America in local currency; what proportion such debt is of gross national product; and whether such debt for each country includes public sector pension liabilities where those pension liabilities are not provided by private sector funds.

Mr. Nelson: Data on Government debt in local currencies are available in the IMF's Government finance statistics yearbook and on gross national product in the OECD's national accounts, copies of which are available in the House Library. Contingent liabilities arising from public sector pensions are not included in the Government debt figures in the IMF's Government finance statistics yearbook.

Privatisation

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are *(a)* the total receipts from the privatisation of Government assets for each year since 1979, *(b)* the percentage shares of total Government income this represents for each year and *(c)* the total sums raised by each separate sale.

Mr. Dorrell: The table shows the privatisation proceeds received by the Government for each year since 1979-80 and their scale relative to general Government receipts. Privatisations and secondary sales of shares with net proceeds of less than £50 million in any year have not been shown individually.

Net privatisation proceeds

£ billion

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
Amersham International	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Associated British Ports	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
BAA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·5	0·7	—	—	—	—	—
British Aerospace	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Airways	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·4	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Gas	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2·6	1·8	1·8	0·8	0·5	—	0·4	—
British Petroleum	0·3	—	—	—	0·5	—	—	—	0·9	3·0	1·4	—	—	—	—
British Steel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·1	1·3	—	—	—	—
British Telecommunications	—	—	—	—	—	1·4	1·3	1·4	0·3	0·3	0·1	0·1	1·8	3·7	—
Britoil	—	—	—	0·3	0·3	—	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cable and Wireless	—	—	0·2	—	0·3	—	0·6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity (England and Wales)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3·1	3·4	1·5	—
Electricity (Northern Ireland)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·4	—
Electricity (Scotland)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·1	1·0	—
Enterprise Oil	—	—	—	—	—	0·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
GPFC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	—

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94
NTL	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	—	—
National Seed Development Organisation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rolls-Royce	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·0	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rover Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·2	—	—	—	—
Royal Ordnance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Water Companies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·5	1·5	1·5	—	—
Miscellaneous[1]	0·1	0·2	0·2	0·2	0	0·1	0·1	0·1	–0·1	0·1	-0·1	0·1	0	1·2	—
TOTAL	0·4	0·2	0·5	0·5	1·1	2·0	2·7	4·5	5·1	7·1	4·2	5·3	7·9	8·2	[2]5·5
Relative to GGR (per cent.)	0·5	0·2	0·4	0·4	0·9	1·4	1·8	2·8	2·9	3·7	2·0	2·5	3·6	3·7	[2]2·4

[1] Includes, in any year, sales with net proceeds of less than £50 million, expenses which could not be netted off the associated sale because they arose in a financial year in which there were no proceeds from that sale and (in 1992-93) the proceeds of the Treasury's auction of privatised companies' debt.
[2] March FSBR forecast.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has as to the annual extent of tax avoidance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: No reliable estimate can be made, but it remains the Government's policy to ensure that oppórtunities for tax avoidance are minimised. My right hon. and learned Friend's Budget contains a number of anti-avoidance measures which will increase revenue by £1·8 billion over three years.

VAT

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if VAT on fuel bills will be inclusive, or exclusive, of any standing charge levied; what arrangements are available to Her Majesty's Government to vary positive rates of VAT downwards; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Standing charges are regarded as part of the payment for the supply of fuel and power and will therefore be subject to the VAT changes introduced by section 42 of the Finance Act 1993.

Only those goods and services specified in a list annexed to EC directive 92/77/EEC can be moved from the standard rate of VAT to a reduced VAT rate. The reduced rate cannot be lower than 5 per cent. and there are no provisions for the introduction of zero rates of VAT.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Sir John Cope: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

First-time Home Buyers

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to give increased support to first-time buyers.

Mr. Nelson: Housing is now more affordable than for a number of years, due to lower interest rates and house prices. The Government's taxation and expenditure plans are set out fully in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Income Tax

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what tax a married man on an income of *(a)* £900,000 per annum and *(b)* £15,000 per annum would have been required to pay in each of the last 10 years assuming no additional tax allowances.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is in the table.

	Tax liability for a married man with total income[1] of	
Year	*£900,000* £	*£15,000* £
1983-84	531,668	3,662
1984-85	531,067	3,554
1985-86	530,502	3,464
1986-87	529,910	3,290
1987-88	529,381	3,025
1988-89	355,467	2,726
1989-90	355,145	2,656
1990-91	355,005	2,569
1991-92	354,439	2,496
1992-93	354,279	2,359
1993-94	354,254	2,334

[1] Assuming all income is earned and that the only allowances and reliefs available are the married man's allowance for years up to 1989-90 and the personal allowance and married couple's allowance for subsequent years.

PRIME MINISTER

Kashmir

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Pakistan on the policy the Pakistan Government intend to follow regarding Kashmir.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* I discussed Kashmir with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Cyprus in October. I reaffirmed the United Kingdom Government's view that the issue of Kashmir can be resolved only by bilateral negotiation between Pakistan and India. I therefore welcome the joint announcement by the Indian and Pakistani Governments that they will be conducting bilateral talks at senior official level in January.

EDUCATION

School Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will give the names of those who currently advise his Department about the national curriculum and associated matters, and in each case the body they represent;

(2) how many people drawn from the primary school sector of education are on his Department's advisory team; and what percentage they represent.

Mr. Robin Squire: The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has the main responsibility for advising my right hon. Friend on the national curriculum and associated matters. The authority was established on 1 October under the chairmanship of Sir Ron Dearing. Its 14 members, announced on 14 September, are:

Mr. Roy Blatchford—Headmaster, Bicester Community College, Oxfordshire (an LEA maintained secondary school).

Mr. John Burn—Principal, Emmanuel College, Gateshead (Tyneside City Technology College).

Mrs. Judith Conway—Teacher, Christ Church School, Chorleywood, Hertfordshire (a self-governing GM primary school).

Mr. Paul Dick—Headmaster, Kennet School, Thatcham, Berkshire (an LEA maintained secondary school).

Mrs. Heather Du Quesnay—Director of Education, Hertfordshire County Council.

Dr. Philip Evans—Headmaster, Bedford School (an independent 7-18 school).

Mrs. Yvonne Hargreaves-Pizer—Headteacher, Hague Primary School, Tower Hamlets, London (an LEA maintained school).

Mr. Graham Mackenzie—Group Chief Executive, UES Holdings Limited

Dr. John Marks—Open University Tutor in Physics and History and Philosophy of Science, and Director of the Educational Research Trust

Professor Leonard Marsh—Principal, Bishop Grosseteste College, Lincoln

Professor Anthony O'Hear—Professor of Philosophy, University of Bradford

Mr. David Quarmby—Joint Managing Director, J. Sainsbury plc.

Mrs. Shahwar Sadeque—Director of Art of Intelligence (a computer software company), Governor of the BBC, and former researcher and school teacher

Mr. Martyn Worrall—Headmaster, Hawksworth Hall School, Leeds (an independent special school owned by the Spastics Society).

The members were selected on the basis of their individual expertise and experience and not as representatives of any particular body.

Three of the authority's seven teachers are involved in primary education and much of Professor Marsh's professional work has been concerned with the primary sector.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Boswell: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Standard Numbers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for the last 12 months, and by local education authority, the number of occasions where he has *(a)* declined and *(b)* approved an application in respect of standard numbers.

Mr. Robin Squire: Over the last 12 months my right hon. Friend approved 636 requests from local education authorities for changes in school standard numbers. In 171 of these cases the order implementing the change modified the original proposals. Over the same period my right hon. Friend declined to approve a change on 76 occasions. The figures by local education authority are as follows:

Local education authority	*Application for change*		
	Approved	*Refused*	*Modified*
City	—	—	—
Camden	1	—	—
Greenwich	—	—	—
Hackney	—	—	—
Hammersmith	1	1	—
Islington	—	—	—
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—
Lambeth	2	2	—
Lewisham	1	—	—
Southwark	—	—	—
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—
Wandsworth	—	—	1
Westminster	1	—	1
Barking	—	—	—
Barnet	—	—	—
Bexley	—	—	—
Brent	2	—	—
Bromley	1	—	—
Croydon	2	—	5
Ealing	3	—	—
Enfield	1	—	—
Haringey	7	2	—
Harrow	—	8	—
Havering	2	—	—
Hillingdon	—	—	—
Hounslow	3	8	1
Kingston upon Thames	—	—	—
Merton	1	—	—
Newham	—	—	—
Redbridge	1	—	—
Richmond upon Thames	—	—	—
Sutton	—	—	1
Waltham Forest	—	—	—
Birmingham	—	—	2
Coventry	9	7	1
Dudley	—	3	2
Sandwell	3	3	3
Solihull	—	—	—
Walsall	3	—	—
Wolverhampton	—	—	4
Knowsley	—	—	—
Liverpool	—	—	—
St. Helens	—	—	1
Sefton	4	—	—
Wirral	2	4	1
Bolton	—	—	—
Bury	3	1	—
Manchester	1	—	—
Oldham	—	—	—
Rochdale	—	—	—
Salford	2	—	—
Stockport	2	—	—
Tameside	—	—	—
Trafford	—	—	—
Wigan	—	—	—
Barnsley	3	—	—
Doncaster	—	—	—
Rotherham	—	—	—
Sheffield	—	—	1
Bradford	3	—	3
Calderdale	7	1	2
Kirklees	15	—	1
Leeds	2	—	—
Wakefield	—	—	1
Gateshead	1	—	—
Newcastle upon Tyne	3	1	1
North Tyneside	—	—	—
South Tyneside	—	—	—

Local education authority	Application for change: Approved	Refused	Modified
Sunderland	—	1	—
Isles of Scilly	—	—	—
Avon	54	13	11
Bedfordshire	6	—	1
Berkshire	29	—	5
Buckinghamshire	5	—	—
Cambridgeshire	1	—	—
Cheshire	3	—	1
Cleveland	1	—	—
Cornwall	2	—	1
Cumbria	7	1	1
Derbyshire	4	1	—
Devon	6	—	—
Dorset	2	—	8
Durham	—	—	—
East Sussex	—	—	1
Essex	4	3	17
Gloucestershire	1	—	—
Hampshire	12	1	10
Hereford and Worcester	2	—	—
Hertfordshire	8	—	2
Humberside	6	5	3
Isle of Wight	—	—	—
Kent	36	1	35
Lancashire	29	1	13
Leicestershire	7	—	—
Lincolnshire	7	1	—
Norfolk	2	—	—
North Yorkshire	30	1	2
Northamptonshire	10	—	4
Northumberland	1	1	1
Nottinghamshire	5	—	2
Oxfordshire	50	2	2
Shropshire	4	—	—
Somerset	—	—	2
Staffordshire	5	—	1
Suffolk	5	—	1
Surrey	—	—	—
Warwickshire	6	—	2
West Sussex	7	—	6
Wiltshire	16	3	7
Total	465	76	171

Car Crime

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what response his Department has made to the proposals by the National Crime Prevention Organisation for an educational initiative to cut car crime.

Mr. Forth: The National Crime Prevention Organisation has not made any specific proposals to my right hon. Friend for an educational initiative to cut car crime.

Musical Instruments (VAT)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will ensure that sixth form college students receive an entitlement to a refund on value added tax on musical instruments comparable to that applicable to sixth formers in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Sixth formers in schools have no such entitlement. Under a special scheme, local authorities are eligible for VAT refunds. Such refunds may be claimed where local education authorities buy musical instruments from retailers. Sixth form colleges and FE colleges are not similarly eligible, but the Government take account of VAT costs in determining funding for this sector; the supply of goods and services incidental to the supply of education by such colleges is, however, exempt from VAT.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

India (Dam)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he took before deciding to fund the upgrading of the Hirakud hydro-electric dam at Orissa in India formally to appraise and meet the needs of the families displaced by the original dam.

Mr. Goodlad: The appraisal mission took account of the arrangements made for resettlement of people displaced by the original dam in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which are well documented. The upgrading project will not have any significant social impact for these resettled groups or any other groups, and no appropriate action was identifed in respect of the people affected by the original scheme. ODA considers that the needs of this group are best addressed through projects targeting poor and tribal people in Orissa more generally, such as the Orissa health and family welfare project which we are financing.

Brazil

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with which organisations in Brazil the Government have worked to help Brazilian street children.

Mr. Goodlad: The Overseas Development Administration, through its joint funding scheme, currently supports projects for Brazilian street children with the National Movement of Street Boys and Girls, and the Brazilian Centre for Poor Girls and Adolescents. This assistance has been channelled through the British NGOs childhope, Womankind, CAFOD, Oxfam and Christian Aid. In addition, funds have been made available from the British ambassador's small projects fund to support the Sao Martinho shelter for street children in Rio de Janeiro.

Cambodia

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds the Government have currently committed to *(a)* Cambodia mines action centre and *(b)* any other grouping for de-mining in Cambodia; and what further funds will be made available.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government have committed $200,000 to the Cambodia Mines Action Centre. Since October 1991 the Government have also provided nearly £500,000 to other de-mining operations in Cambodia, including the Halo Trust, a British non-governmental organisation. We hope that agreement on longer-term international support will be reached by early 1994.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the companies with whom the Government are working in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to aid these countries in their development.

Mr. Goodlad: The know-how fund, Britain's programme of bilateral technical assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, is working with numerous partners.

A list has been placed in the Library. It will be updated regularly.

Indonesia

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to Indonesia to date in 1993-94; and what form the aid has taken.

Mr. Goodlad: We expect to spend about £24 million in the full year 1993-94. This will be mainly technical co-operation and financial aid as part of aid and trade provision allocations. Our funds are spent mainly on projects that promote educational development, forestry conservation, energy efficiency and improved public administration and help with provision of infrastructure in the transport and other sectors.

St. Helena

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a decision to be made upon which recommendations of the report, "Heritage in St. Helena", will be implemented; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: This report was commissioned by the St. Helena Heritage Society and the Government of St. Helena, not by Her Majesty's Government, and decisions on the report are for them. We understand that some recommendations have already been implemented, whilst the others are under active consideration.

Evaluation Reports

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the evaluation report on the pilot phase of the global environment facility commissioned by the World bank, United Nations environment programme and the United Nations development programme;

(2) if he will make a statement on the findings of the independent evaluation of the pilot phase of the global environment facility commissioned by the World bank, United Nations environment programme and the United Nations development programme;

(3) who were the members of the independent panel of experts that was formed by the World bank, United Nations environment programme and the United Nations development programme to evaluate the pilot phase of the global environment facility.

Mr. Goodlad: The independent evaluation of the global environment facility (GEF) was carried out by three teams and a co-ordinator, Mr. Haven North, under the direction of the evaluation managers of the World bank, the United Nations development programme, and the United Nations environment programme, and with the guidance of an independent panel of experts, whose members were Ms Monique Barbut, Mr. Rudolf Hoegger, the Hon. Mathias B. Keah, Dr. Ashok Khosla, Mr. Jean Quesnel and Ms Erna Witoelar.

The report focuses on institutional issues, and is intended to inform the meeting of GEF participants in Cartagena from 6-10 December to discuss the restructuring of the GEF. It is a well-written report which contains many important recommendations. I have placed a copy of the report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the outside evaluators used to study the effectiveness of particular aspects of the United Kingdom's aid programme in the last three years.

Mr. Goodlad: The ODA's evaluation department's reports are available and are listed in our "Catalogue of Evaluation Studies", an updated copy of which will shortly be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Each report lists the outside evaluators used.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criticism he has received over the past three years from outside evaluators used to study the overall effectiveness of the United Kingdom aid programme; and what was the action taken.

Mr. Goodlad: The ODA's evaluation department undertakes its regular evaluation programme on a project-by-project basis, by sector or theme, rather than attempting to study overall effectiveness. Specific action taken in response to recent reports includes the preparation of a guidance paper on forestry projects in response to the findings of six forestry evaluations; and the convening of a seminar by the Aga Khan Foundation on Promoting Quality Education in the Third World as a result of a joint evaluation of the schools improvement programme which had been co-funded by ODA.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was paid in each of the last two years to outside evaluators of the United Kingdom's aid programme.

Mr. Goodlad: In 1991-92 and 1992-93, the ODA's evaluation department paid £333,944 and £511,404 respectively to external evaluators.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which 20 companies have been the leading indirect beneficiaries of spending within the aid and trade provision since its inception in 1978; and what percentage of total ATP spending each has attracted.

Mr. Goodlad: The 20 leading main contractors gaining business under the aid and trade provision since its inception in 1978 are as follows:

	Company	Percentage of total ATP commitments since 1978
1	Balfour Beatty	[1]20·95
2	GEC	7·64
3	Davy	5·89
4	Biwater	4·02
5	Amec International	4·02
6	Foster Wheeler	3·69
7	Snamprogetti	3·23
8	Northern Engineering Industries	3·16
9	John Brown Engineering	2·56
10	Siemens-Plessey	2·36
11	Phillips Radio	2·33
12	Marconi	1·84
13	Babcock	1·76
14	TecQuipment International	1·59
15	Coppee UK	1·50
16	John Laing	1·50
17	STC	1·25
18	Boving	1·17
19	AWD	1·16
20	Communication Supplies Ltd.	1·05

[1] 76 per cent. of Balfour Beatty's share (i.e. 16·01 per cent. to total ATP commitments since 1978) are accounted for by a joint venture with Cementation Ltd.

Much work under these contractors is carried out by numerous subcontractors. Information on the allocation of total ATP spending by subcontractor would be disproportionately time consuming to collect centrally.

Global Environment Facility

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much funding is given to the global environment facility per annum by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Kingdom has committed £40·3 million to the global environment facility (GEF). Of this, we contributed £4·4 million in financial year 1991-92 and £5·4 million in financial year 1992-93 as requested by the GEF. Our contributions in 1993-94 onwards will continue to depend on the requirements of the GEF for the year in question.

Know-how funds

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list in full the current disbursements under the know-how funds.

Mr. Goodlad: Disbursements for 1992-93 were as follows:

	£
Albania	40,000
Bulgaria	1,921,000
Estonia	359,000
Former Czechoslovakia	7,093,000
GDR	2,000
Hungary	5,741,000
Kazakhstan	136,000
Latvia	350,000
Lithuania	471,000
Poland	10,553,000
Romania	3,041,000
Eastern Europe and Pan Baltic regional	2,803,000
Azerbaijan	81,000
Belarus	26,000
Georgia	26,000
Russian Federation	11,201,000
Ukraine	3,093,000
Uzbekistan	267,000
Former Yugoslavia	45,000

The public expenditure provision for know-how fund countries for 1993-4 is approximately £53 million, of which approximately £23 million has been spent to date.

World Bank Information

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidance was given to the United Kingdom executive director of the World bank in respect of the vote on expanding access to World bank information; and how he voted.

Mr. Goodlad *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* We welcome the measures approved by the World bank's board of executive directors in August to increase substantially the information which the bank makes publicly available. We consider that this will help to promote a more participatory approach and thus strengthen the developmental effectiveness of bank-funded operations, as well as enhancing public awareness and understanding of the bank's role.

It is not our practice to reveal instructions to our executive director nor to disclose what position he takes in board discussions, the proceedings of which remain confidential.

HEALTH

Local Authority Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list, for each local authority for each year since 1988, in homes for elderly, elderly mentally infirm and younger physically handicapped people the number of *(a)* wardens and deputies, *(b)* other care staff and care assistants and *(c)* other staff;

(2) if she will list for each local authority, for each year since 1988, *(a)* the number of organisers and assistant organisers in the home help service and *(b)* the number of home helps;

(3) if she will list by local authority the number of social work assistants for each year since 1988;

(4) if she will list by local authority for each year since 1989, for day centres for mentally ill, elderly and physically handicapped people the number of *(a)* officers in charge, deputies, leaders and assistants, *(b)* instructors and *(c)* other staff;

(5) if she will list by local authority the number of trainee social workers for each year since 1988.

Mr. Bowis: For the numbers of whole time equivalent staff directly employed by local authority social services departments in the categories requested, I refer the hon. Member to "Local Authority Social Services Statistics: Staff of Local Authority Social Services Departments", copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Psychiatric Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for hospital psychiatric services the number of beds available and patient activity per 1,000 population for 1992-93.

Mr. Bowis: In the year ending 31 March 1993, there was an average of 47,294 beds available for use in wards caring for mentally ill patients, providing 1·0 beds per thousand population. The number of patients treated as ordinary admissions and day cases in these wards during 1992-93 was 234,000 representing 4·8 patients per thousand population. These figures are exclusive of beds available in other residential facilities.

Community Nurses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for 1992-93 for home community nursing services the number of first contacts by all community nurses by *(a)* the age group and *(b)* the number of whole-time equivalent community nurses.

Mr. Sackville: We expect the information requested for the number of first contacts by all community nurses by age group for 1992-93 to be available in April 1994. The data on the number of whole time equivalent community nurses will be available in the summer of 1994.

Zemaphyte

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether zemaphyte may be privately prescribed to NHS patients.

Dr. Mawhinney: "Zemaphyte" Chinese herbal eczema remedy was added to the list of drugs and other substances which cannot be prescribed on national health service prescription from 1 November 1993. Zemaphyte may be prescribed on a private prescription by a general practitioner. The costs of dispensing a private prescription would have to be met by the patient.

Children's Homes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each local authority for each year since 1987 for community homes for children and young persons in care the number of *(a)* child care staff, *(b)* teachers and instructors and *(c)* other staff.

Mr. Bowis: I have arranged for information on community homes for children and young persons in care for 1988 to be placed in the Library.

Occupational Health Service

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which regional health authorities and district health authorities, and which district general hospitals and NHS trusts, have their own occupational health service for their own staff.

(2) how many NHS staff, and what percentage of NHS staff, in each region, have access to an occupational health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to receive the conclusions of the research to establish the infective dose of cryptosporidium.

Mr. Sackville: Studies in animals referred to in my reply to my hon. Friend on 2 July at columns *647-48*, have now been completed. They have failed to establish the infective dose of cryptosporidium. Further studies are being carried out in the United States of America but will take at least two years to produce any results.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice and guidance her Department gives to medical officers and environmental health officers regarding the issue of notices to water suppliers requiring them to advise customers to boil drinking water which contains low levels of cryptosporidium oocyst contamination.

Mr. Sackville: Advice to boil water is given to protect public health. This is the responsibility of district health authorities and is issued by their consultants in communicable disease control.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments are contained within NHS hospitals in England.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available in the form requested. Data are collected for national health service trusts and directly managed hospitals with accident and emergency departments. An NHS trust comprising two or more hospitals, each with its own accident and emergency service, is recorded as having one accident and emergency department.

On this basis, in 1991-92, there were a total of 238 NHS trusts and directly managed hospitals with accident and emergency departments.

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments in NHS hospitals in England have been closed in the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is not available centrally.

Workplace Health

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the membership, and what are the terms of reference, of the task force established to examine activity on health promotion in the workplace.

Mr. Sackville: The task force's membership was as follows:

Mr. T. M. Hogg (Chairman)—Director of Production Control for Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd.
Mr. T. Astill—Group Director, National Pharmaceutical Association.
Dr. M. Baxendine—Director of Medical Services, United Biscuits.
Dr. P. Davies—Health and Safety Executive.
Mr. J. Cridland—Director, Environmental Affairs, CBI.
Miss S. Dymott—Head of Occupational Health Nursing Services, Esso.
Ms S. Gooch—Chair of National Standing Committee on Health and Social Policy, Royal College of Nursing.

Ms J. Greenoak—Director, Health Education Authority.
Dr. D. Miller—Consultant Occupational Physician.
Dr. M. O'Brien—President of Faculty of Public Health Medicine.
Mrs. R. Pengelly—Federation of Small Businesses.
Ms I. Sharp—Director, National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention.
Ms S. Veale—Assistant Secretary, Equality and Social Policy TUC
Dr. D. Wright—Chief Medical Officer, British Petroleum plc and Dean of the Faculty of Occupational Health Medicine.

The Departments of Health and Employment were represented. Dr. R. Smith, chairman of the Wellness Forum, participated as an observer.

The task force's terms of reference were:

"To review and assess past and current workplace activity and to advise on the development of health promotion in the workplace covering the five key areas of 'The Health of the Nation' White Paper, including health promotion campaigns and materials which can be used in the workplace, to provide regular reports to the Wider Health Working Group, including good practice, gaps in provision, and matters requiring attention."

The task force reported to the wider health working group in September, and copies of its report are available in the library. As recommended, a small steering group is being convened to take forward further work in this area.

District Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list in rank order the district health authorities which are currently running at *(a)* a deficit and *(b)* a surplus.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is collected only by regional health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairmen of the regional health authorities for details.

Hospital Parking

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she intends to issue to hospitals on charging *(a)* visitors and patients and *(b)* staff, for parking within hospital grounds.

Mr. Sackville: The question of charging for parking within hospitals grounds is for local determination in the light of local circumstances. We have no plans to issue guidance.

Royal Sussex County Hospital

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of the review which enabled the Brighton health commissioners to determine a zero growth rate in health care demands for the Royal Sussex county hospital when redevelopment is completed.

Mr. Sackville: The allocation of funds to East Sussex health authority is a matter for South East Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Peter Barker, chairman of the regional health authority for details.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide current staffing figures for the Brighton Health Care NHS trust and projected staffing figures at the Royal Sussex County hospital when reconstruction is complete.

Dr. Mawhinney: Brighton health care national health service trust currently employs approximately 4,500 staff. Future employment plans at the trust is a matter for the board, the chairman of which is Mr. John Spiers.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what part the planned expansion of the Nuffield Sussex trust hospital has played in the revision of bed space demands at the Royal Sussex county hospital.

Mr. Sackville: The planned provision of health services from the Royal Sussex county hospital is a matter for Brighton health care national health service trust and East Sussex health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Spiers, chairman of the trust for details.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide details of the present pattern of bed usage within the Brighton health care NHS trust and the proposed pattern of use when the reconstruction of the Royal Sussex county hospital is complete.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Dental Charges

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount raised from all charges on NHS dental services.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1992-93 patient charge income from the general dental services was £394·8 million, net of refunds to patients. Information is not available centrally on the small amount of income raised by the limited range of patient charges applicable in the community and hospital dental services.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much would be raised if the amount paid for a course of NHS dental treatment by a patient not exempt from charges was raised from 80 per cent. of the cost of treatment to *(a)* 85 per cent., *(b)* 90 per cent., *(c)* 95 per cent. and *(d)* 100 per cent.

Dr. Mawhinney: Each additional 5 per cent. increase in the rate of the proportional charge would raise between £20 million and £25 million. This estimate is made on the assumption that there is no change in the demand for or supply of dental treatment under the general dental services.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the total annual saving to the Exchequer of removing the exemption for pregnant women and nursing mothers from dental examination and treatment charges.

Dr. Mawhinney: Some £23 million in 1992-93.

Abortions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women having terminations of pregnancies in non-NHS hospitals were charged for the procedure in the last year for which figures are available; and what was the average charge levied.

Mr. Sackville: Of the total 179,522 abortions in 1991, 84,442—47 per cent—were carried out under the national health service, either directly in NHS hospitals or under arrangements between certain NHS authorities and the private sector. A total of 95,080 were performed on a private fee paying basis.

Information on fees charged by private clinics is supplied to the Department on an in confidence basis. The hon. Member may wish to approach individual approved places direct about the level of their fees.

Prescriptions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give for each year since 1988 the change in numbers of items prescribed resulting from changes to the limited list.

Dr. Mawhinney: The total number of prescriptions dispensed in each of the years from 1988 is shown in the table. It is not possible to isolate the effect of the selected list scheme from the other factors which have an influence on the number of national health service prescriptions dispensed each year.

Number of prescriptions—England

Year	*Number (million)*
1988	375·5
1989	383·5
1990	394·8
[1]1991	413·9
[2]1991	406·5
1992	425·1

[1] 1988 to 1991 (a) are based on fees. They cover prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration.
[2] 1991 (b) to 1992 data are from the new prescription cost analysis system based on items and have the same coverage as above.

Health Service Reform

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role was played by the Royal College of Nursing and other royal colleges in establishing the clinical standards advisory group; and what assessment he has made of the contribution of this group to the debate on health service reform.

Mr. Sackville: The medical and nursing royal colleges were consulted on and fully supported the establishment of the clinical standards advisory group—CSAG—in 1991. All of the group's appointed members are nominated by the medical and nursing royal colleges in the manner prescribed by the CSAG Regulations (1991 No. 578). The group's first reports, on access to and availability of specialist services published in July, copies of which are available in the Library, made a positive and constructive contribution to discussions on how best to maintain and raise standards of clinical care for national health service patients. The group has just submitted its second report, on services for people with diabetes, which the United Kingdom Health Ministers will consider carefully and publish with their response early next year.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are the latest estimated figures of her Department for the numbers of children involved in child prostitution;

(2) what measures are being taken by her Department to deal with the problems of child prostitution.

Mr. Bowis: My Department does not have central figures to estimate the numbers of children involved in child prostitution. I understand that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department collects figures on the number of children cautioned or proceeded against for soliciting offences. Local authorities social services have a duty under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to investigate where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering from or is likely to suffer significant harm and this would include information received suggesting a child may need protection from child prostitution. The Government's guidance, "Working Together", emphasises that the investigative process should involve gathering information from other key professionals and liaising with other investigating agencies such as the police. Any action taken to protect the child should be taken in collaboration with all the other agencies involved.

Royal Free Hospital

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to make a decision about the future of the renal transplant unit at the Royal Free hospital.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government are taking the important advice of the specialty reviews into account in their review of hospital services in London.

The issues are complex but it is our intention to make some initial announcements shortly.

Surgery Costs

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of NHS procedures for *(a)* total hip replacement, *(b)* total knee replacement, *(c)* coronary artery bypass grafting, *(d)* mitral-aortic valve replacement, *(e)* hernia repair, *(f)* stripping of varicose veins, *(g)* hysterectomy, *(h)* tonsillectomy, *(i)* cataract extraction and lens implant, *(j)* knee replacement, *(k)* heart transplant, *(l)* heart/lung transplant and *(m)* surgery for an enlarged prostate.

Mr. Sackville: The information available is shown in the table. All estimates of average cost are at 1991-92 prices and inclusive of an allowance for capital charges. Estimates are not available for total knee replacement, stripping of varicose veins, knee replacement, heart/lung transplant and surgery for an enlarged prostate.

NHS procedure	*Estimated average cost in £s (1991-92 prices)*
Total hip replacement	3,810
Coronary artery bypass grafting	5,870
Heart valve replacement	8,800
Inguinal hernia	1,140
Hysterectomy	2,050
Tonsillectomy	590
Cataract extraction	1,230
Heart transplant	26,400

General Practitioners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in England received gross payments in excess of £200,000 in each year since 1991-92.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether travel expenses for employees of national health service trusts, incurred through attending training sessions, should be paid by the employing trust.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for the employing trust.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total accumulated receipts of the NHS trusts that have achieved a 6 per cent. return on assets.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service trusts do not have accumulated receipts. They do, however, have accumulated reserves which represent the surpluses retained in the trusts after interest and dividends. The total net accumulated income and expenditure reserves of all NHS trusts at 31 March 1993 was £134,510,000.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what connections the outgoing chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust had with any political party;

(2) what are the party political affiliations of chairs of trusts and regional health authorities and district health authorities at present.

Dr. Mawhinney: We do not seek details on political affiliation. People are appointed for their personal qualities, and for the skills they bring to the leadership and strategic direction of the national health service.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to dismiss the chairman and chief executives of *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts whose authorities fail regularly to meet the standards of the patients charter.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

We expect the corporate governance task force to set out new definitions of the functions of chairmen and non-executive directors and it will be against these definitions that their performance will be judged. The performance of chief executives of national health service authorities and trusts is a matter for the chairman and non-executive directors working together.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the salary of the chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust.

Dr. Mawhinney: The remuneration of the chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust is £19,285 per year.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the grounds for not renewing the contract from 30 November of the chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust; when he was informed that his contract would not be renewed; and on what basis he was appointed as chairman of the trust two years ago.

Dr. Mawhinney: The chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust was appointed for a two year term of office which expired on 30 November 1993.

In considering whether to offer a further term, we sought advice from the national health service management executive outpost director and the regional health authority chairman. We decided, after very careful consideration of a variety of factors which govern these matters, that a change in the leadership of the trust was necessary.

I wrote to the chairman of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust on 5 November informing him of my decision.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the current official listed business addresses of each *(a)* NHS hospital trust and *(b)* general practitioner fund holding practice within (i) the Trent regional health authority and (ii) Yorkshire regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: A list of addresses of national health service trusts in Trent and Yorkshire regions will be placed in the Library. The information on general practitioner fundholding practices is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Michael Carlisle and Sir Bryan Askew, the chairmen of the Trent and Yorkshire regional health authorities for details.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ask all existing chairmen and non-executive directors of health authorities and NHS trusts if they would be willing to continue in office without payment other than loss of earnings and expenses.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reasons were given for the chief executive of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust leaving in February 1992.

Dr. Mawhinney: This is a matter for the board chairman and non-executive directors of the Royal Cornwall hospital trust. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. John Williams, vice chairman of the trust and acting chairman, for details.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue advice to NHS trusts to prevent trusts seeking contracts by offering faster treatment for patients covered by these contracts.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance has already been issued jointly by the Department and the Joint Consultants Committee which clearly states that provider units should not offer contracts to one purchaser which would disadvantage the patients of another purchaser.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if Sir James Ackers *(a)* resigned, *(b)* was asked to resign or *(c)* was dismissed from the chairmanship of West Midlands regional health authority;

(2) what were her reasons for paying Sir James Ackers £10,000 under paragraph 9(3) of schedule 5 to the National Health Service Act 1977.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sir James Ackers resigned from the position of chairman of West Midlands regional health authority on 8 January 1993.

The decision to offer a compensation payment took account of the fact that Sir James Ackers resigned from the position of chairman of the West Midlands regional health authority 18 months before his term of office was due to expire; and that in his 10 years of service considerable progress was made, particularly in carrying out many major hospital developments; waiting lists had fallen dramatically and a record number of patients had been treated.

Ambulances

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients were recorded as dead on arrival by each ambulance trust in each of the last five years;

(2) how many patients were recorded as dead on arrival by ambulance by region in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Sackville: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Referrals

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to hold centrally records in respect of *(a)* regional health authorities and *(b)* district health authorities on the number of extra-contractual referrals that they have refused; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: There are no plans to collect this information centrally.

Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of male and female adult cancer patients have been included in clinical treatment trials in the NHS in the last available year;

(2) if she will give the percentage of male and female child cancer patients who have been included in clinical treatment trials in the NHS in the last available year.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Coronary Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were turned away from coronary care units, in the last recorded year, through lack of space.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Any hospital that takes acute admissions will have coronary care facilities, and if a patient needing those facilities cannot be accommodated in a coronary care unit for any reason they will normally be accommodated in an acute medical ward where they will receive the same treatment and care as they would in a coronary care unit.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many coronary care unit beds there were in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not routinely collected centrally. Figures based on the latest information available indicated that in 1991 there were at least 879 coronary care beds and 356 high dependency beds in England.

GPs (Night Visits)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current fee payable to a general practitioner when making a night visit between the hours of 10 pm and 8 am.

Dr. Mawhinney: The higher night visit fee, payable where a visit is made by the patient's own general practitioner, a GP from the patient's practice, or by a GP from a small rota of not more than 10 GPs, is £46·65; the lower night visit fee, payable for all other visits, is £15·55.

Smoking

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the effect on the level of cigarette consumption of the price of cigarettes.

Mr. Sackville: Increases in price have been shown to decrease consumption, though by a proportionately smaller amount. A 10 per cent. increase in price, for example, would be expected to lead to a reduction in consumption in the range of 3 per cent. to 6 per cent.

General Practitioner Fundholders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given to regions concerning their plans for the funding allocations for general practitioner fundholders.

Dr. Mawhinney: Guidance on setting general practitioner fundholder budgets is given in EL(93)93, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with North West Thames regional health authority over its proposed adjustment to the funding allocation for fundholding general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: All regional health authorities set general practitioner fund-holder budgets within the framework set out in EL(93)93, which requires them to take account of significant local factors. Copies of EL(93)93 are available in the Library.

Private Ambulance Operators

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue a code of practice for private ambulance operators.

Mr. Sackville: A code of practice for private ambulance operators has been published today. Copies will be placed in the Library. The code sets out minimum standards in a range of important operational areas including staff selection and training, vehicles, equipment and telecommunications. It will provide valuable guidance for purchasers in judging the quality of potential providers against the high standards set by national health service ambulance services, as well as giving private providers clear indicators of the standard of service acceptable to the national health service.

National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will establish a task force of senior civil servants to consider the workings of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: No.

Hospital Patients

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per day for each patient in *(a)* health authority-run hospitals and *(b)* national health service trust hospitals; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The cost per day for each patient in directly managed units and national health service trust hospitals in 1991-92 was £149·87 and £168·89 respectively. The figures are based on patients using a bed and include day cases. Direct comparisons are not meaningful since a large proportion of first wave trust hospitals were acute units whose costs would be greater than directly managed units with long-stay facilities.

Pensioners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost to public funds of each person of pensionable age cared for in *(a)* a NHS hospital, *(b)* a registered nursing home and *(c)* a registered residential care home; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: Information relating to the costs of hospital care is not available by age group. Information concerning financial support for residents who entered registered nursing and residential care homes prior to April 1993 is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. No information is as yet available centrally on the situation since April 1993 under the new community care arrangements.

Asthma (Pollution)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Government's assessment of the relationship between air pollution and asthma.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is advised on the effects on health of air pollutants by two independent expert committees, the Advisory Group on the Medical Aspects of Air Pollution Episodes—MAAPE—and the Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants—COMEAP. Asthma is an ill-understood disease. The role of the interactions of genetic and environmental factors, such as exposure to vehicle exhaust emissions and allergens, in triggering off asthma attacks remains unclear. Earlier this year, therefore, a sub-group of COMEAP was established, specifically to advise on the link between exposure to air pollutants and asthma. The first meeting of this sub-group took place in June. A report of its findings will be published and placed in the Library.

Hypothermia

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths were recorded with a reference to hypothermia in each year since 1985.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Number of deaths with hypothermia as the underlying cause of death and with any mention of hypothermia on the death certificate, England and Wales, 1985-1992

	Underlying cause	*Mentions*
1985	440	827
1986	437	837
1987	269	559
1988	194	440
1989	166	372
1990	152	368
1991	249	534
1992	149	362

Note:

Neonatal deaths for 1986 to 1992 are included in the mentions but not in the underlying cause of death (neonatal deaths were not given an underlying cause of death from 1 January 1986 onwards).

Unemployment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she has undertaken to establish the impact of unemployment on health.

Mr. Sackville: Details of recent research are included in the Office of Health Economics briefing number 29 published in July 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

Suicides

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of adult suicides in 1992; and how many of these were unemployed.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the number of people who have committed suicide and who were unemployed is not available centrally. At death registration informants are asked for last occupation rather than employment status of the deceased.

The table shows adult suicide deaths—ICD[1] E950-E959—by sex for England and Wales for 1992.

Data for 1992 are provisional.

1992	*18+*
Males	3,026
Females	895

[1] International Classification of Disease code ninth revision.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Products

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of places on the Codex Alimentarius Commission are currently occupied by representatives of commercial companies operating businesses related to the supply, processing and sale of agricultural products and derivatives; and what measures are proposed to limit the influence of companies operating businesses related to the supply, processing and sales of agricultural products and derivatives on the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Mr. Soames: The Codex Alimentarius is an inter-governmental body and thus the decisions reached

are those reached by Governments. Generally speaking, official representation at meetings is thus by Government officials. There are, however, no rules on the composition of delegations from countries. Normally trade and consumer representatives are present at Codex meetings either as advisers in national delegations, at the invitation of the Government concerned, or as observers representing international trade or consumer organisations that have been recognised by Codex.

I see no need to limit the influence of trade, or consumer representation on matters considered at Codex meetings.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are proposed to ensure an increased representation by independent consumer, environment and public health representatives at full meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Commission; and if she will list those matters which are currently directly determined by *(a)* the Government of the United Kingdom and *(b)* the official institutions of the European Union which will no longer be determined by these institutions under the terms of the sanitary and hypto-sanitary measures in the current draft of the GATT agreement.

Mr. Soames: Representation at Codex meetings by independent consumer, environment and public health representatives is already possible, at their own expense, and I know of no measures intended to increase this.

The GATT agreement will bring with it a subsidiary agreement—the sanitary and phytosanitary agreement—whereby the standards agreed by Codex will be regarded as the international norm in cases of trade disputes that come forward for adjudication under GATT dispute settlement procedures. Nevertheless, individual countries, and the European Union, would still be free to set their own standards. In the event of a trade dispute, countries imposing more rigorous standards would have to demonstrate that they were justified scientifically.

Association of Drainage Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether her Department's officials who attended the annual conference of the Association of Drainage Authorities on 10 November will pass on the information they gained to the Department of the Environment; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: There is no need to do so as the matters raised at the annual conference come within the responsibilities of my right hon. Friends the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Wales.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the current designated disposal sites for sewage sludge dumping off the Yorkshire coast; how often these sites are reviewed; and if a map showing these sites can be *(a)* placed in the Library and *(b)* sent to the hon. Member.

Mr. Jack: The designated site off the Yorkshire coast for the dumping of sewage sludge is some 12 miles east of Spurn Head in an area bounded by the co-ordinates:

53° 35·00′ N 0° 30·00′ E
53° 35·00′ N 0° 35·00′ E
53° 30·00′ N 0° 35·35′ E
53° 30·00′ N 0° 30·00′ E

The site is located in deep water and its suitability for sewage sludge disposal is kept under continuous review in the light of the results of the regular monitoring programme. The monitoring results are published in the Ministry's aquatic environment monitoring report series. In March 1990 the Government announced that the disposal of sewage sludge at sea would cease at the end of 1998.

I have arranged for a chart showing the location of the disposal site to be placed in the Library and for a copy of this chart and the fourth report of the Marine Pollution Monitoring Management Group's Co-ordinating Group on Monitoring of Sewage Sludge Disposal Sites to be sent to the hon. Member.

Bomb Proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Jack: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits abroad she has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Jack: During 1993, the Minister and her predecessor made a total of 19 visits abroad. Their total travel and hotel costs amount to £24,758. Eleven visits were to EC Councils of Ministers; the remaining eight were in support of bilateral relations and trade promotion.

Cattle Imports

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action she is taking to ensure the maintenance of the highest health controls on the importation of cattle from abroad; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Ministry is taking a number of measures designed to help prevent the introduction and spread of disease by imported cattle:

- we have instigated 24-hour periods of blanket surveillance at all south and east coast ports which cover exports as well as imports;
- we are targeting consignments where there is a particular animal health disease risk with up to 100 per cent. checks;
- we gave stepped up checks at points of destination to between 50 and 60 per cent. on average.

Where concerns have been greatest the following measures have been taken:

- following imports earlier this year of warbled cattle from France we have introduced a 100 per cent. check on all imported cattle from France. Diseased animals will be re-exported at the owner's expense;
- following imports last year of foot and mouth disease sero-positive cattle from eastern Europe, the European Community has not instituted a pre-export testing requirement on all cattle originating from eastern Europe; as an additional safeguard we are conducting 100 per cent. testing of all cattle imported from these countries;

it is possible but not yet proven that the recent outbreak of brucellosis in Wales was associated with an imported animal. Our investigations are continuing. In the meantime, we are stepping up our checking at destination on cattle from France and the Netherlands.

We are taking other steps which should cut down the risk of importing diseases in the future.

we raise with the member states concerned and the Commission disease problems on each occasion they arise. We also monitor very closely the Commission's role in enforcing proper implementation of Community animal health rules in other member states;

we are urging the Community to harmonise standards of veterinary certification based on the principles drawn up by the Federation of Veterinarians in Europe and in particular that vets should certify only where they have personal knowledge of the relevant facts.

Dumping at Sea

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further steps she envisages to tackle nuclear waste dumping at sea arising out of the London convention meeting in November of the International Maritime Organisation; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The consultative meeting of the London convention held on 8-12 November agreed to introduce a ban on the disposal of radioactive waste at sea. The United Kingdom abstained from the vote. We are currently considering the implications of the convention's decision on this matter, but we have no immediate plans to carry out sea dumping of radioactive waste.

Animal Feedingstuffs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements she has for obtaining independent expert advice on the safety of animal feedingstuffs.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I have been giving further thought to the present arrangements following the recommendation last year from the expert group on animal feedingstuffs for a standing advisory committee to have an overview of feedingstuffs safety issues.

Existing committees—the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee, the advisory committee on the microbiological safety of food, and the veterinary products committee—are clearly well equipped to advise on major aspects of the subject. Beyond this, however, there is a need, identified by the expert group, to consider new developments concerning feed materials, manufacturing processes and feeding practices insofar as these might pose risks for human and animal health.

We have concluded that the best way of ensuring that new developments in these fields are properly assessed will be for the responsible Departments to hold regular reviews to identify any matters that may require an independent appraisal and then to obtain whatever specialist advice is needed to evaluate the specific isue. Flexible arrangements on these lines will bring the most relevant expertise to bear in the least burdensome way.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has received on the subject of the hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend met representatives of the National Farmers Union, the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Ulster Farmers Union on 26 October to discuss economic conditions in the hills and uplands. Ministry officials have also had meetings with these bodies, the Farmers Union of Wales and the Country Landowners Association. In addition, my right hon. Friend and I have had correspondence with a number of hon. Members representing hill farming constituencies.

Scrapie

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what published scientific information is available concerning natural scrapie in Suffolk sheep.

Mr. Soames: I shall write to the hon. Member with a list of the information.

Offals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why specified offals excluded from the food chain in 1989 did not include bone marrow, liver and kidney.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave him on 1 November at column *34*.

Forestry Commission Land

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list, for each separate piece of land currently owned or leased by the Forestry Commission in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire *(a)* its name and *(b)* its area in hectares; and whether she will place a map in the Library which names and identifies each of these pieces of land.

Mr. Jack: The Forestry Commission manages the following areas of land in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire:

County	*Area (hectares)*
Derbyshire	3,339
Leicestershire	669
Lincolnshire	5,627
Northamptonshire	4,090

I have made arrangements for a map showing the location of the individual areas to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

The more detailed information requested on the individual areas is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sheep Dips

Mr. Fry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fishiers and Food what is the most recent advise she has received from the Veterinary Products Committee on the continued use of organophosphorous sheep dips.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The VPC has carefully and thoroughly examined all issues surrounding the use of OP dips. It has found that there is no evidence to support either a ban or suspension on the use of OP dips when used correctly. Nevertheless the Government and the VPC have to treat with the utmost seriousness any suggestion of potential harm to human health. We are therefore taking clear and positive steps, in a carefully planned and organised way, to restrict their availability. A useful analogy to our approach is that used with regard to pesticides.

The Veterinary Products Committee gave further considertion to the future licensing of organophosphorous sheep dip products at its meeting on 21 October 1993 and confirmed its report at its meeting on 25 November.

Organophosphorous sheep dips are highly effective weapons in our fight to ensure that the United Kingdom's 40 million sheep are properly protected from harmful disease, and I welcome the Veterinary Products Committee's clear advice following their meetings that the marketing of these dips can continue. Over the last eight years, there have been 529 cases of reported human ill health associated with sheep dip exposure. The Committee found that in the majority of cases where information was available the full recommended protective clothing had not been worn or properly used.

The number of reported adverse reactions must be seen in the context of over a million occasions when flocks—involving hundreds of millions of sheep—were dipped during that eight-year period. I am disappointed that, notwithstanding the publicity drive we have carried out since the Committee's report in April, many sheep dippers are still failing to take the necessary precaustions. The Committee has therefore recommended the introduction of a new certificate of competence, which would mean in future that only dippers who hold such certificates would be allowed to buy these dips.

The Government fully support this proposal. We have already begun discussions with the National Proficiency Test Council and the Agricultural Training Board about arrangements to bring in a statutory certification scheme before the next dipping season. We will be consulting interested parties shortly about plans to require dippers wishing to buy OP sheep dips to have enrolled for the NPTC certificate by 1 April 1994, and to have obtained certificates by 1 April 1995. Meanwhile, the training that would be required to obtain a certificate will be available on a voluntary basis at NPTC—approved courses from early January 1994 onwards.

I have also agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health that a panel of medical and scientific experts should be set up, as a sub-committee of the Veterinary Products Committee, to address the question of co-ordinating research into reports of long term health effects aising from exposure. Terms of reference and composition of the panel are currently being drawn up, and a further announcement giving full details will be made shortly.

The Government will also be undertaking a review to ensure that sheep dips are disposed of safely.

I am very grateful to Professor Armour for the care and depth with which he and his Committee has considered the issues and all the information put to it, and for its clear advice.

The report setting out the Veterinary Products Committee's recommendations to the Licensing Authority (Agriculture and Health Ministers), and the measures through which the Government intend to implement them, is today beikng placed in the Library of the House.

Intervention Board

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of employees, by grade, in the Intervention Board executive agency; how many at each grade are women; what steps the Intervention Board Executive Agency has taken to implement the programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity for women in the civil service, announced by the Minister for the Civil Service in 1992; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the action plan drawn up by the Intervention Board for implementing the programme in that agency.

Mrs. Shephard: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to the Intervention Board executive agency and I have asked the chief executive to reply to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of employees, by grade, in the Intervention Board executive agency; how many at each grade are of ethnic minority origin; what steps the Intervention Board executive agency has taken to implement the programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity for people of ethnic minority origin, announced by the Minister for the Civil Service on 22 May 1990; and if she will place in the Library a copy of the action plan drawn up by the intervention board for implementing the programme in that agency.

Mrs. Shephard: Responsibility for this matter is delegated to the Intervention Board executive agency and I have asked the chief executive to reply to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Letter from G. Stapleton to Mr. Frank Field, dated 1 December 1993:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to the Parliamentary Questions on the Equal Opportunities Programmes for Action which appeared under your name on the Notice of Questions given on 23 November. The information you requested is set out below and in the enclosed annexes, together with explanations of the general background.

Women in the Civil Service

Enclosed at Annex I is a list of the total number of employees in the Agency, by grade, showing separately the number of women in each grade. Following the introduction of the Programme for Action in 1992 the Agency drew up its Action Plan, a copy of which is at Annex II. We are fully committed to equal opportunities with the aim of implementing those recommendations within the Programme for Action which are Applicable to the agency.

The Intervention Board has a policy on flexible working patterns which includes staff who work part-time but only during school term time, as well as the more usual part-time arrangements which apply throughout the year. Currently about 15% of the staff of the Agency are part-time employees. There are also some examples of job sharing within the Agency and the arrangements are being examined to identify other posts to which this flexibility could apply. Career breaks are granted to staff in appropriate circumstances to meet their domestic commitments and proposals have been put to our Trade Union Side to formalise this scheme. The Agency has agreed to take the lead on Child Care on the co-ordinating body for Civil Service departments and agencies within the Reading area and is liaising with the Thames Valley Training and Enterprise Council in order to provide a child

care information service. For the 1993 summer holiday, places were offered for the children of staff on a local play scheme. Opportunities for the provision of future schemes is being examined.

Recruitment and promotion boards wherever possible include at least one woman member and the Agency's Equal Opportunities Policy is publicised to job applicants and staff. Sexual Harassment Contact Officers have received specialist training and are available to counsel staff. The Agency's training strategy takes account of the needs of women and includes courses directed specifically towards women. In-house training courses have also been re-organised on a flexible basis to suit the needs of part-time members of staff.

It is encouraging to see that the proportion of women in the management grades has steadily increased in recent years; at Executive Officer level women now represent just under 50% of the grade total; at Higher Executive Officer level women account for just under 40%; and at Senior Executive Officer level just over 20%. If this trend continues, as we are confident it will with the assistance of our Equal Opportunities Policy, it augurs well for the achievement of the Agency's aims. However, more needs to be done and the Agency team dealing with Equal Opportunities Policy is being strengthened.

Ethnic Minority Issues in the Civil Service

Attached at Annex III is a list containing the total number of employees by grade with an estimation of those of ethnic minority origin. The details given in Annex III were obtained from an exercise undertaken solely for the purpose of this reply. However, dicussions have been under way over the last 2-3 months with the local Trades Union Side on the details of an ethnic monitoring survey of all staff in the Agency. This survey will be underpinned by a Code of Practice governing access to the data and its confidentiality.

Since the Programme for Action for People of Ethnic Minority Origin was announced in 1990 steps have been taken to ensure that all staff are aware of the Agency's commitment to equality of opportunity. Managers in particular are made aware of the requirement to operate equal opportunities in such matters as staff reporting and promotion, and of their responsibilities to develop all staff. All training avoids the use of racial stereotypes. Once the Code of Practice has been agreed and the questionnaires issued and returned we will be able to monitor more closely the effectiveness of the Agency's commitment to the Programme of Action including the publication of its Action Plan on race which is currently under preparation.

Since the publication of the Programme for Action the Agency has not had any grievance raised concerning discrimination or harassment on the grounds of race and has aimed to ensure that all personnel policies seek to prevent discrimination on these grounds. The publication of the Agency's Departmental Action Plan will help to reinforce these policies and we are confident that they will improve the Ethnic Minority representation more widely throughout the Agency's management grades. The strengthening of the Agency's Equal Opportunities team will enable the Agency to press ahead with the implementation of the Departmental Action Plan.

Annex I
Total number of employees within the agency as at 31 October 1993 indicating number of women by grade

Grade	*Grade Total*[1]	*Number of women by grade*[1]
3	1	—
5	5	—
6	4	—
7	21	1
SEO	48	10
HEO	116	45
EO	207	100
AO	453	302
AA	112	71
SGB1	9	6
SGB2	26	12
SUTLX	1	1
SPTLX	5	3
CTM	1	1
TM	2	2
TYP	22	22
PS	14	14
ADAS1	1	—
ADAS2	1	—
Total	1,049	590

[1] Includes permanent and casual employees.

ANNEX II

Intervention Board—Executive Agency: 1993 Departmental Action Plan for Women

Introduction

1. The Intervention Board is a medium size Agency, firmly committed to a strong, sound policy of equal opportunity for women, covering current staff, potential recruits and future employees.

2. The Agency's basic aim is to operate the Common Agricultural Policy Guarantee Section within the United Kingdom, as efficiently and effectively as possible in accordance with policies laid down by Agriculture Ministers.

3. The Agency has no responsibility for public appointments and the activities, other than direct appointment of staff, do not offer the opportunity of influencing women's issues. The activities set out in this plan therefore relate solely to the employment of women by the Agency and their career development.

Issues for Women

4. The Agency's approach is based on central guide-lines issued by the Cabinet Office's (OPSS) 'A Programme for Action to Achieve Equality of Opportunity for Women in the Civil Service', (first introduced in 1984 and revised in 1992).

5. The Agency has reviewed its progress in meeting aims of the 1984 programme and has now set out challenging but achievable targets for future years in line with the methodology suggested by the Opportunity 2000 Campaign which is supported by the OPSS and the revised directions issued in March 1992. The Agency, as with other smaller Government bodies, belongs to the Opportunity 2000 Campaign by virtue of the Cabinet Office "umbrella" subscription.

6. There is already a well established framework of existing procedures in the Agency, which is being strengthened to demonstrate the Agency's commitment to equal opportunities for women on merit.

7. Monitoring and, where appropriate, procedures will be strengthened which will:

(a) seek to attract a greater number of women job applicants;
(b) ensure that recruiting procedures do not discriminate against women;
(c) encourage women to enhance their career prospects through appropriate training;
(d) ensure that all women employees are given opportunities to develop their job and career prospects;
(e) monitor the annual staff reporting and performance pay awards to ensure that equal opportunity practices are followed for women;
(f) ensure that there is no discrimination against women at the Agency's promotion boards;
(g) run pro-active policies to retain women staff and to encourage their return after career breaks.

8. The Agency has established within the framework of these main commitments, individual targets to achieve further progress for the Agency's women staff. Some of the targets are short term to be achieved within 6 to 12 months, others intermediate within 2 to 5 years, and the balance within 5 to 8 years.

9. The Agency is headed by a Chief Executive at Grade 3. There is currently a balance of women in posts up to and including Executive Officer level which represents the national average of women in the economically active proportion of the population. Although there is no woman officer above Grade 7 level, we have already enhanced the numbers in our middle management grades and intend to improve the balance by grade profile in future years subject to individuals' merit.

10. The computer Personnel Project, currently being developed, will, when in place, enhance monitoring and the availability of statistics on a gender basis.

11. The Agency has for several years, pioneered and operated schemes for part time working including permanent term time only posts, with varied and flexible working patterns, including job sharing. These have enabled women staff to return to work despite family commitments as well as new staff to be attracted to its employ.

12. Some women in the Agency have already taken advantage of the 'Women Only' training courses run by the Civil Service College, and the Industrial Society.

13. A policy statement and complaints procedure for Sexual Harassment, was published in February 1990 and is currently being updated. A female Sexual Harassment Officer for women is already in place and a male counterpart will be appointed shortly.

14. Wherever possible internal promotion and external recruitment boards have suitably qualified women represented.

Priorities for action

15. Although the Agency has a very good record as an employer of women, it considers that there is still more to achieve, in particular, in their representation at middle and senior management grades. Its intentions to meet this and other commitments are set out in the following priorities to be met by 31 March 1993:

(a) to endorse the equal opportunities statement in all recruitment advertisements;
(b) to set up more effect gender monitoring on recruitment;
(c) to improve gender monitoring statistics on training (and career progression);

16. The following have been identified as priorities to be met by 30 June 1993:

(a) to agree a training strategy for women to enhance their career prospects;
(b) to decide on a possible biennial conference for women in the Agency;
(c) to agree procedures for monitoring Staff Reporting overall assessments by gender;
(d) to implement a Career Break Scheme;
(e) to take a decision on whether child care facilities can be provided.

17. The Agency has continuing commitments:

(a) to review separate internal training schemes for part-time and term-time staff where appropriate and to enhance the availability generally of all training in the Agency for these staff;
(b) to promote, where appropriate, "positive action" training for women only on both internal and external courses;
(c) to establish career progression statistics by gender;
(d) to keep under consideration with its line managers all posts that may prove suitable for varied work patterns;
(e) to ensure that its "in house" magazines encourage articles and features from women.

Review and publication of results

18. Progress toward the set targets on equal opportunities will be continuously monitored, and existing procedures will be reviewed and updated. The staff will be notified by means of Office Notices.

21 December 1992.

Annex III

Total number of employees within the agency as at 31 October 1993 with estimated number of ethnic minority staff by grade

Grade	*Grade total*[1]	*Estimated number of ethnic minority staff by grade*[1]
3	1	—
5	5	—
6	4	—
7	21	—
SBO	48	—
HEO	116	1
EO	207	6
AO	453	43
AA	112	14
SGB1	9	1
SGB2	26	1
SUTLX	1	—
SPTLX	5	—
CTM	1	—
TM	2	—
TYP	22	2
PS	14	1
ADAS1	1	—
ADAS2	1	—
Total	1,049	69

[1] Includes both permanent and casual employees.

Bananas

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consultation she has had with the chairman of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce in relation to the issuing of banana import licences in the present year; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what consultation she has had with representatives of the banana importing trade in relation to potential conflict of interest between the functions of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce in issuing licences for import of bananas and the position of the chairman of the board being also chairman and chief executive of Fyffes.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 26 November 1993]:* When the EC banana regime was established, arrangements were put in place to avoid the possibility of any conflict of interest arising from the chairman of the Intervention Board also being chairman and chief executive of Fyffes. The chairman is not, in any case, involved in the day-to-day running of the agency. The board's officials have issued licences to import bananas into the European Community in the present year entirely in accordance with the provisions of Council Regulation 404/93 and Commission Regulations 1442/93 and 1443/93 with this in mind, my right hon. Friend has had no need for consultations with the chairman of the board, nor with representatives of the banana importing trade on this matter.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Allowances

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was his original estimate of the number of people who would be in employment as a result of the disability working allowance once the scheme was fully operational; what is the current figure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The original estimate that about 50,000 people might be entitled to DWA was based on surveys of disabled people carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The current case load is 3,176. New

benefits can, of course, be expected to take a period of years to become established and so the original estimate has not been revised.

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what special rules for the terminally ill still apply for claimants of disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: Special arrangements ensure that people with a limited life expectancy of six months or less are awarded the highest rate of the care component of disability living allowance, or the higher rate of attendance allowance, whether or not they have care needs, and without having to serve a qualifying period. Such claims are handled under special administrative procedures to ensure a speedy response.

It is also possible for a third party to make a claim on behalf of the terminally ill person, with or without that person's knowledge.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons over the age of 65 years claim both mobility component disability living allowance and care component disability living allowance or mobility component disability living allowance and attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available because the age of the claimant is not recorded unless the claim is successful.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many persons over the age of 65 years are in receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance care component;

(2) how many persons over the age of 80 years are in receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance care component;

(3) how many persons over 65 years receive mobility component disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that on 31 March 1993 there were 929,000 people over the age of 65 getting the care component of disability living allowance or attendance allowance; of these, 507,000 were over 80 years of age. We also estimate that 228,000 people over the age of 65 were getting the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Note: For attendance allowance the source to determine age is a 1 per cent. sample used to adjust and apportion the AA pay load by age. For disability living allowance the source is a 5 per cent. sample.

State Earnings-related Pensions Scheme

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of SERPS.

Mr. Hague: The Government are committed to ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to make provision for their retirement in addition to the basic state pension. SERPs is one of several options available to people. Some 10 million people are contracted out of SERPs through occupational pension schemes; and an additional 5 million people have chosen to contract out of SERPs through personal pensions. The Government want to encourage personal responsibility in the provision of pensions, and we are considering ways of ensuring that personal pensions remains attractive across the age range.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals who contracted out of SERPs during the last year for which figures are available had earnings whch when expressed as a fraction of national average earnings were *(a)* less than 50 per cent., *(b)* 50 to 99 per cent., *(c)* 100 to 149 per cent. and *(d)* 150 per cent. or more.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested. Information on the earnings of members of contracted out occupational schemes expressed as a percentage of national average earnings, as at the end of 1991-92, is shown in the table. Such information as is available on the earnings of individuals contracted out of SERPs by virtue of appropriate personal pensions is contained in "Social Security Statistics 1993", a copy of which is in the Library.

Earnings band	*Number of employees in contracted-out employment (000s)*
Less than 50 per cent. of national average earnings	360
Between 50 and 99 per cent. of national average earnings	2,620
Between 100 and 149 per cent. of national average earnings	3,270
Over 150 per cent. of national average earnings	3,110

Notes:

1. Data derived from Inland Revenue statistics. It relates to the whole of the United Kingdom.
2. The figures are based on an analysis of a 1 per cent. sample of all end-of-year PAYE returns submitted to the Inland Revenue by employers. Each relates to a single employment.
3. The definition of national average earnings for this purpose is calculated from the sample using the amount of pay and an estimate of the length of employment covered by each return, and includes both part-time and full-time employment.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security where is the weather station whose recordings trigger payments to the residents of Balmoral and Braemar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: A list of all weather stations and the post-coded areas which they cover is contained in the social fund cold weather payments general regulations, copies of which are in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Child Support Agency will instigate a system of credits so that cross-subsidies from parents are taken fully into account; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The formula which the Child Support Agency uses to assess maintenance contains a protected income provision which takes account of the fact that a parent is supporting stepchildren, and of whether or not maintenance is paid for those children.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what current review the Child Support Agency is undertaking in respect of maintenance payments in clean-break divorces where arrangements have been made by courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Any review of child support policy is a matter for Ministers, not the Child Support Agency. As with any new policy, the improved arrangements for child maintenance are being carefully monitored. If, in the light of experience, the system can be made even better, changes will be considered.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for changing the 21-hour rule; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The 21-hour rule enables unemployed claimants in receipt of income support to follow part-time education and training courses while continuing their search for work. We have no plans to change this rule.

Absent Fathers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women have been asked to date to name an absent father at benefit offices in the Doncaster area; how many have demurred; how many have had their benefit deducted as a penalty; and if he will show in his answer from what benefit the deduction was made.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. Hepplewhite to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 30 November 1993:

I have been asked to reply to your Question to the Secretary of State asking how many women have been asked to name an absent father at benefit offices in the Doncaster area; how many have demurred; how many have had their benefit deducted as a penalty; and the benefit from which deductions were made.

Between 5 April and 31 October 1993, 137 parents with care of children were interviewed in connection with their applications for child maintenance in the Doncaster area; 4 declined without good cause to co-operate with the Agency in arranging maintenance. As yet no Reduced Benefit Directions have been implemented in the area.

Fuel Bills

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help he is proposing to give householders in need in order to meet their fuel bills; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 30 November 1993.

Rent Allowances

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest figures for the cost of rent allowances in respect of private tenancies.

Mr. Burt: The estimated expenditure on rent allowances for 1993-94 is £3,254 million.

Notes: The source of this information is the 1993 departmental report, published in February 1993. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Funeral Grants

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review the inequalities between men and women in the provision of funeral grants.

Mr. Scott: There is no such inequality.

Income Support

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of eligible persons in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who do not claim income support; what means are being used to improve the take-up rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Take-up figures for income support are not available on a regional or local basis. Estimates for the take-up of income-related benefits for Great Britain were published in January 1993 in "Income Related Benefit Estimates of Take-up for 1989" and showed that 87 per cent. of available income support was being received by 75 per cent. of those eligible to claim it.

Social security legislation puts the onus of claiming benefit on individuals who may decide, for various reasons, not to take up benefit entitlement. The Department's role is to ensure that people are in a position to make informed choices.

In this respect, the Benefits Agency are responsible for a wide range of initiatives to increase awareness of entitlement: Exhibitions talks, liaison with citizens advice bureaux, operation of multilingual freelines, participation in local radio phone-ins and now the one-stop initiative.

Payment Recovery

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what studies are available to indicate the effect DSS recovery procedures may have on legal settlements of compensation and associated civil actions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I am not aware of any such studies.

Housing Benefit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current estimate of eligible households in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland which do not take up housing benefit; what means are used in order to improve the take-up rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Take up figures for housing benefit are not available on a regional basis. Estimates of the take up of income related benefits for Great Britain were published in "Income Related Benefit Estimates of Take-up in 1989" in January this year, a copy of which is in the Library. These figures show that 91 per cent. of available housing benefit was being received by 83 per cent. of those eligible to claim.

Information on housing benefit is available at all benefit agency and unemployment benefit offices, though as responsibility for the administration of housing benefit lies with individual local authorities they are in the best position to undertake local publicity and initiatives to improve local take-up.

WALES

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Redwood: The previous Secretary of State undertook a visit to Brussels on 1-2 April 1993 for the purpose of inward investment and to attend EC meetings. The total cost of the visit was £983·20. My right hon. Friend also visited Stuttgart on 8-9 May 1993. The purpose of the visit was to perform the opening ceremony of the Wales at Stuttgart Arts Festival and participate. The total cost to the Department was £908·80.

In September 1993 I undertook an inward investment mission to Hong Kong, Japan and North America. The final cost is expected to be below £30,000 and comes from the WDA budget.

Felinheli Bypass

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement giving details of the causes of the delay in opening the Felinheli bypass in Gwynedd; what is the additional cost to the Welsh Office arising out of this delay; how much of those costs will be recouped; and what is the new scheduled date for opening the road.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The contract completion date for the Felinheli bypass is July 1994. The contractor is, however, intending to open the bypass before the end of the contract period but accidental damage to the new bridge over the bypass during the movement of heavy earth moving plant has frustrated his attempt to open it before the end of the year. He still expects to open the bypass early next spring, several months ahead of its contract completion date.

All the repair costs will be borne by the contractor.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what accumulated reserves were held in total and by each TEC in Wales on 1 April 1992 and on 1 April 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The reserves held by each TEC are set out in their annual reports and accounts as at 29 March 1992 and 28 March 1993 and copies of these are held in the Library of the House.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many learning for work places and what budget have been allocated to each TEC in Wales; how many people are currently on learning for work in each area; what monitoring information is collected about learning for work participants and the subsequent destinations they will be entering; how he plans to evaluate the programme; and if he will make a statement about its extension beyond 1994.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of learning for work places contracted with TECs in Wales and the number of participants on the programme as at 29 October are set out in the table. Information about the allocation of budgets by the Welsh Office to individual TECs is commercial in confidence. However, the total budget available for learning for work in Wales is £3·887 million.

Information is being collected about starts, participants and qualifications, and take up by gender and disability.

Destinations of leavers will be obtained through follow-up questionnaires. The programme will be evaluated in the costs and benefits compared to other programmes.

The learning for work programme is scheduled to run until August 1994 and its future beyond that date is currently being considered.

Learning for Work—Wales
Position at 29 October 1993

TEC name	*Contracted places 1993-94*	*Starts*
Gwent	304	73
Mid Glamorgan	384	65
North East Wales	152	64
North West Wales	235	16
Powys	44	0
South Glamorgan	380	36
West Wales	423	105
Wales Total	1,850	359

Moated Sites

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list for the last 10 years the archaeological moated grange sites that have been demolished;

(2) if he will list the archaeological moated grange sites that are due to be lost because of planning permission approval being granted.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency under its chief executive, John Carr. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. A. J. Carr to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 1 December 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your two recent Parliamentary Questions about the loss of moated grange sites in Wales.

In my letter of 30 November in answer to your earlier questions about the identification and protection of moated sites generally in Wales I referred to recent Planning Policy Guidance issued by the Department on Archaeology and Planning. The Guidance gives advice on the handling of archaeological matters in the planning process. In particular it emphasises that the desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration in determining planning applications whether that monument is scheduled or unscheduled. Advice to local authorities in Wales who for the most part do not have in-house archaeological staff is available from the Welsh Archaeological Trusts who, as you know, maintain the Sites and Monuments Record. Against this policy background it is for local authorities themselves to determine planning applications for development of sites of archaeological interest. Cadw does not keep details of planning permission granted by Welsh local authorities which affect such sites.

Where development is planned on a site scheduled as an ancient monument consent needs to be submitted to the Secretary of State. This is in addition to any application for planning permission. As I mentioned in my earlier letter Cadw's records of consent do not identify the monument by type but we are not aware of consent being granted for the demolition of any scheduled moated site in Wales in the past 10 years.

Urban Energy Management

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what role councils in Wales play in the United Kingdom urban energy management network.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Cardiff city council represents Wales on the seven-city strong urban energy management network.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what involvement training and enterprise councils in Wales have had in assessing the skill base in Wales for implementation of an energy efficiency programme in *(a)* industry, *(b)* commercial and *(c)* domestic sectors in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The TECs were commissioned by the WDA under the auspices of the Welsh energy project to add specific questions on training needs relating to energy and environmental issues, in the industrial and commercial sectors, as part of the 1992 Welsh labour market information survey.

Investors in People Award

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employers in each TEC area in Wales have been given the investors in people award; how many have made a commitment to meeting the standard; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As at 31 October 1993, 33 employers in Wales have been awarded investor-in-people status, and 213 have made a commitment to meeting the investors standard. The table sets out the breakdown by TEC.

Investors in people
Wales at 31 October 1993

TEC	*Awarded investor status*	*Commitment made*
South Glamorgan	6	37
Mid Glamorgan	6	35
Gwent	7	26
West Wales	6	56
Powys	1	8
North West Wales	5	24
North East Wales	2	27

Energy Technology Development Projects

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what collaborative energy technology development projects co-sponsored by the European Commission are currently under way in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: European programmes in the more efficient use of energy are actively promoted in Wales. An annual seminar is held specifically for this purpose.

There are currently nine projects funded by European programmes in Wales, a list of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

Valleys Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to rectify the structural problems identified in the Hausner Associates report on the programme for the valleys prepared for his Department, in regard to the decline in manufacturing employment and creation of long-term jobs in the valleys.

Mr. Redwood: Victor Hausner's evaluation of the first programme for the valleys—1988 to 1993—has informed the development of the latest five-year programme.

Two of the programme's aims specifically tackle unemployment by focusing on creating more, better quality jobs, and improving training, education, and transport so that local people can benefit.

DEFENCE

Imported Artillery Systems

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose the 14 larger calibre artillery systems shown in the United Nations arms register were imported from France; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The United Nations conventional arms register refers to 14 large-calibre artillery systems. These are 14 self-propelled launcher loaders (SPLLs) for the multiple launch rocket system (MLRS). MLRS is an international collaborative project and under the workshare arrangements for the project some SPLLs are finally assembled by Aerospatiale in France before delivery to the partner nations. The 14 SPLLs in question were delivered in 1992 from Aerospatiale to the British Army of the Rhine as part of the United Kingdom's total requirement for MLRS launchers.

Animal Research

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what species of animals are currently used by his Department or on its behalf for the purposes of research and experimentation.

Mr. Aitken: The species of animals currently used by the Department for purposes of research and experimentation are rats; mice; guinea pigs; rabbits; sheep; goats; pigs; miniature pigs; marmosets; and rhesus monkeys.

All experiments involving the use of animals fully meet the spirit and letter of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

AS90 Ammunition

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature of the fault in the round due to be fired from the AS90 at the demonstration on 16 November; what was the country of manufacture of the round; why 155 mm artillery shells of foreign manufacture are in service with the Royal Artillery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The failure to fire by an AS90 howitzer in the opening moments of the otherwise very impressive demonstration of this new equipment on 16 November was caused by a defective primer which failed to ignite the propelling charge. This is a rare event and initial indications are that it may have been due to incomplete filling of the primer, which was manufactured in Germany. Other elements of the round in question were manufactured in the United Kingdom. 155 mm ammunition currently in

use was procured initially for the FH70 gun under the terms of the tri-national MOU with Germany and Italy which governed this project.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made since the opening of the Scott inquiry in the criteria adopted by his Department in deciding whether to give substantive replies to parliamentary questions seeking details of arms or military equipment exports from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Aitken: None. The present criteria are of long standing and have been maintained by successive Governments.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Hanley: The Secretary of State for Defence has made 14 overseas visits in 1993. The cost and purpose of each visit was as follows:

Date 1993	*Destination*	*Purpose*	*Approximate cost* £
January			
5th to 9th	Far East (Hong Kong)	To visit British Forces and have official talks.	141,048
25th to 26th	Belgium (Mons)	Visit NATO Military Headquarters.	1,685
February			
15th to 16th	Norway	To visit British Forces and have official talks.	4,462
25th to 26th	Gibraltar	To visit British Forces and to have official talks.	4,793
March			
22nd to 24th	Falkland Islands	To visit British Forces.	1,813
29th	Belgium (Brussels)	NATO Ministerial meeting.	3,358
April			
20th to 23rd	United States of America (Washington)	To represent Her Majesty's Government at opening of Holocaust Museum, and to have bilateral talks.	9,269
May			
16th to 21st	Far East (Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Singapore)	Bilaterals.	45,145
25th	Belgium (Brussels)	NATO Ministerial Meeting.	1,238
June/July			
No visits abroad			
August			
2nd to 4th	Bosnia/Croatia, Italy	To visit British Forces in Bosnia and Croatia, and for bilateral talks in Croatia and Italy.	22,000
September			
19th to 24th	CIS (Russia and Ukraine)	Bilaterals.	67,761
October			
20th to 21st	Germany (Travemunde)	NATO Ministerial meeting.	10,711
22nd	Germany (Bielefeld)	To visit British Forces.	
23rd to 24th	Germany (Bonn)	To participate in Bertelsmann Forum.	
24th to 26th	France	Bilateral.	
November			
21st to 22nd	Austria (Vienna)	Bilateral.	6,257
25th	Germany (Bonn)	Anglo-German Summit.	1,071

Note: Figures are based on the cost of the Royal Air Force and civil flights involved. Where RAF flights were used (in all cases except the visit to the United States of America in April and the vast majority of the Far East visit in May) the costs also include the flight costs of accompanying officials. Accommodation normally provided by Her Majesty's Ambassador or High Commissioner, other Government representative, or by host.

Infantry

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be British infantry strength in 1994 and 1995.

Mr. Hanley: The total trained strength of British infantry is expected to be about 29,000 on 1 April 1994 and between 26,000 and 27,000 on 1 April 1995.

Royal Clarence Yard

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take immediate steps to contain the infestation of dry rot in several buildings at Royal Clarence yard, Gosport.

Mr. Hanley: Treatment of the dry rot found in three buildings at Royal Clarence yard is being considered in the context of our future plans for the establishment.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are his plans for disposing of the Royal Clarence yard, Gosport; and what is the proposed timing of the disposal;

(2) if he will dispose of the four residential properties at the entrance to Royal Clarence yard, Gosport.

Mr. Hanley: We are examining the scope and feasibility of releasing some or all of Royal Clarence yard and hope to announce a decision shortly.

Regent's Park Barracks

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list to-date the organisations and individuals who have written to his Department opposing the erecting of a multi-storey car park at the Regent's Park barracks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Since notification of our intention to proceed I have received letters from six organisations and individuals about provision of a garage facility at Regent's Park barracks, including representations from Camden council, the Crown Estate, the Georgian Group, a local residents' association, a firm of solicitors and a local resident.

Convoy (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cargo being carried by the convoy of three military lorries which travelled along the A638 road into Doncaster town, South Yorkshire at approximately 12.30 hours on 27 October; where the convoy originated; what was its final destination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Without details of vehicle types, registration numbers, and so on, it is not possible positively to identify the vehicles concerned. On the day and about the time in question, however, two Army Landrovers and a four-ton lorry were travelling on the A630 where it merges with the A638 in Doncaster. The vehicles had been collected from Grantham and were proceeding to 219 Transport Squadron (V) at Scarborough barracks in Doncaster. They were not carrying any cargo.

Headquarters Fire

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the report written by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority into the serious fire that took place whilst construction work was being carried out in the basement of his Department's Whitehall headquarters in 1985.

Mr. Hanley: Yes, a copy of the London Fire Brigade letter dated 3 May 1985 will be placed in the Library.

Clyde Submarine Base

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the annual running costs of the Clyde submarine base, Faslane.

Mr. Hanley: The annual operation costs for 1993-94 are estimated to be £85,600,000.

RAF Land

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated land sale value of each of the RAF stations involved in the review of pilot flying training.

Mr. Hanley: The estimated value of the individual sites on the defence estate is commercial in confidence.

Departmental Land

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much land, by acreage, his Department owns in each of the counties of England.

Mr. Hanley: The land owned in acres by the Ministry of Defence in each of the counties of England is set out in the table.

	Acres
Avon	408
Bedfordshire	3,249
Berkshire	4,722
Buckinghamshire	1,601
Cambridgeshire	6,902
Cheshire	1,006
Cleveland	119
Cornwall	6,731
Cumbria	19,830
Derbyshire	277
Devon	7,391
Dorset	12,177
Durham	415
East Sussex	633
Essex	39,356
Gloucestershire	3,674
Greater London	3,030
Greater Manchester	1,110
Hampshire	31,417
Hereford and Worcester	2,076
Hertfordshire	227
Humberside	2,587
Isle of Wight	12
Kent	13,660
Lancashire	1,549
Leicestershire	2,587
Lincolnshire	14,893
Merseyside	489
Norfolk	26,870
North Yorkshire	31,778
Northamptonshire	2,160
Northumberland	57,061
Nottinghamshire	2,095
Oxfordshire	8,970
Shropshire	4,436
Somerset	1,994
South Yorkshire	1,001
Staffordshire	2,908
Suffolk	8,495
Surrey	11,550
Tyne and Wear	25
Warwickshire	4,030
West Midlands	82
West Sussex	1,819
West Yorkshire	15
Wiltshire	102,143

Figures are at 1 April 1993, the latest date for which records are available, and relate to freehold landholdings, including foreshore, for which deeds were held. Acquisitions or disposals which may have been completed but where deeds had not been transferred by 1 April 1993 are not included.

Maralinga

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the ex gratia payment towards the clean-up of the Maralinga site will be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: On 14 July 1993 the United Kingdom Government agreed in principle to make an ex gratia payment to the Federal Government of Australia as a contribution to cost of the further clean-up of the Maralinga site. Final arrangements for making this payment are close to completion and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Search and Rescue (Chivenor)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to authorise the continuation of the Wessex helicopter search and rescue service at RAF Chivenor in the event of any decision being made not to transfer the Sea Kings to Chivenor from April 1994.

Mr. Hanley: I will write to the hon. Member.

Lesbians and Gay Men

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he proposes to introduce the new regulations dealing with lesbians and gay men in the armed forces; and if he will set out the regulations currently in force.

Mr. Hanley: New regulations reflecting the policy announced in June 1992 that homosexual activity of a kind that is legal in civilian law should not constitute an offence under the service law cannot be introduced until the law has been amended. This will be done as soon as the legislative programme allows. The new policy is, however, being followed by the armed forces and new tri-service guidelines on handling cases of homosexuality are currently being drawn up.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the benefits payable *(a)* to lesbians and gay men who have been dismissed from the services because of their homosexuality and *(b)* to men and women administratively discharged.

Mr. Hanley: The level of financial benefits payable to all personnel who are administratively discharged from the armed forces depends on their length of service and the circumstances of each case. Where misconduct or unsatisfactory behaviour has occurred, the individual's rate of pension could be affected. If personnel do not qualify for an immediate pension there is no difference in the level of their preserved pension and gratuity. If they have completed sufficient service for them to qualify for an immediate pension they receive a lower rate of pension and, therefore, of gratuity as this is three times the first year's pension. To qualify for an immediate pension, however, they would have had to complete a minimum of 16 years' reckonable service if officers or 22 years' reckonable service if non-commissioned personnel. Individuals discharged as a result of homosexuality would normally receive the full extent of benefits to which they are entitled based on their length of service.

Able Seaman Brett Burnell

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the case of Able Seaman Brett Burnell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The Royal Navy has a well established statutory complaints procedure of which Able Seaman Burnell was fully appraised prior to his discharge. Should he wish to do so he may seek redress through these channels.

Armed Forces (Protective Clothing)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the flak jackets issued to United Kingdom forces serving in the former Yugoslavia in protecting against sniper fire;

(2) what plans he has to issue United Kingdom forces serving in the former Yugoslavia with bullet-proof vests;

(3) what factors have been taken into account in deciding not to issue United Kingdom forces in the former Yugoslavia with bullet-proof vests.

Mr. Hanley: All United Kingdom personnel serving on the ground in Bosnia are equipped with lightweight combat body armour (CBA), which provides protection against shrapnel and would normally be worn in battle. Contoured ceramic chest plates are also available for use in theatre. These can be fitted to the CBA to cover the heart area, back and front, and will stop high velocity bullets. They are designed to provide maximum protection with minimum degradation of the wearer's effectiveness. The decision to issue and to wear the plates is a matter for the judgment of the local commanders, who have not identified any requirement for protection over and above that which is available in theatre.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what would be the cost of issuing bullet-proof vests to United Kingdom forces serving in the former Yugoslavia.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for defence what is the cost of an individual set of body armour used by British service personnel in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Hanley: The cost of the combat body armour, including ceramic plates, issued to United Kingdom forces serving in the former Yugoslavia is £156 per set, including VAT.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the operational locations where United Kingdom forces have been issued with bullet-proof vests.

Mr. Hanley: Body armour is issued as a matter of course for any form of operational duty where the risk warrants it wherever that might be. Records of issue, however, are not kept.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many national contingents serving with UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia have issued their forces with bullet-proof vests.

Mr. Hanley: All contingents in UNPROFOR serving in Bosnia issue some form of body protection, either individually or on a pool basis for certain duties.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the relevant merits of the body armour worn by *(a)* British service personnel and *(b)* Dutch service personnel deployed in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: All body armour issued to British troops has been researched, developed and trialled extensively against specific military requirements. This applies to the combat body armour (CBA) issued to personnel in the former Yugoslavia, which specifically protects the wearer from fragments produced by exploding munitions, which is considered to be the main threat, and, with the ceramic plates inserted, also protects against high velocity bullets. Dutch personnel are currently using a heavyweight British commercial body armour providing a high degree of protection against high velocity bullets, which is double the wieght of the CBA issued to British troops and considerably reduces mobility.

Defence Equipment Programme

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the defence equipment programme in the light of the Chancellor's Budget statement.

Mr. Aitken: The Government will continue to ensure that the armed forces are properly equipped to carry out their tasks effectively. I am, therefore, pleased to announce decisions on a number of important equipments.

The way ahead on ordering new tanks for the Army has been decided. Having examined a range of options, we have concluded that the most cost-effective way forward would be to buy more Challenger 2 rather than upgrade Challenger 1. Accordingly, subject to the negotiation of satisfactory contractual terms, we intend to place a further order with Vickers Defence Systems for up to 259 more Challenger 2 tanks, together with the associated support and training package. As part of these negotiations, we will ask the company to quote for production bands below this quantity so that we can consider possible options for varying the order. The contractual negotiations will be conducted under the Department's "No Acceptable Price No Contract"—or NAPNOC procedures—in order to secure the best value for money. I would expect to be able to place a contract next year.

A decision has also been taken on the way forward on support helicopters. The main need is for additional large helicopters with good load-carrying capacity and a rear loading ramp. Only two types can meet this Medium Support Helicopter requirement: The Westland Group plc EH101 utility and the Boeing Helicopters Chinook. Some large loads could only be carried by Chinook, which is a reliable and capacious aircraft, proven in RAF service, but for other tasks advantages would be offered by the operational flexibility of a mixed fleet containing the modern, sophisticated and agile EH101.

We therefore intend to enter NAPNOC negotiations with Westland and Boeing to determine the lowest prices available and other details of EH101 utility and Chinook helicopters respectively. On the basis of this information, we will decide what helicopters to buy. Value for money is the key and the prices determined through the parallel NAPNOC process will be crucial to decisions on the way forward.

Finally, the 1993 Statement on the Defence Estimates stated that our plans for the Royal Navy include building up to a fleet of 25 highly capable mine countermeasures vessels of the Hunt and Sandown classes. In this context I am delighted to be able to announce that we are now in a position to invite tenders for a further batch of Sandown class single role minehunters.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Waldegrave: During 1993 I made five visits abroad which incurred costs borne on public funds. The costs of each visit, including those of officials travelling with me, were as follows:

Destination	*Cost* £	*Purpose*
Carnegie, Canada	2,240	Meeting of Science Ministers
Luxembourg	1,905	European Research Council meeting
Geneva	1,748	Visit to European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN)
Hong Kong/Japan	16,597	Ministerial visit covering science and technology issues
Washington, United States of America	12,109	Discussions on public service reforms with the Vice-President

County of Lancashire

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what evidence he has submitted to the Local Government Commission relating to the future of the county of Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have not submitted any evidence to the Local Government Commission relating to the future of the county of Lancashire. The County Palatine of Lancaster has been in existence for more than 640 years, and I hope it will continue for at least as long again.

Charter Line (East Midlands)

Mr. Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will set out the cost of the Charterline he has established in the east midlands, the number of calls made on it daily and the number of staff engaged in running it.

Mr. David Davis: The cost of setting up the Charterline pilot study was £880,000. The cost of the software system design was £109,000, and planning, project management and evaluation costs were £195,000. These are all one-off rather than on-going costs. At current levels of usage, it would not be necessary to purchase additional equipment to extend Charterline nationally. Operational costs to 3 November 1993 were £340,400. Significant economies of scale could be achieved if Charterline were to be rolled out on a national basis.

Charterline has, to date, received over 4,700 calls. IBM, which runs the Charterline service on behalf of the citizens charter unit, has nine trained staff available to answer Charterline calls, of whom three are awaiting calls at any one time.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Local Authorities (Loans)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the total value of loans taken out by each of the 26 councils at the date of their last local government audit.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:

	£
Antrim borough council	2,752,818
Ards borough council	11,533,625
Armagh district council	2,687,827
Ballymena borough council	4,210,135
Ballymoney borough council	1,655,186
Banbridge district council	3,310,372
Belfast city council	33,297,440
Carrickfergus borough council	1,964,634
Castlereagh borough council	5,824,542
Coleraine borough council	2,818,547
Cookstown district council	299,519
Craigavon borough council	7,956,487
Derry city council	6,992,348
Down district council	5,151,730
Dungannon district council	1,326,877
Fermanagh district council	811,196
Larne borough council	1,844,631
Limavady borough council	1,542,266
Lisburn borough council	2,089,520
Magherafelt district council	1,114,525
Moyle district council	1,206,883
Newry and Mourne district council	8,917,191
Newtownabbey district council	7,536,600
North Down borough council	12,362,913
Omagh district council	4,680,833
Strabane district council	3,596,743
TOTAL	137,485,388

Prosperity

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in what working party his Department participates jointly with representatives of the Irish Republic to examine ways and means of promoting greater prosperity in both parts of Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The major forum for such discussions is the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference whose objectives include working together for peace, stability and prosperity throughout the island of Ireland by promoting reconciliation, respect for human rights, co-operation against terrorism, and the development of economic, social and cultural co-operation.

Other forums include

(a) the Anglo-Irish Secretariat;

(b) A steering group which oversees the upgrading of the Belfast to Dublin rail link involving officials of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications, Republic of Ireland;

(c) A joint steering committee on cross-border rural development in which the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland participates; and

(d) A joint working party set up to deliver the Northern Ireland/Ireland Interreg programme involving officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel, Department of Education for Northern Ireland, Department of Economic Development, Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland.

Development Agencies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the development agencies together with their directors; and how much has been paid to each director, including expenses, in each of the past five years, and this year to-date.

Mr. Aitkins: Laganside corporation has functions similar to those of urban development corporations in Great Britain. Payments to members over the past five years were as follows:

Members	*Amounts Paid (Salary and Expenses)*				
	June 1989—March 1990 £	*1990-91* £	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £	*April 1993 to Date* £
A. *Current Members*					
The Duke of Abercorn *(Chairman)*	18,277	19,724	19,996	26,696	16,288
Mr. F. Cobain	3,733	5,600	5,600	7,940	4,680
Mr. B. Feeney	4,479	5,600	5,600	8,049	4,680
Mr. J. Fitzpatrick	4,479	5,600	5,600	8,049	4,680
Mrs. M. Spence	4,479	5,600	5,600	8,049	4,680
Mr. G. Irwin	—	5,133	5,600	7,965	4,680
Mr. R. Empey	—	—	—	5,455	4,680
Mr. E. Airey	—	—	—	5,455	4,680
Mrs. L. Blakeston-Houston	—	—	—	4,366	4,680
Mr. J. Jaworski	—	—	—	—	880
B. *Former Members*					
Mr. J. McGuckian *(Deputy Chairman)*	7,904	9,163	8,710	4,006	—
Mr. J. Carson	4,479	5,600	5,600	2,593	—
Dr. B. Henderson	4,479	5,600	5,600	2,593	—
Mr. D. Moreland	4,479	—	—	—	—

Student Nurses

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated total cost per annum of training nurses from the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: At 31 October 1993 there were 263 nurse students from the Republic of Ireland attending colleges in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that the total cost of training these students in 1993-94 will be approximately £1·9 million.

Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the amount of Government financial support paid to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in each of the last five years.

Sir John Wheeler: The Northern Ireland Office has paid the following direct grant aid to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders in each of the last five years.

	£
1988-89	197,764
1989-90	211,881
1990-91	219,500
1991-92	286,828
1992-93	302,000

The Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders also contracts with other Northern Ireland Departments to provide progammes for a range of client groups within the criteria set by those departments. Information on the amounts involved is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Victim Support

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the amount of Government financial support paid to Victim Support Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Sir John Wheeler: The following sums were paid to Victim Support Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

	£
1988-89	33,000
1989-90	40,580
1990-91	44,000
1991-92	93,000
1992-93	167,000

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Sir John Wheeler: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

EMPLOYMENT

Claimants

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were interviewed at each stage and how many of those who claimed unemployment benefit—including continuing to claim cases—had their claim disallowed following availability, actively seeking work or refusing suitable employment action taken at *(a)* the new claims stage, *(b)* 13 week interviews, *(c)* restart interviews and *(d)* other counselling interviews for 1992-93 and 1993-94 for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. M. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 1 December 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about how many people were interviewed at each stage and how many of those who claimed unemployment benefit (including continuing to claim cases) had their claim disallowed following availability, actively seeking work or refusing suitable employment action taken at *(a)* the new claims stage, *(b)* 13 week interviews, *(c)* Restart interviews and *(d)* other counselling interviews for 1992-93 and 1993-94 for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; and if he will make a statement. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

This information is not available in the precise form which you request it. However, the attached tables show, for each region, the numbers of interviews conducted at each stage of unemployment together with the total number of disallowances by Adjudication Officers on each eligibility condition. We have no information available that tells us the stage of unemployment at which the disallowances occurred.

Also, the Employment Service has changed it's performance monitoring at national level for 1993-94 and the numbers of interviews for this year cannot be given in exactly the same format as the previous year.

Table 1 contains information for the 1992-93 operational year. Table 2 shows information to June 1993—these are the latest published figures for Adjudication Officer's decisions.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Table 1—1992-93

	New Claims	Interviews 13 week	Interviews Restart	Interviews Other	Disallowances by adjudication officer Availability	Restricted Availability	Actively Seeking Employment	Refusal of Employment
Northern	233,739	43,146	172,212	24,639	1,506	239	132	17
Yorkshire and Humberside	407,439	65,186	209,592	43,694	5,249	826	413	22
East Midlands and Eastern	443,838	44,606	252,469	36,894	4,042	500	46	24
London and South East	1,412,962	238,039	854,311	83,414	18,787	6,589	483	81
South West	378,761	45,923	200,833	32,488	3,708	660	149	17
Office for Wales	217,596	40,200	148,542	32,011	1,676	371	78	5
West Midlands	407,148	50,369	258,437	36,254	3,976	458	132	8
North West	567,287	121,882	441,163	77,417	5,526	2,089	853	63
Office for Scotland	447,337	81,559	280,722	27,858	3,211	521	253	15
National Total	4,516,107	730,910	2,818,181	394,569	47,681	12,253	2,539	252

Table 2—1993-94 (to June)

	New claims	Interviews Restart	Interviews Other	Decisions by adjudication officer Availability	Restricted availability	Actively seeking employment	Refusal of employment
Northern	54,302	43,546	12,065	362	55	44	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	87,060	64,264	31,306	1,077	278	112	12
East Midlands and Eastern	94,252	71,221	15,007	845	187	44	11
London and South East	302,130	258,318	24,240	3,265	1,443	141	9
South West	78,703	62,601	12,122	577	115	43	7
Office for Wales	49,972	42,182	13,328	304	73	22	3
West Midlands	82,554	71,986	12,776	696	146	30	8
North West	123,178	116,063	43,502	1,086	451	253	16
Office for Scotland	101,287	72,889	21,036	593	94	89	6
National Total	973,438	803,070	185,382	8,805	2,842	778	73

Employment Service

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress the employment service has made in meeting the targets outlined in the 1993-94 agency agreement; and if he will list for each quarter the *(a)* total unemployed job placings and variance from targets, *(b)* long-term unemployed job placings and variance from target, *(c)* people with disabilities job placings and variance from target, *(d)* inner-city job placings and variance from target, *(e)* number of claims not pursued following initial contact and variance from target, *(f)* number of claimants moved from unemployment benefit to another benefit and variance from target and *(g)* number of people who withdrew their claim to benefit after contact with fraud investigators and variance from target.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Employment Service is making progress against its targets for 1993-94, meeting or exceeding almost all at the mid-year stage. It placed 859,000 eople in the first two quarters, against an annual target of 1·470 million. This represents 130,000 more placings than at the same stage last year. The Employment Service does not have a target for the number of claimants moved from unemployment benefit to another benefit. The performance is shown in the table.

Employment Service performance against target July to September 1993

Annual performance targets	Quarter 1	Quarter 2	Cumulative	Target levels
(a) Total placings of unemployed people into jobs	394,000	465,000	859,000	1·47 million
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*	*Per cent.*
(b) Long-term claimants placed into jobs as a percentage of total unemployed placings	28·6	27·6	28·0	27·0
(c) People with disabilities placed into jobs as a percentage of total unemployed placings	3·2	3·3	3·2	3·0
(d) Unemployed people in inner cities placed into jobs as a percentage of total unemployed placings	34·1	35·0	34·6	35·0
(e) Benefit claims not pursued following initial contact with ES (as percentage of initial enquiries)	8·4	8·5	8·5	9·0
(g) People signing off as a result of action by fraud officer	18,000	18,500	36,500	63,000

Restart Courses

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people have been referred to restart courses by employment service counsellors since April for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; how many of them were unemployed for over two years; how many attended and completed the course; what were the outcomes of the participants; how many had benefit penalties imposed for not attending or failing to complete their attendance at the restart course; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. M. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 1 December 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about Restart Courses. These are matters which fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

As you will know from our previous correspondence, Restart Courses are short courses aimed at helping people who are having the most difficulty returning to work. They are not an alternative to regular job search or other employment or ttraining programmes. Essentially they provide people with the opportunity to explore all the options open to them and give them confidence to take the next step back to work.

People who have been unemployed for two years or more who refuse or fail to take up a place on an Employment Department employment or training programme at their Restart interview, are asked to attend a Restart Course.

As your question has raised a number of specific points, I am setting out the information you have asked for in the two tables attached—one deals with all Restart Course attenders, the other just those covered by the requirement to attend.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Restart Course Attenders unemployed for 2 years or more April 1993-September 1993

	Northern	Yorkshire and Humberside	East Midlands and Eastern	London and South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. Referrals to Restart Courses[1]	6,305	11,558	10,367	32,604	9,104	5,892	10,779	19,274	10,503	116,386
2. Starters	3,755	6,559	5,589	16,877	5,152	3,034	6,486	10,048	5,024	62,524
3. Total completers	3,451	5,877	5,103	15,594	4,614	2,750	5,737	9,286	4,499	56,911
Completers who had agreed to follow up:										
Jobs	788	1,776	1,753	3,173	1,084	719	1,641	2,718	2,618	16,270
Training For Work	443	836	870	2,552	831	425	1,523	1,675	643	9,798
Jobclub	323	441	634	2,032	542	394	479	795	336	5,976
Other employment, training and related opportunities	2,456	3,970	3,761	10,533	3,215	1,846	2,323	5,564	2,696	36,364
4. Total number of people with an outcome to follow up[2]	2,979	5,204	4,685	14,029	4,179	2,495	5,184	8,500	4,107	51,362
5. Number of decisions received from the Benefits Agency[3]	328	582	387	703	276	203	202	1,361	1,094	5,136

[1]This figure includes people who fail to attend the course they are booked for who are rebooked for another event.
[2]Some people will be referred to more than one option at the end of the course.
[3]Since April 1993, the Benefits Agency has combined the number of reductions for non attendance/non completion of Restart Courses with the number of reductions for non attendance/non completion of Jobplan Workshops. Therefore we can only supply the number of decisions that have been made. This figure includes cases where no reduction is made. About 87 per cent. of all decisions lead to a reduction of up to 40 per cent. of personal Income Support.

All Restart Course Attenders April 1993-September 1993

	Northern	Yorkshire and Humberside	East Midlands and Eastern	London and South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	North West	Scotland	Total
1. Referrals to Restart Courses[1]	6,678	12,707	11,521	37,201	10,890	6,787	12,644	20,929	11,333	130,690
2. Starters	4,012	7,291	6,312	19,382	6,135	3,491	7,583	10,917	5,484	70,607
3. Total completers	3,691	6,618	5,779	17,633	5,474	3,151	6,693	10,045	4,891	63,975
Completers who had agreed to follow up:										
Jobs	864	1,989	1,985	3,705	1,310	851	1,973	2,984	2,829	18,490
Training For Work	469	914	974	2,964	972	500	1,810	1,829	693	11,125
Jobclub	343	490	730	2,184	696	474	603	849	382	6,751
Other employment, training and related opportunities	2,601	4,371	4,328	12,271	3,786	2,184	2,825	6,118	2,999	41,483
4. Total number of people with an outcome to follow up[2]	3,193	5,784	5,291	16,170	4,976	2,866	6,106	9,196	4,464	58,046

[1] This figure includes people who fail to attend the course they are booked for who are rebooked for another event.
[2] Some people will be referred to more than one option at the end of the course.

Counselling

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed people have been referred to jobplan workshops by employment service counsellors since April for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; how many of them were unemployed for over one year; how many attended and completed the workshop; what were the outcomes of the participants;

how many had benefit penalties imposed for not attending or failing to complete their attendance at the jobplan workshop; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 1 December 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to him about Jobplan Workshops. These are matters which fall within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Jobplan is a new programme which aims to help people who have been unemployed for a year or more to compete successfully for jobs and opportunities. About 80 per cent. of the people who first become unemployed leave the unemployment register within a year. For those who remain unemployed, confidence and the intensity of jobsearch can decrease. They may believe that there are very few positive options open to them. It is therefore important that at this stage people take a fresh look at their situation and have the chance to review their strengths and skills and set themselves new clear, achievable job goals that take advantage of the range of help available.

This can be achieved on Jobplan, through in-depth guidance interviews with one of the leaders, access to computer assisted guidance programs and tests of attainment. During the week participants will draw up a comprehensive action plan which will map out the steps that they need to take to find work. For many people this will involve further help such as Training for Work or a place on a Jobclub.

People who have been unemployed for a year will be asked to attend a Jobplan workshop unless they prefer to take up a place on another Employment Department programme. People who fail to attend each day of the workshop may, under the Income Support (General) 1990 Regulation 21A, amended in March this year, lose a proportion of their personal entitlement to Income Support. When making this amendment, Ministers consulted the Social Security Advisory Committee who accepted that it was reasonable to ask people unemployed for some time to go on an event such as this.

I have set out the information you have asked for in the table attached.

I hope that this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

All Jobplan Attenders April 1993-October 1993

	Northern	*Yorkshire and Humberside*	*East Midlands and Eastern*	*London and South East*	*South West*	*Wales*	*West Midlands*	*North West*	*Scotland*	*Total*
1. Referrals to Jobplan[1]	13,098	21,320	22,965	118,264	21,981	10,499	24,148	32,755	26,517	291,547
2. Starters	8,121	12,168	13,045	66,691	13,344	5,901	14,112	17,372	14,092	164,846
3. Total completers	7,556	11,170	11,972	61,291	12,208	5,343	12,810	15,971	12,694	151,015
Completers who agreed to follow up:										
Jobs	2,319	3,355	3,906	19,244	3,884	1,742	3,446	4,951	4,318	47,165
Training For Work	2,472	3,364	3,206	17,101	4,455	1,397	4,699	4,892	3,840	45,426
Jobclub	843	1,646	1,795	11,339	1,691	896	2,075	1,797	1,759	23,841
Other employment, training and related opportunities	2,993	5,748	4,781	30,977	5,356	2,734	5,201	8,355	5,214	72,359
4. Total number of people with an outcome to follow up[2]	6,787	10,481	11,083	57,521	11,443	4,851	12,059	15,042	11,487	140,754
5. Number of decisions received from the Benefits Agency[3]	491	1,112	867	4,040	661	396	585	2,024	2,527	12,703

[1] This figure includes people who fail to attend the workshop they are booked for who are rebooked for another event. All people referred to Jobplan have been unemployed over 1 year except a small number (1,582) from areas affected by colliery closures where special dispensation exists.

[2] Some people will be referred to more than one option at the end of the workshop.

[3] The Benefits Agency have combined the number of reductions for non attendance/non completion of Jobplan with the number of reductions for non attendance/non completion of Restart Courses. Therefore we can only supply the number of decisions that have been made. About 87 per cent. of all decisions lead to a reduction of up to 40 per cent. of personal Income Support.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the amount of overpayment made by his Department to training and enterprise councils in each year for which information is available; how much has been recovered; how many TECs are still holding money which has been overpaid; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Information currently available shows that the Department identified overpayments amounting to £3,407,887·71 and £8,807,118·79 made to the 75 training and enterprise councils (TECs) in England in 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively.

Of these overpayments Treasury agreement has been given to write off £231,054 and a further £11,513,773 has been recovered. In consultation with legal advisors the Department is vigorously pursuing recovery of the remaining balance from the three TECs which still hold overpayment monies.

In 1992-93 information currently available shows overpayments amounting to £6,586,421·73 were made to 51 TECs. Action is in hand to ensure that the overpayments are recovered by the end of December 1993.

No information is held centrally with regard to overpayments in 1993-94, but regional staff have been instructed to ensure that any overpayments are recovered as they are identified.

The Department is committed to ensuring that sound systems of financial control are in place in all TECs and in all training providers and to recovering any overpayments that may be made as they are identified.

Liverpool

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Liverpool.

Mr. David Hunt: Last Friday, I visited TWG Packaging, where I was given a presentation on the company's achievements. I then met members of the Merseyside Manufacturing Challenge Group who made a presentation on the work of the group and their vision for the long-term economic regeneration of Merseyside.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Procedures Committee

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will accept the recommendations made by the Animal Procedures Committee in its annual report 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The document is a report on the activities of the committee including matters upon which it has made recommendations in the course of 1992. The committee recommended the extension of the controls of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 Octopus vulgaris and made recommendations in respect of nine applications for project licences under section 5 of the Act. Its recommendations were accepted.

Section 11 Funding

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total estimated saving to the Treasury from the proposed cuts in section 11 funding.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Departmental expenditure plans are reviewed annually and details of planned provision are set out in Home Office annual reports. Reductions in future financial provision for section 11 grant were made in the context of the 1992 public expenditure survey. The following table shows planned provisions for section 11 grant in the 1991 and 1992 public expenditure surveys, as published in the annual reports of 1992 and 1993 respectively.

£ million

	1992-93	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
Annual Report 1992	130	136	139	—
Annual Report 1993	—	131	111	97

Year-on-year differences in expenditure plans reflect a range of factors such as changed assumptions as to inflation.

Life Sentences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women held in prisons in England and Wales were serving a life sentence as of 19 November.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the population of life sentence prisoners in Prison Service establishments.

The latest available information is for 30 September 1993 and shows that there were 3,086 prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales serving life sentences, of whom 2,980 were men and 106 were women.

Clothing (Fire Safety)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were killed or injured as a result of clothing catching fire *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the London borough of Lewisham in each year since 1980.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information for the United Kingdom is shown in the table. It shows casualties where clothing being worn was the first item to catch fire. The statistics cannot identify fires starting elsewhere spreading to clothing. Data are not separately available for Lewisham.

Deaths and injuries of children aged under 11, where clothing on a person was the first material to catch fire, in fires attended by local authority fire brigades, United Kingdom

Year	*Fire related deaths*	*Fire related injuries*
1981	4	18
1982	1	10
1983	0	14
1984	0	11
1985	0	7
1986	2	14
1987	0	10
1988	4	11
1989	0	8
1990	0	8
1991	0	8
1992[1]	1	10

[1] Provisional.

Source: Home Office Fire Statistics, based on reports from local authority fire brigades.

Wormwood Scrubs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each of the projects now under development at Wormwood Scrubs prison, London, the cost of each project and if funding for each project has been approved and granted.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from: Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the current development work at Wormwood Scrubs prison.

The major phase of redevelopment work currently being carried out at the prison is due to be completed by the end of April 1994. This will create a secure corridor to connect the four existing accommodation wings and provide additional accommodation for 146 prisoners. A new kitchen, gymnasium, medical centre, workshops and reception and discharge unit are also being provided. The estimated capital cost is £43·7 million.

In later phases of the redevelopment it is proposed to complete the modernisation of the four existing accommodation wings, which will include upgrading security and 24 hour access to sanitation in those cells which do not have it at present. A final decision is still to be made about the timing and phasing of this work.

Prison Building

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of money to be allocated for the prison building programme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Ms Mildred Gordon, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the money to be allocated to the prison building programme.

Over the next three years a total of £620·3 million will be assigned to the prison building programme, as follows:

£ million

1994-95	*1995-96*	*1996-97*
251·4	223·1	145·8

The overall total includes nearly £43 million for the completion of the current prison building programme and the purchase of sites and infrastructure work for the programme of building six new prisons to which the Home Secretary referred on 6 October.

The remaining £577 million will be spent on providing additional accommodation, repairs and modernising facilities in existing prisons.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department undertakes into the problem of child prostitution.

Mr. Maclean: The Home Office has not conducted or funded research into child prostitution.

Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the bonus payment paid to the Director General of the Prison Service since his appointment.

Mr. Howard: £8,280, in respect of the period 6 January 1993 to 31 March 1993.

Segregation Units and Prison Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women held in segregation units in prisons in England and Wales on 19 November;

(2) what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women held on rule 43 in prisons in England and Wales on 22 November.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the number of men and women in Prison establishments segregated from association under Rule 43 and the number held in segregation units.

The table below shows the number of inmates held on Prison Rule 43 and Young Offender Institution Rule 46 on 22 November.

	Rule 43 & 46 (own protection)	*Rule 43 & 46 (good order and discipline)*
Men	1,251	267
Women	19	14
Total	1,270	281

The above table does not include inmates held in vulnerable prisoner units. Information on numbers held in segregation units is not collected centrally.

Deportations

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been deported from Britain in each of the last five years after breakdown of their marriage.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available as wives are not separately identified in the deportation statisics.

Fraudulent Leaflets

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward legislation to outlaw the production of fraudulent leaflets purporting to come from a rival political party.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend sympathises with the hon. Member's concerns. The Government have, however, no present plans to introduce such legislation, the technical feasibility of which is not beyond doubt.

Muderers (Prison Sentences)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the average amount of time spent in prison by those who were sentenced for murder and have since been released.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Frank Field, dated 30 November 1993:

AVERAGE SENTENCE LENGTH FOR MURDER

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average time served by inmates sentenced for murder and who have since been released.

I attached a copy of a table showing the numbers of life sentence prisoners released from 1981-1991. This information ispublished annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (Table 8.5 of the latest volume, for 1991, Cm 2157), a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new money is to be made available and how much for building new prison establishments in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 30 November 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the funding for the construction of new prison establishments.

On 2 September 1993 the Home Secretary announced that the design, construction, management and potential financing of future new prisons would be contracted out to the private sector. It is intended that both the construction and operation of the six new prisons planned will be funded in this way. It is too early to indicate the cost of these prisons which will be assessed on the basis of value for money obtained for the complete financial package comprising both capital and operating costs. Outline proposals and expressions of interest in the first two prisons have recently been invited. It is expected that almost all of the expenditure will fall outside the period covered by the 1993 Public Expenditure Survey (that is, beyond 1996-97).

Doncaster prison which is due to open next year is the last of the current programme of 21 new prisons to be built.

Temazepam

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has now considered the recommendations of the Advisory Council on Misuse of Drugs for measures to reduce Temazepam misuse.

Mr. Maclean: I am considering the report of the advisory council in consultation with other Government Departments and I hope to reach a decision shortly.

Domestic Fires

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many domestic fires occurred in *(a)* 1963 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available; what were the casualty figures in each year; and what proposals he has to reduce these.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information required is given in the table.

Fire certification arrangements under the Fire Precautions Act 1971 are not possible in single dwellings. The Government therefore continue to seek reductions in casualties from fires in such dwellings through effective initiatives in publicity and education.

Domestic fires and casualties from domestic fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom

Year	Domestic fires	Casualties (includes fire brigade)	
		Fatal	Non-fatal
1963	37,600	656	2,652
[1]1992	64,500	576	11,219

[1] 1992 figures are provisional.

Source: Home Office Fire Statistics, based on reports from local authority fire brigades.

Criminal and Motoring Cases

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* criminal and *(b)* motoring cases were brought to trial at Redbridge magistrates court and Snaresbrook Crown court for each quarter of 1991, 1992 and 1993 to date.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1991 and 1992, which is provisional, is given in the table. Information for 1993 is not yet available.

*Number of defendants prosecuted at Redbridge magistrates' court and the number of defendants tried at Snaresbrook Crown Court for "criminal"[1] and "motoring"[2] cases by quarter 1991 and 1992**

Year/ Quarter	Redbridge PSD		Snaresbrook CC	
	[1]Criminal	[2]Motoring	[1]Criminal	[2]Motoring
1991				
Q1	925	1,066	1,020	4
Q2	906	1,103	1,064	4
Q3	956	1,189	1,074	4
Q4	901	1,365	935	3
1992				
Q1	1,116	1,101	1,101	5
Q2	1,002	1,223	916	4
Q3	1,014	1,051	894	4
Q4	[3]1,000	1,330	724	1

[1] Indictable and summary non motoring offences.
[2] Summary motoring offences.
[3] Improvements in the data collection methods used by the Metropolitan police district (MPD) have led to an increase from this quarter in the number recorded as proceeded against in magistrate courts for indictable and summary non-motoring offences of about a third in the MPD area as a whole.

Special Constables

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what actions he intends to take to improve the training for special constables; and what further action he will take before recruiting.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Chief constables are responsible for the recruitment and training of special constables in their force area.

The central planning and training unit has developed a number of standard training packages as a resource for training special constables. National special constable training packages covering induction and basic training are now in use in the majority of forces in England and Wales, and a new development training package is being introduced in a number of police forces.

Suspects' Rights

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure of his Department on promoting the rights of suspects under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 since the coming into force of the Act and for each subsequent year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The approximate expenditure incurred in distributing to police forces new or revised versions of the codes of practice required under section 66 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and notices to detained persons required under paragraph 3.2 of code C was as follows:

	£
1985	33,700
1986	2,000
1988	14,600
1991	138,300
1992	[1]—

[1] No expenditure.

Police Resources, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions he has had with the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on existing police resources covering the Greater London area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the Commissioner from time to time to discuss matters of common concern, including resource matters.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost of each visit to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Howard: I have not made any official visits abroad since becoming Home Secretary.

Details of visits made by my predecessor during 1993, and the associated travel and subsistence costs, including those of a private secretary, are as follows:

Purpose	*Cost* £
Official visit to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh	12,504
European Conference on Uncontrolled Migration, Budapest	2,430
Ad Hoc Immigration/TREVI Ministerial Meeting, Copenhagen	1,784

Fire Inspections

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he has had from local authorities to the Government's proposal to end local authority fire inspections of bed-sitters and multi-tenant flats.

Sir George Young: I have been asked to reply.

Local housing authorities have a statutory duty under the Housing (Means of Escape from Fire in Houses in Multiple Occupation) Order 1981 to require that houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) with at least three storeys (excluding basements) and with a combined floor area of over 500 square metres are provided with adequate means of escape from fire.

Housing authorities have discretionary powers to inspect smaller HMOs under section 395 of the Housing Act 1985.

We have no plans to remove these powers.

SCOTLAND

Forestry Commission

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans the Government have to privatise the landholdings of the Forestry Commission.

Sir Hector Monro: Forestry Ministers have asked the forestry review group to review options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands, and to make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies.

Once they have received and considered the advice of the review group, they will decide what further action, if any, should be taken.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by generic and specific name the trees and shrubs, indigenous or otherwise, which are most commonly grown by the Forestry Commission; if he will show the density of each species as a percentage of land use; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The species most commonly grown by the Forestry Commission are listed in the table, together with the percentage of the total area of the commission's productive woodland which each occupies.

Species	*Percentage of Total Area*
Conifers	
Picea sitchensis (Sitka spruce)	48·0
Pinus contorta (Lodgepole pine)	11·6
Pinus sylvestris (Scots pine)	9·5
Larix kaempferi (Japanese larch)	5·3
Picea abies (Norway spruce)	5·0
Pinus nigra var maritima (Corsican pine)	4·2
Pseudotsuga menziesii (Douglas fir)	2·7
Larix eurolepis (Hybrid larch)	1·5
Larix decidua (European larch)	0·7
Tsuga heterophylla (Western hemlock)	0·7
All other conifers	1·4
Total Conifers	90·6
Broadleaves	
Quercus spp (Oak)	3·1
Fagus sylvatica (Beech)	2·6
Betula spp (Birch)	2·0
Fraxinus excelsior (Ash)	0·5
Acer pseudoplatanus (Sycamore)	0·3
Castanea sativa (Sweet Chestnut)	0·3
All other broadleaves	0·6
Total Broadleaves	9·4

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has of the number of trees on Forestry Commission land in *(a)* Nottinghamshire, *(b)* England, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales.

Sir Hector Monro: A broad estimate is given in the table.

	Number of Trees (Millions)
Nottinghamshire	7
England	300
Scotland	800
Wales	200

Training

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many trainees were recruited to employment training and the successor training for work programme in each local enterprise company area in *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93 and *(c)* between 1 April and 1 October.

Mr. Lang: In Scotland the responsibility for the monitoring of recruitment to employment training and its successor training for work rests with Scottish Enterprise and with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have therefore asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what sum of money was spent by each local enterprise company on employment training and its successor programme, training for work, in *(a)* 1991-92, *(b)* 1992-93, *(c)* between 1 April to 30 September, actual and *(d)* 1993-94, estimated outturn.

Mr. Lang: In Scotland the responsibility for the monitoring of local enterprise company expenditure on employment training and its successor training for work rests with Scottish Enterprise and with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have therefore asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what analysis has been made in each local enterprise company area of the leaver destination of trainees on employment training or its successor programme, training for work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: In Scotland the responsibility for analysis of leaver desinations of trainees on employment training and its successor training for work rests with Scottish Enterprise and with Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I have therefore asked the chairmen of these bodies to write to the hon. Member.

Nursery Education

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding the percentage of *(a)* three-year-old children and *(b)* four-year-old children who attend nursery school in each local education authority area in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table. The percentage figures are based on the mid-1992 estimates of the three- and four-year-old population.

Percentage of three-year-olds and four-year-olds attending education authority nursery schools/departments at September 1992.

Education Authority	*Per cent. of three-year-olds*	*Per cent. of four-year-olds*
Scotland	19·3	50·9
Borders	4·2	34·0
Central	20·6	61·9
Dumfries and Galloway	8·6	56·3
Fife	19·1	79·2
Grampian	12·0	57·1
Highland	5·0	28·3
Lothian	27·8	66·8
Strathclyde	20·2	42·1
Tayside	22·8	51·2
Orkney	18·2	50·7
Shetland	30·4	47·1
Western Isles	0·0	0·0
Strathclyde Divisions:		
Argyll and Bute	0·0	0·0
Ayr	14·4	39·1
Dunbarton	13·7	61·1
Glasgow	38·3	33·5
Lanark	10·2	28·6
Renfrew	15·4	42·6

Scenic Areas

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those notified applications for developments in national scenic areas which have been called in since 1979.

Mr. Stewart: The Town and Country Planning (Notification of Applications) (Scotland) Direction 1980 was issued in August 1980. Since then, the Secretary of State has called in four notified applications for developments in national scenic areas. These were:

an application for a hill track at Little Gruinard;
two applications for housing development at Kelton, Dumfries and Galloway; and
an application for seven houses on the foreshore at Ballachulish.

Smoke Detectors

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions have taken place between his officials and representatives of Convention of Scottish Local Authorities concerning the installation of smoke detectors in homes in *(a)* the public housing sector and *(b)* private homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: In discussions earlier this year with COSLA, and also with Scottish Homes, about the implementation of the health promotion initiatives outlined in "Scotland's Health—A Challenge to Us All", the Chief Medical Officer and officials of the Scottish Office Home and Health Department emphasised the importance of smoke detectors in reducing fatalities from fires and encouraged COSLA and Scottish Homes to continue their efforts to secure the installation of detectors throughout their housing stocks.

Regulations making the fitting of mains-operated smoke alarms compulsory in all new dwellings came into force in Scotland on 23 July 1993.

Sports Centres

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the provision of *(a)* swimming pools and public baths and *(b)* indoor sports centres by each relevant Scottish local authority on a per capita basis; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: This information is not held centrally.

Locate in Scotland

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the budget of Locate in Scotland in each year since its establishment; and what would the budget be in 1993, using the year of its establishment as a baseline, had it kept pace with inflation.

Mr. Stewart: Locate in Scotland was established in 1981. Between 1981-82 and 1983-84 costs were not held in a format to identify separately those attributable to Locate in Scotland.

The cost of running Locate in Scotland from 1984-85 to 1992-93, taking account of salaries, administration expenses, travel, overseas offices and marketing is shown.

£ million

Year	*Cost*
1984-85	3·3
1985-86	3·5
1986-87	3·8
1987-88	3·9
1988-89	4·0
1989-90	4·3
1990-91	4·6
1991-92	5·1
1992-93	6·2

Had costs since 1984-85 kept pace with inflation, the budget in 1992-93 would have been £5·1 million.

Hardy Nursery Stock

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the health of the hardy nursery stock industry in Scotland; and what plans he has further to develop and promote it.

Sir Hector Monro: The container sector of the industry has seen increasing sales and prices whereas in the bare-root sector overproduction of some lines has led to price reductions. Overall demand is good and activity on the landscape supply side shows signs of an increase. Growers have generally accepted the new single market plant health regime—plant passports—without major problems.

I was pleased to be able to lend my personal support this year again to the Scotgrow exhibition and I hope to attend the launch of Scottish Plants early next year. In the meantime we are considering whether the Government could make a financial contribution towards a joint initiative by the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the Horticultural Trade Association and Scotgrow to employ a full-time promotional officer.

Community Councils

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his plans for community councils.

Mr. Stewart: I announced, on 11 November, new measures to strengthen the role of community councils following local government reform.

Under the changes, community councils will gain the legal right to be consulted on local planning issues and schemes which the new councils will be preparing for decentralising service delivery arrangements. In addition, local licensing boards will be urged in new Government guidance to keep community councils fully informed of local developments in their area.

Glasshouse Crops

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to promote the use of waste heat from incinerators, distilleries and industrial units for the production of glasshouse crops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The Energy Efficiency Office commissions a wide range of studies, including waste heat recovery projects. The results of these studies are widely promoted.

Renfrewshire Enterprise

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of full-time permanent jobs that have been created by Renfrewshire Enterprise since its inception; and how many full-time permanent jobs have been lost in its catchment area in the same period.

Mr. Stewart: Estimates of jobs created by the local enterprise companies are made not by my right hon. Friend but by the local enterprise companies themselves, since it is they who have access to all necessary details about the projects and activities in which they have been involved. Renfrewshire Enterprise estimates that, during the period April 1991 to October 1993, its activities have created 6,500 jobs; and that it has had a considerable impact over and above this in maintaining and safeguarding jobs across its area.

No central register of jobs lost in the area is held. However, Renfrewshire Enterprise's monitoring of major job losses over the same period suggests losses of around 3,500.

Lending Libraries

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the provision of lending libraries by each relevant Scottish local authority on a per capita basis; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Local authorities revenue expenditure on library provision in 1991-92, the latest year for which figures are available, is set out in the table.

Local Authorities net revenue expenditure on libraries 1991-92

Authority	*£ per Capita*
Regional Councils	
Borders	14·04
Dumfries and Galloway	12·55
Highland	11·46
Island Councils	
Orkney	19·94
Shetland	18·86
Western Isles	13·27
District Councils	
Clackmannan	16·61
Falkirk	13·63
Stirling	18·92
Dunfermline	11·91
Kirkcaldy	12·21
North East Fife	12·74
Aberdeen	17·07
Banff and Buchan	14·09
Gordon	10·73
Kincardine and Deeside	10·08
Moray	15·73

Authority	£ per Capita
East Lothian	11·08
Edinburgh	16·99
Midlothian	13·98
West Lothian	12·85
Argyll and Bute	10·30
Bearsden and Milngavie	17·97
Clydebank	19·64
Clydesdale	13·53
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	13·30
Cumnock and Doon Valley	15·23
Cunninghame	13·87
Dumbarton	16·01
East Kilbride	18·06
Eastwood	16·72
Glasgow	20·92
Hamilton	14·17
Inverclyde	12·10
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	9·87
Kyle and Carrick	14·04
Monklands	16·17
Motherwell	15·65
Renfrew	20·74
Strathkelvin	13·99
Angus	13·00
Dundee	19·52
Perth	13·36
Scotland	15·62

Benomyl

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines his Department currently issues on the use of benomyl as a crop fungicide; what precautions he advises on its use; what are the effects of misuse; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My Department receives advice on pesticide safety issues from the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, an independent body of scientific and medical experts. Following a review of benomyl by the ACP, it was announced in March of this year that there was no cause for concern over its continued use in the United Kingdom.

In addition to the statutory conditions governing pesticide usage in general, benomyl products carry label restrictions including warning not to contaminate waterways, to keep off skin, to wash after use, to empty the container completely and dispose of safely; and, for home garden produce, to store away from children. Exposure to extremely large amounts of benomyl can cause anophthalimia and microphthalmia in rats. However, provided conditions of use are followed, exposure of consumers and operators is 1,000 times less than that demonstrated as a no-effect level in rats.

Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will commission a study by Scottish Enterprise into the potential for the development of manufacturing of Paisley pattern goods in Paisley.

Mr. Stewart: Renfrewshire Enterprise, in partnership with Renfrew district council, is already supporting the industry and examining a number of strategic issues through the Paisley pattern initiative. The initiative covers the heritage of the industry; commercial and product development; and marketing and promotion of Paisley pattern and its links with the local area.

Renfrewshire Enterprise plans to examine in the new year the full market potential for the manufacturing of Paisley pattern products, to build on the strategic examination of the industry conducted under the Initiative.

I am sure Renfrewshire Enterprise would be happy to provide the hon. Member with further details about the initiative should he wish to contact it direct.

Windyhill Farm, Elderslie

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will consider the appeal against refusal of planning permission by Renfrew district council for the development of a quarry at Windyhill farm, Elderslie; what procedures will be followed before final determination of the appeal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Evidence on this appeal will be heard by a reporter at a public local inquiry scheduled to commence on 14 June 1994. The reporter appointed will subsequently submit a comprehensive report based on the evidence led at the inquiry and the many other written representations submitted by local residents and other parties. The report and reporter's recommendations will, thereafter, be referred to my right hon. Friend who has directed that he should determine this appeal on the grounds that the proposal would constitute a significant development within a designated green belt.

Lord Lieutenants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the procedure for the appointment of a lord lieutenant of Renfrewshire to replace the retiring incumbent; if he will publish a table showing the name, occupation and date of appointment of *(a)* the vice-lord lieutenant and *(b)* each deputy lord lieutenants of (i) Glasgow and (ii) Renfrewshire; how nominations can be made for these positions; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Lord lieutenants in Scotland are appointed by Her Majesty under section 131 of the Reserve Forces Act 1980. Deputy lieutenants are appointed by the lord lieutenant under section 133 of that Act, which includes the requirement that the lord lieutenant must ascertain that Her Majesty does not disapprove of the proposed appointment. Under section 135 of that Act, each lord lieutenant may, with Her Majesty's approbation, appoint a deputy lieutenant or a lieutenant as vice-lord lieutenant. Current information about the occupations of vice-lords lieutenant and lords-lieutenant is not held centrally. The other information requested by the hon. Gentleman is as follows:

Renfrewshire

Name	Date of appointment
Vice-Lord Lieutenant	
Colonel Sir Houston Shaw-Stewart of Greenock and Blackhall, Bt, MC TD	11 November 1980
Deputy Lieutenants	
Lieutenant-Colonel A. Leonard Aitkenhead, MBE TD	13 February 1962
Major David A. Kerr, MC TD	13 February 1962
Sir William J. Lithgow, Bt, of Ormsary	31 May 1970
Major John G. Stewart, TD	31 May 1970
Sir Eric Yarrow, Bt, MBE	31 May 1970
Sir Ian Denholm, CBE	20 October 1980
George G. MacMillan of MacMillan and Knap	15 September 1983

Name	Date of appointment
Alan R. Devereux, Esq., CBE	31 May 1985
The Right Hon. The Lord Goold	31 May 1985
The Right Hon. The Lord Maclay	29 July 1986
Commander Henry C. Abram, VRD OStJ	7 October 1987
Brigadier John Brown, OBE MM TD	7 October 1987
Guy W. N. H. Clark, Esq.	7 October 1987
Captain William H. Hunter, CBE	7 October 1987
Mrs. Helen M. Laird, OBE	7 October 1987
Wing Commander C. Hector MacLean, AE	7 October 1987
James R. Minto, Esq., OBE	7 October 1987
Sir Simpson Stevenson, LLD	14 May 1990
Mrs. Margaret J. Baird	20 July 1993
Colonel Archibald D. Bremner	20 July 1993
Miss Annabel M. Goldie	20 July 1993
Archibald L. Morton, Esq.	20 July 1993
Cameron H. Parker, Esq., OBE	20 July 1993

Glasgow

Name	Date of appointment
Vice-Lord Lieutenant	
Robert Gray, Esq., CBE OStJ LLD	15 July 1992
Deputy Lieutenants	
Group Captain Marcus Robinson, CB AFC AE	1955
Lieutenant-Colonel Leonard E. Dickson, CBE MC TD	3 May 1963
Colonel A. Walker Naddell, ERD KStJ	3 May 1963
Sir Samuel Curran, LLD FRS	30 June 1969
William L. Smith, Esq., MC TD	30 June 1969
Peter M. Gemmill Esq.	31 August 1971
Air Vice-Marshal Alexander V. R. Johnstone, CB DFC	31 August 1971
Captain John Mallard, MBE VRD	31 August 1971
Colonel A. T. Wilson, VRD	31 August 1971
Lord Wallace of Campsie, KStJ	31 August 1971
Colonel Lachlan Robertson, OBE TD	15 May 1975
Sir William Gray, LLD	1 July 1975
Peter T. McCann, Esq., OStJ	26 December 1977
Miss Agnes M. Patrick	7 November 1979
John K. Richmond, Esq.	7 November 1979
Mrs. Jean A. McFadden, CBE	2 July 1980
Gerald McGrath Esq.	30 April 1980
John H. Young, Esq., OBE	21 September 1981
Bashir A. Maan, Esq.	7 December 1982
Dr. Michael Kelly, CBE OStJ LLD	26 June 1984
James Mullen, Esq.	9 July 1985
Philip O'Rourke, Esq.	9 July 1985
Iain J. A. Dyer, Esq., MBE	4 November 1987
Patrick Lally, Esq.	4 November 1987
William Aitken, Esq.	26 May 1992
Mrs. Susan Baird, CBE OStJ	15 July 1992

Planning Regulations

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider extending planning regulations to make it the duty of planning authorities to ensure that service copies of proposed developments which are available to the public exactly match development plans on planning application forms and associated plans.

Mr. Lang: Responsibility for completion of neighbour notices rests with the applicant. It is intended that the description given of the proposed development should be consistent with the information on the planning application form. However, there is no requirement for it to match exactly. If it comes to light that there is a general problem on this matter, I will of course be willing to look into it.

Land (Public Access)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes planning authorities are enacting or proposing when approached for planning permission for a change of ownership of forestry regarding freedom to roam; what representations he has had on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: Change in the ownership of a forest is not subject to planning permission. The Forestry Commission operates procedures, where it plans to dispose of forestry land, which offer local authorities the opportunity of entering into an access agreement between the commission and the authority. These arrangements are being reviewed at present in conjunction with the work of the forestry review group. The review group and Ministers have received many representations of which a large proportion are concerned about maintenance of access.

Procurators Fiscal

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the arrangements for reporting perceived cases of maladministration by local procurator fiscal's offices; how many such cases have been reported in relation to the operation of the procurator fiscal's office in Paisley since 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Where my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate receives a complaint about the conduct of business in a procurator fiscal's office, he obtains an immediate and full report of the circumstances. Procurators fiscal know that they may be called upon at any time to explain their actings to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate. In addition, a programme of practice review involves inspection of local offices. Procurators fiscal also submit monthly returns of their activities to the Crown Office. In matters of administration procurators fiscal are accountable through their regional procurator fiscal to the Crown Agent. Regional procurators fiscal have powers to visit and inspect offices in their regions, and routinely do so. Local offices are also subject to regular financial auditing.

There have been no reports of maladministration as such in relation to the operation of the procurator fiscal's office at Paisley, although a number of complaints have recently been made about the handling of particular cases by that office. The Crown Agent has discussed these with the procurator fiscal, and certain new procedures have been adopted as a result.

Job Creation

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what major job-creating projects have been announced in Scotland in the last 12 months.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* There have been many announcements of job creating projects in Scotland in the last 12 months. Those involving 200 or more jobs are listed.

Organisation	Location	Jobs expected to be created
Muir Construction Ltd.	Kirkcaldy	250
Aulds (Food) Ltd.	Inchinnan	270
Jabil Circuit Ltd.	Livingston	400
Mimtec Ltd.	Livingston	400
Marks and Spencer plc and Sainsbury plc	Glasgow-Renfrew	5,000
Mitsubishi Corporation (UK) Ltd.	Livingston	200
Hoover Ltd.	Cambuslang	400
Scotcable Ltd.	Uddingston	500
Marshall Food Group Ltd.	Edinburgh	300
Direct Line Insurance plc	Glasgow	200
David A. Hall Ltd.	Broxburn	400
VRG International Inc.	Livingston	300
Costain plc and Taylor Woodrow plc	Hunterston	500
Shell Ltd. and Esso Ltd.	North East Shetland	3,000
Fullarton Fabrication Ltd.	Kilwinning	200
Kvaerner Govan Ltd.	Glasgow	500
Ministry of Defence	Glasgow	700
Conoco (UK) Ltd.	Aberdeen	400
Kvaerner H and G Offshore Ltd.	Aberdeen	300
Safeway Food Stores Ltd.	Glenrothes	250
Motorola Ltd.	Glenrothes and East Kilbride	980
Shoprite Group Ltd.	Dunfermline	360
Solectron Scotland Ltd.	Dunfermline	300
Great Britain plc		
Hamilton Oil Company	Port Glasgow	300
PCI Ltd.	East Kilbride	300
Hoskyns Group plc	Forres	200
DAKS Simpson Group plc	Larkhall	256
British Sky Broadcasting plc	Bathgate	200
Levi Strauss (UK) Ltd.	St. Andrews	230
British Telecommunications Ltd.	Glasgow	200
European Monitors Ltd.	Ayr	350

Local Government Review

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a detailed explanation of his reasons for proposing to detach Musselburgh from the East Lothian local authority area, citing the specific representations or evidence of public opinion which supported that plan.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* In reaching the decision to include Musselburgh in the proposed Lothians authority, particular attention was paid to the petition of 8,000 names from the "Hands Off Musselburgh" campaign which expressed opposition to Musselburgh's inclusion within an expanded Edinburgh authority. The fact that Musselburgh traditionally formed part of Midlothian, and became part of East Lothian as recently as 1975, was also taken into account.

Gourock Rope Works

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he or his officials last discussed the subject of the current circumstances surrounding the Gourock rope works, Port Glasgow, and its future with representatives of Historic Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* Historic Scotland, as an executive agency responsible to my right hon. Friend, reports to me for my interest in the Gourock rope works as a listed building.

Historic Scotland officials had a meeting with officials of Inverclyde district council regarding the rope works building on 12 August. Regular communication has been maintained since then. I hope the future of the category A listed building will be made secure by a scheme for its restoration.

I shall write to the hon. Member as matters develop.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many members of Ayrshire and Arran health board's valuation committee have recently resigned from the evaluation committee.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* No members have resigned from the evaluation committee.

Countryside Survey

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment on the results of the countryside survey 1990 and the implications of these results for his Department.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* My right hon. Friend maintains regular contact with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on these matters and will continue to do so. My right hon. Friend is committed to integrating environmental concerns into all policy areas.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 2 December 1993

NATIONAL FINANCE

Pensions

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much of the total amount of money raised by measures to restrict the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund introduced in the last Budget will be paid by members of money purchase occupational schemes in the form of a reduction in the assets available to purchase a pension;

(2) how much of the total amount of money raised by measures introduced in the last Budget, to restrict the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund, will be paid by employers in the form of additional contributions;

(3) how much of the total amount of money raised by measures to restrict the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund introduced in the last Budget will be paid by individuals paying additional voluntary contributions into occupational schemes in the form of a reduction in assets available to purchase a pension;

(4) how much of the total amount of money raised by measures introduced in the last Budget, to restrict the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund, will be paid by pension funds in the form of a reduction in assets;

(5) how much of the total amount of money raised by measures to restrict the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund introduced in the last Budget will be paid by holders of personal pensions in the form of a reduction in the assets available to purchase a pension.

Mr. Dorrell: The impact of the changes in the taxation of dividends announced in the March Budget on contributions to, and the assets of, pension funds will depend upon a wide range of factors including future rates of return on investments, earning levels and the existing levels of assets and liabilities.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax will be raised in a full tax year by the measure introduced in the March Budget restricting the amount of tax which can be reclaimed by a pension fund.

Mr. Dorrell: The overall Exchequer yield from the changes in the taxation of dividends announced in the March Budget is estimated to be £900 million in 1995-96 and about £1 billion a year subsequently.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions his officials have had with officials in the Department of Social Security on the extent to which the tax changes affecting pension funds introduced in the March Budget are likely to affect the number of people relying on various forms of private pension provision;

(2) what discussions his officials have had with officials in the Department of Social Security on the extent to which the tax changes affecting pension funds introduced in the March Budget are likely to affect the numbers contracting out of SERPS.

Mr. Dorrell: Regular discussions take place between officials of my Department and Department of Social Security officials on a wide range of topics affecting pension funds.

Mr. Bates: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his officials had with officials of the Department of Social Security before changing the taxation of the income of pension funds in the March Budget.

Mr. Dorrell: The potential effects of changes to the taxation of dividends announced in the March Budget were taken fully into account in developing the proposals. Issues affecting pensions are the subject of regular discussions between my officials and those of the Department of Social Security.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the current cost threshold for answering parliamentary questions is calculated.

Mr. Dorrell: The threshold is set at a level which is eight times the average direct cost of staff involved in answering written parliamentary questions. The average direct cost is updated annually by indexation. The cost threshold is increased in £50 steps, rounded upwards.

Tax Credits

Mr. George: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the National Association of Pension Funds about the effects of further reductions in the value of tax credits on dividends payable by United Kingdom companies to United Kingdom resident or other non-resident shareholders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Association of Pension Funds has written to my right hon. and learned Friend, and I met representatives of the association on 27 October.

Corporate Tax Fraud

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase penalties for corporate tax fraud.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have no such plans. We believe the existing system of tax-geared penalties to be quite adequate.

Value Added Tax

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 November on payments by the VAT commissioners, what was the value of the VAT payable orders gone astray since 1 July 1988 subsequently recovered.

Sir John Cope: Of the total sum of £360,638, reported as gone astray in the previous answer £237,624·11 had been recovered as at 30 November 1993. The sums still outstanding continue to be subject to any possible further recovery action.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *273*, what inquiries he has instituted as to why traders do not take advantage of electronic transfer; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Customs ask traders to provide bank account details on first registration, by an annual mailshot to verify registration details and when officers carry out visits to their premises.

The option of payment by electronic transfer or by payable order can be helpful to business, but the choice of method is a commercial decision for the trader.

Inquiries and general feedback to Customs indicate that a proportion of those who choose to receive payable orders do so to enable them to retain control over the sum, both as to destination and timing.

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Sir John Cope: The annual cost to the Treasury for use of Government car service cars by its Ministers in financial year 1992-93 was £270,282. Five cars were allocated to Treasury Ministers on long-term hire and are available for other official use within the Treasury when not required by Ministers.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has regarding future arrangements for the grant of criminal legal aid in the magistrates courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Decisions on the grant or refusal of legal aid in criminal cases brought in the approximately 600 magistrates' courts in England and Wales are an integral part of procedures which, in the interests of the liberty of the subject, have to be as expeditious as possible. The Legal Aid Act 1988 vests the function of deciding in the courts themselves, but gives me the power to transfer it to the Legal Aid Board.

The evidence continues to indicate that, under the present arrangements, the Lord Chancellor cannot be certain that the existing regulations governing the grant of legal aid are being applied sufficiently rigorously, in particular in determining the financial eligibility of applicants. This has led the Comptroller and Auditor General repeatedly to qualify my Department's appropriation account because of material doubt whether this category of legal aid spending is regular.

In no circumstances can any irregularity in dispensing public money be acceptable, and the Lord Chancellor will take every available step to ensure proper safeguards consistent with the due administration of justice. In addition to the guidance issued last year, the Lord Chancellor has made changes in the regulations, with effect from September 1993, to clarify and strengthen the duty on justices clerks to satisfy themselves of an applicant's means before granting legal aid. In addition, with the help of the Justices Clerks Society and the Legal Aid Board, the Lord Chancellor is considering whether the previous guidance on the "interests of justice" criteria requires to be revised. The impact of these measures will be closely monitored.

In January 1992, the Lord Chancellor invited the Legal Aid Board to consider whether, in the interests of making decisions on the grant of criminal legal aid in the magistrates courts more uniform and systematic, I should transfer this function from the courts to the board. The board reported earlier this year that it would be ready to assume responsibility if certain changes were made in the present scheme, but that it could not do so until 1995 at the earliest. In consultations on the board's report, reservations were expressed about some of the details, while other aspects commanded widespread support.

Transferring responsibility for the grant of criminal legal aid to the Legal Aid Board offers the advantage of greater consistency in decision-making. However, there could be countervailing risks to the speed and efficiency of criminal procedures. As a matter of policy, I feel bound to take these risks seriously, and I am not at present satisfied that they are outweighed by the advantage.

However, if the current measures do not achieve an acceptable result, I will give further consideration to a transfer to the board. At the same time, I will consider any identifiable alternative measures, with a view to achieving the best practicable balance between speed of decision-making and assured regularity in the handling of public money.

TRANSPORT

London Underground (Power Failures)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a table listing the number of occasions on which the London Underground service has been affected by a power failure in the past five years in each case indicating the number of lines, train services and passengers affected and the length of time during which the service was interrupted; and whether or not passengers had to be evacuated from any part of the system.

Mr. Norris: Over the past five years London Underground has experienced one other significant power failure, at Charing Cross station on the morning of 19 October 1992. As a result of the failure of the local station power supply, the station was evacuated and remained closed for the rest of the day, reopening at the start of service on 20 October. All Jubilee line trains were terminated at Green Park, and Bakerloo and Northern line trains did not stop at Charing Cross. There are no figures available for the number of passengers directly affected.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has been given of the theoretical risk of simultaneous failure of all power supplies to the London Underground system.

Mr. Norris: An independent risk analysis report has estimated the risk of simultaneous loss of Lots Road and Greenwich generating stations and the Neasden bulk supply point to be one in 3,378 years.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers on the London

Underground were affected by the power failure on 24 November; and what proportion of the total number of daily users of the underground service this represents.

Mr. Norris: London Underground has provided the following information:

300,000 passengers were affected by the morning failure, representing 12 per cent. of daily users.

20,000 passengers were evacuated from trains stalled between stations—in tunnel or in the open—due to the morning failure, representing 0·8 per cent. of daily users.

150,000 passengers were affected by the evening failure, representing 6 per cent. of daily users.

2,000 passengers were evacuated from trains stalled between stations—in tunnel or in the open—due to the evening failure, representing 0·08 per cent. of daily users.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether *(a)* the Lots Road or *(b)* Greenwich power station reserve for London Underground were called upon on 24 November; and whether either failed.

Mr. Norris: I understand from London Underground that there was no failure of the basic power supply system from the two generating stations. I am informed that the incident on 24 November was caused by the malfunctioning of equipment designed to protect the high-voltage system from thermal danger in the event of a fault.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the lines affected and estimate the number of train services delayed as a consequence of the power failure on the London Underground on 24 November.

Mr. Norris: The latest information from London Underground on lines and train services affected as a consequence of the power failure on 24 November is as follows:

Central Line
08:00—16:15. No service east of Marble Arch; 80 per cent. of services affected.

Circle and Hammersmith and City Lines
08:00—13:30. No service between Edgeware Road and Moorgate; 50 per cent. of services affected.

District Line
07:45—13:30. No service between Embankment and Barking; 20 per cent. of services affected.

East London Line
08:00—11:00. No service.

Metropolitan Line
08:00—13:30. No service between Baker Street and Moorgate; 10 per cent. of services affected.

At 17:33, following restoration of eastern Central line services there was a further power failure affecting both the Central and the District lines. Twenty per cent. of District line services were affected and 80 per cent. of Central line services. Normal service was not resumed on the Central line until the morning of 30 November. Between 25 and 29 November the Central line was able to achieve an average of 38 per cent. of its normal scheduled mileage.

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the age and state of repair of the cable used to transmit power to the London underground; and what advice he has received about the likelihood of any future repetition of the power failure which occurred on the underground on 24 November.

Mr. Norris: I have asked London Transport for a full report on the cause of the power failure on 24 November. Until I have received that report, it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

Maritime Safety

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding a draft resolution on the application of the competition rules to maritime transport proposed by the President of the Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I received representations on the proposed draft resolution on competition and maritime transport both from individual United Kingdom shippers and from organisations representing shippers and shipowners; those representations were carefully considered. The Council of Ministers meeting on 29 November decided not to proceed with the resolution.

Railtrack

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the management of Railtrack to discuss levels of investment need in track and infrastructure in the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: I last met the chairman of Railtrack yesterday when it was announced that the modernisation of the west coast main line will be taken forward as a privately managed and financed investment as part of the private finance initiative.

Nuclear Waste

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the transport implications of the United Kingdom Government's abstention on the vote for a permanent world-wide ban on nuclear waste dumping at sea at the London convention meeting in November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom is currently considering what declarations may need to be made to the International Maritime Organisation in respect of the resolution prohibiting the sea disposal of radioactive waste. The transport of radioactive materials, including radioactive waste, is a separate issue, subject to stringent international safety standards.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the management of the west coast main line to discuss issues relating to investment.

Mr. Freeman: I last met the director of the west coast main line at the end of October.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding investment in the west coast main line during the last year; and if he can give a breakdown as to the sources of such representations.

Mr. Freeman: I have received a large number of representations from hon. Members, local authorities and others on the need to modernise the west coast main line.

The Government announced on 30 November that the modernisation of the west coast main line will be taken forward as a privately managed and financed investment as part of the private finance initiative.

Biodiversity

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to ensure that the Government's biodiversity action plan will include an objective to avoid the loss of important biodiversity sites to transport developments.

Mr. Norris: The Government will consider the implications for biodiversity when formulating and reviewing transport policies and will ensure that biodiversity objectives are fully taken into account in the assessment of new transport infrastructure.

We have a long-standing policy of keeping transport infrastructure away from protected areas such as sites of special scientific interest, wherever possible.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the biodiversity action plan will allow for the re-routing of ships to avoid marine areas of special interest for wildlife.

Mr. Norris: The Government have already agreed with the International Maritime Organisation a number of routing measures to reduce the risk of oil pollution around the United Kingdom coast.

An amended "Area to be Avoided" off the Shetland islands and new "Areas to be Avoided" off Orkney and around Fair Isle came into force on 28 November. Specific recommendations, most of which include prescribed routes, also came into force covering the Pentland firth, the Isles of Scilly, the Minch, the North channel, off Smalls and Grassholme channel, the Needles channel, the English channel and Dover strait and the Firth of Forth.

The European Community is currently identifying sensitive areas which are at high risk from maritime traffic and further measures may be proposed by the Commission to protect these areas.

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. MacGregor: The annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers is £286,000 for the financial year 1993-94. Five vehicles are involved.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will be responsible for *(a)* setting targets and *(b)* paying compensation for non-fulfilment, in terms of the passengers charter, in the event of rail privatisation.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* Each rail franchise agreement will set out the operating standards which franchisees will have to deliver and the incentives and penalties which will apply if performance exceeds or falls short of those standards. The setting of standards and the related incentive and penalty arrangements will be the responsibility of the franchising director acting within guidelines laid down by my right hon. Friend.

M11

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to provide a motorway service station on the M11; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department has secured planning clearance for a motorway service area at Birchanger adjacent to junction 8 of the M11 and has appointed Forte Welcome Break to construct it. Building work is now under way and the service area is due to open early in 1995.

Kingston upon Hull City Transport

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the ownership of Kingston upon Hull City Transport.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the future of Kingston upon Hull City Transport Ltd.

Mr. Freeman: The Secretary of State has given formal consent to the sale of Kingston-upon-Hull City Transport Ltd, the bus company owned by the Hull city council, to Cleveland Transit Ltd. The new owners are to offer a 49 per cent. shareholding in the company to the employees.

Change of ownership takes place under the terms of section 75(3) of the Transport Act 1985, which allows authorities to sell their public transport companies with the consent of the Secretary of State.

I wish the company success in the private sector.

Advertising

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much his Department spends annually on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising and *(c)* press advertising; and what were the corresponding figures for 1985 and 1979.

Mr. Norris: Figures are £,000s

	1993-94	*1992-93*	*1985-86*	*1979-80*
(a) TV	[1]5,155	5,467	70	4,141
(b) Radio	—	566	858	62
(c) Press	[1]15	131	834	105

[1] Figures for 1993-94 are provisional

Motorway Charging

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the Government's plans for taking forward motorway charging.

Mr. Macgregor: The Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his Budget speech that I would shortly be making a statement about motorway charging in the light of responses to the Green Paper, "Paying For Better Motorways", which I published last May with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales. The Green Paper considered how the introduction of direct charging for the use of our most important inter-urban roads could provide another source of finance to expand the network more quickly; and how it could help to ensure that we make more efficient use of the network.

Our aim was to stimulate an informed, wide-ranging debate. By far the most striking feature of the responses was the widespread acknowledgement among bodies representing industry and road users of the potential benefits of direct charging. An important effect of charging would be to provide another source of finance for improving the motorway network, so avoiding the congestion that will otherwise come with economic growth and increasing traffic. The motorway network carries 15 per cent. of all road traffic and 30 per cent. of heavy goods vehicle traffic. An effective network is an important contributor to our continued economic prosperity.

As many respondents recognised, motorway charging could have other important advantages. It would provide the key to increasing private sector investment in the operation and expansion of the motorway network. It would make more efficient use of the network, for example by the use of pricing structures designed to spread peak period congestion. It would put the charges on those who actually use motorways rather than the near-50 per cent. of road users who rarely or never travel on the network. And it would improve the competitive position of rail and other forms of public transport for which users are already charged directly.

The Green Paper described three options for direct charging. The first was conventional tolling with toll plazas and booths of the sort found on estuarial crossings in this country and on motorways in a number of other countries. The Green Paper said that this option should be ruled out for existing motorways because of the land that would be required and the traffic delays which conventional tolling would itself cause. There was almost unanimous agreement with that decision.

The second option, suggested as a possible interim measure, was charging by means of a permit system of the sort currently used in Switzerland. The Government have decided that the benefits of such permits would not be sufficient to justify the likely costs of introducing them as an interim measure. We shall not therefore pursue this option.

The third option discussed in the Green Paper was fully electronic tolling, where vehicles using the motorway network would carry an electronic tag which would react to signals as the vehicles passed roadside beacons. Vehicles would not have to stop. The toll would be worked out automatically and would either be charged to the road user's account or deducted from a pre-paid smart card on the vehicle. It is clear from responses to the Green Paper that this is widely seen as the best way of introducing motorway charging in this country.

The technology for electronic tolling on the scale necessary for the British motorway network needs further development. The electronic tolling systems currently operating or being tested in the United States and in Europe would not fully meet the requirements here. In the light of the responses to the Green Paper, we have decided to launch immediately a major programme of research, development and trials to identify the capabilities of the existing technology and to draw up a specification for a motorway charging system. The first step will be to invite industry to demonstrate available technology. We shall then assess in detail the most promising systems, with trials on a specific stretch of motorway. On the basis of the many discussions I have had with manufacturers and organisations involved in electronic road charging here and abroad, I am convinced that there is a great deal of work being undertaken internationally, and it would be feasible technologically to install motorway charging here within about five years.

The assessment of the available technology and systems will provide the basis on which to decide when to go ahead with motorway charging and at an appropriate time bring forward the necessary legislation for Parliament to consider.

The Green Paper also invited views on the best ways of involving private finance in the operation and expansion of the motorway network. We announced a year ago that, as a possible transitional step to motorway charging, the private sector might be invited to bid for contracts under which they would design, build, finance and operate roads for which they would receive payment from Government in relation to the use of those roads. There is strong support for DBFO contracts from the construction industry and the City. Accordingly, we shall enter into early discussions with the construction industry and others to identify a list of potential DBFO schemes which could provide for substantial transfer of risk to the private sector. Our aim would be to let DBFO contracts on schemes which have already been taken through public inquiry. I therefore hope that the first contracts could be let and work started within 18 months.

The Green Paper made it clear that this was not the only option for increasing the role of private finance in the provision of roads. We have decided that the DBFO approach offers the best way forward for the present, whilst we develop for the future more extensive use of private finance and expertise.

I shall be appointing as soon as possible financial advisers to assist in preparing DBFO contracts and to work up further private finance options for the future.

Concerns were expressed in the responses to the Green Paper about the possible side-effect of charging on diversion of vehicles from motorways to other roads. I recognise that concern and devoted a whole chapter of the Green Paper to this question. Charging across the network at levels well below those used in other countries—as was proposed in the Green Paper—is unlikely to cause much diversion, and the Government are very conscious of the need to avoid this. It also has to be taken into account that, without improvement of the motorways, congestion on them will grow, and such congestion would itself cause diversion on to alternative routes. So doing nothing is not a realistic option.

Many respondents indicated that their support for charging was dependent on the resources being used to fund additional road capacity. The Green Paper gave two important assurances. First, that it would be the Government's intention to ensure that the revenue and expenditure on roads subject to charges would be transparent, and that the proceeds of charges would be applied only to the construction and operation of the charged network. Secondly, that the Government would take into account the relationship between the charges and existing motoring taxes in setting their respective levels. The Government reaffirm these assurances.

Many issues, such as the precise definition of the network to be charged and the level of charges require further exploration, which we shall undertake in parallel with the technology trial. Until these detailed decisions are taken, there is no case for amending our national road traffic forecasts and our traffic forecasting methodology to

take account of the contingent effect of tolling, any more than there is for anticipating the possible introduction of city congestion charging.

M20 (Services)

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what motorway service facilities open 24 hours a day will be available on the M20 motorway in time for the opening of the channel tunnel to passenger traffic.

Mr. Key: Planning consent has been granted for motorway service areas—MSAs—on the M20 at Hollingbourne and Westenhanger. Neither is expected to open by May 1994. On completion, both will be required to guarantee 24-hour access, fuel availability, free parking and toilet facilities.

ENVIRONMENT

Gulf War

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many scientists from his Department participated in the study by the United Nations Environment Programme, document UNEP/GC.17/NF.9 into the long-term environmental effects of the Gulf war; and if he will arrange for a copy of the study to be put in the Library.

Mr. Yeo: The document was prepared by the United Nations Enviroment Programme—UNEP; scientists in the Department were not involved in its preparation. As well as summarising the latest information on the effects of the conflict, the document refers to studies by 12 United Nations agencies to which the United Kingdom contributed. A copy of the document is being placed in the Library of the House.

Special Needs Housing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to employ a special needs adviser with a specific remit of developing United Kingdom-wide standard for wheelchair housing.

Sir George Young: The Government recognise the desirability of providing accessible housing for disabled people. However, the development of a national standard for wheelchair housing is more appropriate to the work of the British Standards Institution than that of a special needs adviser within my Department. There is a British standard, BS5619, "Design of housing for the convenience of disabled people". The revision of this standard, which does not currently address the special needs of wheelchair users, is being considered and my Department would be willing to play a full part, alongside organisations which provide housing for special needs, in discussions on incorporating improved provisions for wheelchair users in any such revision.

Housing

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of cutting the Housing Corporation's approved development programme by £300 million on the total number of housing association homes produced for 1994-95.

Sir George Young: Following the changes to Housing Corporation expenditure in 1994-95 announced in the Budget, we estimate that 53,000 new homes will be provided with Housing Corporation funding in 1994-95.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the number of homes which will be produced in *(a)* 1993-94, *(b)* 1994-95 and *(c)* 1995-96 by maintaining the Housing Corporation's approved development programme at its current level.

Sir George Young: Under this year's approved development programme — ADP — the Housing Corporation estimated in January that the number of homes produced would be 54,500 in 1993-94, 49,400 in 1994-95, and 50,100 in 1995-96. Despite the changes in Housing Corporation expenditure made in the Budget, it still expects to achieve 154,000 new homes over this period. No estimate has been made of the number of new homes which would have been provided had the ADP been held at its current level.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his Department's latest estimate of the number of housing association homes which will be produced in 1994-95.

Sir George Young: Following the expenditure plans announced in the Budget we estimate that the Housing Corporation's capital programme will provide for some 53,000 new homes in 1994-95.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total number of new housing association units which will be produced in 1994-95 if the Housing Corporation's approved development programme is reduced by *(a)* £300 million, *(b)* £400 million and *(c)* £500 million.

Sir George Young: Following the Budget announcement that the Housing Corporation's capital expenditure programme has been reduced by some £300 million in 1994-95, we estimate that this will nevertheless provide for some 53,000 housing association homes in 1994-95. No estimate has been made of the effect that the greater reductions identified would have had on total units produced. Any such figure would depend not only on the overall size of the approved development programme, but on the likely balance between sub-programmes.

Water Quality

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, how many laboratories in the north-west exist for testing the quality of water.

Mr. Yeo: North West Water currently has eight laboratories for testing drinking water supplies or waste water. The National Rivers Authority has one chemical and three biological laboratories in the north-west. Both North West Water and the NRA are in the process of rationalising their laboratory facilities.

Biodiversity Convention

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the ratification of the biodiversity convention by the United Kingdom; whether

he intends to qualify the act of ratification in any way; whether he intends to lodge an interpretative declaration alongside the United Kingdom's signature; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: It remains our intention to ratify the convention on biological diversity given satisfactory progress towards securing safeguards regarding our concerns on the financial provisions of the convention. We intend to reaffirm on ratification the interpretative statements we made on signature.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total cost of payments to landowners in respect of sites of special scientific interest; how many landowners received such grants in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Details of the cost of management agreements entered into with landowners in such circumstances and of grants paid in respect of SSSIs are published in the annual reports of English Nature and of the former Nature Conservancy Council, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Community Care Homes

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to undertake an inter-departmental review of the funding of community care homes managed by housing associations to ensure their viability, prior to reinstating certification 10 and the consequential withdrawal of the housing revenue funding provided via the Housing Corporation from those individuals sponsored by social services departments under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Sir George Young: My Department is consulting other Government Departments before a decision is taken on the arrangements for the Housing Corporation's revenue funding of housing association special needs schemes beyond the current financial year.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures are available to show the number of bed spaces which will be lost if proposals to withdraw funding from registered care homes managed by housing associations providing community care schemes under sponsorship arrangements are carried out.

Sir George Young: Revenue grants paid by the Housing Corporation are just one element in the income stream of housing associations which run schemes for clients with special needs. It is not possible, therefore, to quantify the effects of any changes in the level of that particular contribution in terms of the number of bed-spaces that associations are able to make available. Representations have been made to my Department about the effect which any reductions in the corporation's revenue support might have on individual schemes and those representations will be taken into account before a decision is taken on the arrangements for that support beyond the current financial year.

Defective Housing

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which houses, designated as defective under defective housing legislation, are now capable of having those defects rectified; which houses are awaiting a system of treatment to be discovered; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Under part XVI of the Housing Act 1985 eligible owners of all 24 designated house types can have their homes reinstated by substantial demolition and reconstruction if the local authority determines this is a practicable and cost effective solution. Repair schemes meeting the requirements of the legislation are available for all designated house types except Boswell, Dyke, Stonecrete, Underdown, and Waller.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the types of houses currently designated under defective housing legislation.

Sir George Young: The following 24 types of dwellings have been designated defective under part XVI of the Housing Act 1985:

Airey
Boot
Boswell
Cornish Unit
Dorran
Dyke
Gregory
Myton
Newland
Orlit
Parkinson
Reema Hollow Panel
Schindler and Hawksley SGS
Smith
Stent
Stonecrete
Tarran
Underdown
Unity and Butterley
Waller
Wates
Wessex
Winget
Woolaway

Sustainable Development

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government will publish their strategy for sustainable development.

Mr. Gummer: We have almost completed our preparation of a sustainable development strategy for the United Kingdom and now propose to publish it after the House returns in January. We will publish the United Kingdom's climate change programme, biodiversity action plan and forestry programme at the same time.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will explain the basis of his calculations of the distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1994-95.

Mr. Curry: As my right hon. Friend announced in his reply to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) on 30 November 1993, at column *496*, the

distributable amount of non-domestic rates for 1994-95 will be £10,685 million. This is based on a non-domestic rate multiplier of 0·423 and includes an allowance of £464 million for an Exchequer payment to the non-domestic rates pool to compensate for the shortfall which would otherwise occur as a result of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992 and 1993. The basis of the calculation is set out in the table:

Calculation of distributable amount 1994-95

	£ million
1. Income from Local Lists in 1994-95	
Total Local List RV × multiplier (£29,745×0·423)	12,582
(i) Reliefs	
(a) Less transitional decrease	(487)
(b) Less reliefs on (i) empty properties	(1,280)
(ii) partially empty properties	(18)
(c) Less reliefs to charities	(353)
(d) Less discretionary reliefs	(19)
Net Yield	10,425
(ii) Collection Costs/Reductions to Contributions	
(a) Less costs of collection	(70)
(b) Less losses on collection	(220)
(c) Less offset for City of London	(8)
Contribution in respect of year	10,147
(iii) Adjustments and Additions	
(a) Less Net Repayments and interest	(670)
(b) Less outturn adjustments in respect of prior years	(875)
Net Local Contribution	8,602
2. Income from Central List in 1994-95	
Total Central List RV×multiplier (and after transition)=(2,672m×0·423)	1,130
3. Income from Crown Contributions in Aid in 1994-95	
(a) Add Net Crown Yield (after transition)	463
(b) Less relief	(7)
(c) Add Metropolitan Police contribution	33
Net Crown yield	489
Total NDR Yield (1+2+3)	10,221
4. Exchequer Contributions	
(a) Add income foregone in 1993-94 due to revised transitional arrangements	37
(b) Add income foregone in 1994-95	427
Total contribution	464
Total NNDR pool payments (1+2+3+4)	10,685
Total NNDR Distributable amount for 1994-95:	10,685

Notes:

1. Item 1: the estimated total local list rateable value (RV) represents the average value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists, taking into account the effect of appeals decided during 1994-95.
2. Item 1(i)(a): the adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped locally due to the revised transitional arrangements under the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992 and 1993.
3. Item 1(i)(b): adjustments based on estimated mandatory reliefs for empty property in 1994-95 and earlier years not taken into account in the calculation of the distributable amount for 1993-94.
4. Item 1(i)(d): discretionary relief granted to charities, non-profit making organisations and for other reasons.
5. Item 1(ii)(a): the allowance for the costs incurred by local authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers.
6. Item 1(ii)(c): a preliminary estimate of the reduction in the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool on account of the local rate in the City. It is the amount which will be retained by the authority to meet its own expenditure.
7. Item 1(iii)(a): net adjustments in respect of appeals and other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous year's rates settled in 1994-95.
8. Item 1(iii)(b): Outturn adjustment based on outturn for 1992-93 and estimates for 1993-94. Much of the adjustments relate to reduced yield as a result of the number of appeals expected to be decided during 1993-94.
9. Item 2: the rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list after adjustments for appeals and adjustments in respect of previous years.
10. Item 4(a) and (b): the contribution from central government to offset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income foregone arising from the provisions of the Non-Domestic Rating Acts 1992 and 1993. The amount in respect of 1993-94 takes into account the contribution which was made in the distributable amount for that financial year.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentages of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association tenants were receiving rate rebates or community charge benefit in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

Complete information on the numbers of local authority tenancies receiving rate rebate was not collected prior to 1988-89. The available information is as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1988-89	56
1989-90	56

Note: Figure for 1988-89: England, Wales and Scotland
Figure for 1989-90: England and Wales.

Sources: Caseload figures taken from the Housing Benefit Management Information System and local authority tenancies in "Housing and Construction Statistics".

Comparable information concerning housing association tenancies is not avaialble.

From 1989 in Scotland, and 1990 in England and Wales, domestic rates were replaced by the community charge. As community charge was a personal charge it would not be appropriate to analyse community charge benefit recipients by tenure type.

Housing Benefit

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentages of *(a)* local authority and *(b)* housing association tenants were receiving housing benefit in each year since 1979-80.

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

The percentages, which should be used as a general guide only, of local authority tenancies in receipt of housing benefit rent rebates are as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1979-80	18
1980-81	20
1981-82	25
1982-83	49
1983-84	62
1984-85	63
1985-86	64
1986-87	65
1987-88	65
1988-89	58

Year	Percentage
1989-90	57
1990-91	58
1991-92	60
1992-93	64

Notes:
Unified Housing benefit scheme introduced in 1982-83.
Housing Benefit affected by Reform of Social Security 1988.

Sources: Caseload statistics underlying information in "The Growth of Social Security" and the number of local authority tenancies in "Housing and Construction Statistics". Due to considerable changes in housing benefit schemes since 1979, the underlying figures are subject to some estimation.

Comparable information concerning housing associations tenancies is not available, having been collected only from 1992.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Unemployment

10. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of unemployment in the Province; and if he will make a statement.

13. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

22. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of unemployment in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Dr. Liam Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current level of unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: At 14 October there were 102,842 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland, representing a decrease of 3,594 over the year.

The Union

11. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the future of the Union.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government's policy is to uphold the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom; this is recognised in national and international law. There will be no change to that position unless or until that is the wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Stormont

12. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual cost of maintaining the Stormont building.

Mr. Atkins: The cost of maintaining the Stormont building in 1992-93 was £225,000.

Terrorism

14. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with which political parties in Northern Ireland he has discussed a policy of opposing terrorist violence.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: My colleagues and I regularly meet representatives of the Northern Ireland constitutional parties to discuss a wide range of issues, including the Government's security policy. The first priority of that policy is the eradication of terrorism, from wherever it originates.

Peace Talks

15. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about progress towards peace in Northern Ireland.

16. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the peace initiative.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government's objective for Northern Ireland is peace, properly attained. All the Government's policies have this objective. The people who can deliver an end to violence are the paramilitaries and they should do so immediately. But enduring peace will be assisted by a political settlement, which we continue to seek with the constitutional parties and, where appropriate, the Irish Government.

21. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what prospects he sees for further peace talks in the Province; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) earlier today.

18. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his dialogue with the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) earlier today.

Income Support

17. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what number and percentage of families with children receive income support and family credit.

Mr. Ancram: It is estimated that at 29 May 1992, 77,725 families were receiving these benefits, representing 35 per cent. of all families receiving child benefit.

Irish Government (Talks)

19. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further discussions he has had with the Irish Government on the future of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I most recently met Mr. Dick Spring, the Irish Foreign Minister and Tanaiste, at the meeting of the Anglo-Irish conference on 3 November. We noted the support of the Prime Minister and Taoiseach for the objectives of the political talks process and expressed our determination to pursue those objectives within the framework of the statement of 26 March 1991.

Employment Law

20. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met representatives of the Irish trade unions and the Trades Union Congress to discuss Northern Ireland's employment law, and industrial and economic prospects.

Mr. Atkins: I met representatives of the Northern Ireland Committee of Trade Unions to discuss employment and economic issues on 13 May. There are no plans at present for any further meeting but any such request would be accorded favourable consideration.

Security Forces

23. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to ensure that the security forces in the Province have equipment appropriate to their needs.

Sir John Wheeler: The equipment requirements of the police and army are kept under constant review. The Government are fully committed to providing the security forces with the resources they need to defeat terrorism.

Investment

24. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made for the prospects for increased industrial and commercial investments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Government do not carry out formal assessments of the prospects for increased industrial and commercial investment in Northern Ireland. However, the most recent independent surveys of business prospects show that both business confidence and companies' investment intentions are rising. This suggests that recovery from the recession is well underway in Northern Ireland and that investment prospects are good.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the level of inward investment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: So far this year the Industrial Development Board has secured four new inward investment projects involving a total investment of approximately £163 million and I am confident that there will be further announcements during the remainder of the financial year.

Northern Ireland (Consultation)

25. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to include the people living on the mainland of the United Kingdom in any consultation over the status of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The status of each of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom is a matter for Parliament and, to that extent, the people living on the mainland of the United Kingdom already participate in consultation over the status of Northern Ireland. The Government's policy is that the status of Northern Ireland should be determined in accordance with the democratic wishes of its own people, and I have no plans to broaden the consultation.

Sinn Fein

27. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he or his officials have had with Sinn Fein.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There have been no negotiations with Sinn Fein on political matters at either ministerial or official level. As I told the House on Monday, there has been an exchange of documents through a channel of communication since February—and these are in the Library of the House. It is also a matter of record that Ministers and officials have met council delegations, which from time to time have included Sinn Fein members, to discuss constituency matters.

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the current average time between referral to a cardiac surgeon in Northern Ireland and the first appointment with that surgeon;

(2) what was the longest interval in Northern Ireland for waiting time between referral to a cardiac surgeon and the first appointment with that surgeon for the most recent available period.

Mr. Ancram: During the quarter ending September 1993, the medium waiting time between the date of referral to a cardiac surgeon and first appointment was 0·3 months.

Records for the same quarter indicate that the longest a patient waited between referral and first appointment with a cardiac surgeon was 21 months and 20 days. The unusual delay in this case appears to have arisen as a result of an administrative oversight. The Royal Victoria hospital is undertaking a validation of the records of those waiting for appointment with a cardiac surgeon which should ensure that similar oversights do not occur in future.

Community Care

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken towards the implementation of the Government's community care policy in the Eastern and Southern health and social services boards.

Mr. Ancram: The Eastern and South health and social services boards, in common with the other two boards in Northern Ireland, have in place the following arrangements for the implementation of the community care reforms from April 1993:

care management and assessment procedures;
arrangements for purchasing community care services;
procedures for financial assessment, charge collection, and payment of providers;
arrangements for the dissemination, to the public and to user, carer and professional interests, of information on procedures and services; and
procedures for dialogue with independent sector providers.

In addition, since 1991, community care complaints procedures have been functional in each board area, and registration and inspection units have been set up to monitor the standards and operation of all residential and nursing homes.

All these arrangements are being refined and developed in the light of experience of the operation of the new community care procedures.

Banagher Glen

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the average number of vehicles which presently use the road in Banagher glen each day; what is his estimate of the average number which will use it when the glen is reopened to the public; and what are the present and projected figures of *(a)* winter and *(b)* summer months and for (i) weekdays and (ii) weekends.

Mr. Atkins: The number of vehicles which presently use the road in Banagher glen is estimated at 14 per weekday. No estimate is available for weekends. When the road up to the nature reserve is opened to the public, it is estimated that at peak times the average number of vehicles using it will be 45 per weekday. Estimates for other times have not been made.

Ulster Painters

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Arts Council for Northern Ireland concerning its decision for the sale in London of the work of leading Ulster painters.

Mr. Ancram: None.

Youth Training

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the policy of the Northern Ireland Training and Employment Agency regarding the future of community training organisations and the provision of youth training in Northern Ireland;

(2) what is the strategy for the provision of youth training in *(a)* north Belfast, *(b)* south Belfast, *(c)* east Belfast and *(d)* Lagan valley;

(3) how many young people are currently employed in community workshops; and if he will make a statement on the future of the workshops;

(4) what is the strategy for the provision of youth training in west Belfast;

(5) what plans he has to change the policy of block funding for community training organisations;

(6) what plans he has to assist young people leaving school without any recognised academic qualification.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Julian Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Dr. J. Hendron, dated 1 December 1993:

Parliamentary Questions Nos. 1377 to 1382: 3 December 1993

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your questions about:—

(a) what is the policy of the Training and Employment Agency regarding the future of Community Training Organisations and the provision of Youth Training in Northern Ireland;

(b) how many young people are currently employed in Community Workshops; and if he will make a statement on the future of workshops;

(c) what plans he has to change the policy of blockfunding for Community Training Organisations;

(d) what is the strategy for the provision of youth training in West Belfast;

(e) what is the strategy for the provision of youth training in North, South, East Belfast and Lagan Valley; and

(f) what plans he has to assist young people leaving school without any recognised academic qualifications.

The responses to your questions are:—

(a) The Agency would wish to maintain a community sector element within the Youth Training Programme (YTP) as part of the range of provision which is available to young people. As you are aware some workshops are facing financial difficulties caused mainly by fewer young people in the population more of whom are staying on at school. The introduction of a single school leaving date has exacerbated the difficulties. Given this background some community-based training organisations are finding it difficult to remain viable given the diminishing number of trainees and some rationalisation is inevitable; preferably through mergers although some closures may be difficult to avoid. The Agency has recently written to Workshop Chairmen proposing a package of assistance. Where mergers take place full redundancy costs will be paid by the Agency which will also meet the cost of consultancy help. Fifty per cent. of redundancy costs will be paid to workshops which choose to close.

As to youth training in NI the Agency remains committed to providing a Youth Training place for all 16 and 17 year olds who desire it. Arrangements will be made for all those young people affected by a rationalisation to be offered a training place with an alternative provider.

(b) Young people in Community Workshops are not employed by them but are in the Youth Training Programme. At the end of October 1993 there were 3,046 young people in training in Community Workshops. The future of workshops is dealt with in the preceding paragraphs.

(c) There are currently no plans to change the policy of blockfunding for community workshops. The present levels of blockfunding within YTP compare more than favourably with funding elsewhere in the United Kingdom and with that available within the education system in Northern Ireland. However the Agency is currently piloting a single, integrated scheme called Jobskills which may replace both YTP and the Job Training Programme (JTP) and which would have a different system of funding.

(d & e) The Agency's objective is to maintain a network of training organisations across all areas of the Province, including Belfast and Lagan Valley which will enable the Agency to continue to meet the Government guarantee of a training place for all 16 and 17 year olds who want one.

(f) Every school leaver aged 16 or 17 is guaranteed a training place within the Youth Training Programme (YTP). YTP offers a structured programme of training leading to a recognised vocational qualification to help participants compete for suitable jobs.

I hope that you find this information helpful.

Works of Art (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether public bodies holding works of art relating to Northern Ireland are required to consult the Ulster museum or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland before disposing of such works outside Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: No.

Hospitals, Downpatrick

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to visit hospitals in Downpatrick to discuss reorganisation.

Mr. Ancram: My noble Friend Lord Arran visited Downe hospital and maternity unit last month. He recently received the Eastern health and social services board's strategy for general (acute) hospital services which

includes proposals concerning both those facilities. He intends to take until the end of February to consider any views which hon. Members and health and personal social services interests wish to put to him before taking final decisions on the strategy.

Documents

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any correction to make to the text of any document placed in the Library and the Vote Office at the time when he made his statement on 29 November.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In rechecking the documentation some transcription and typing errors have come to light in the dossier of messages between the IRA and the Government which I placed in the Library and Vote Office on 29 November. I have placed in the Library and the Vote Office the corrected version of the dossier. A list of the necessary corrections appears at the beginning of the corrected versions of the dossier.

These errors do not change the sense of the messages, but nonetheless they should be corrected. Parliament must have fully authentic documents. The errors arose from the speed with which the dossier had to be completed and checked in Northern Ireland on Sunday, after the decision that day that it should be published in Parliament the following day. The relevant corrections also apply to the quotations from the documents in my statement on 29 November.

The corrections cast no doubt whatsoever upon the authenticity of the original message of 22 February from the IRA leadership, which I read out in my statement and which said

"The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close".

As I said in my statement, this came from Martin McGuinness. Equally, the Government—notwithstanding allegations by Sinn Fein to the contrary—has no reason to doubt the authenticity of the message sent by the IRA leadership on 2 November, which I also read to the House together with the Government's reply of 5 November.

Nor does the need for corrections of the transcription errors in paragraph 3 of the nine paragraph note sent on 19 March carry any implication that it was the Government rather than the IRA leadership which was seeking advice. The advice referred to in that paragraph is the advice sought in the IRA message of 22 February. The speaking note accompanying the nine paragraph note, published in the dossier and first printed in the *Observer*, makes it entirely clear that the British message gives "substantive advice in response to the initial message", which is indeed the case.

Although they do not carry the implications claimed, I very much regret that those corrections need to be made. I naturally accept full ministerial responsibility for the inaccuracies.

The corrections have been notified to the House at the earliest opportunity. Copies of a letter to all Northern Ireland MPs and spokesmen, enclosing the list of corrections and the text, thus corrected, of the nine paragraph message from the British Government despatched on 19 March, were placed last night in the Library of the Vote Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sheehy Inquiry

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what studies the Sheehy inquiry employed *(a)* Ernst and Young and *(b)* Towers Perrin; and what was the cost thereof;

(2) what budget limits were placed on the Sheehy inquiry;

(3) if he will list in respect of the visits by the secretary to the Sheehy inquiry, Miss Jenny Rumble, to *(a)* Australia, *(b)* New Zealand, *(c)* the United States of America, (i) the dates of departure and return to the United Kingdom, (ii) the airline and seat class funded and used, (iii) the dates and police forces visited, (iv) the subjects studied, (v) the travel cost, (vi) the subsistence costs and (vii) other costs;

(4) if he will list in respect of Mr. Caines's Sheehy inquiry trip to Australia, *(a)* the dates of departure and return to the United Kingdom, *(b)* the airline and seat class funded and used, *(c)* the dates and police forces visited, *(d)* the subjects studied, *(e)* the travel cost, *(f)* the subsistence costs and *(g)* other costs.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards spent £580,000 in 1992-93. Financial provision for the inquiry is £459,000 for 1993-94. The management of expenditure within these sums was the responsibility of the inquiry. The use made by the inquiry of consultancies is described in paragraphs 2.5 and 2.8 of its report, a copy of which is in the Library.

Kickstart Clubs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contribution his Department has made to the kickstart programme of Legal and General; and if he will promote moves towards a national network of kickstart clubs, in an attempt to steer youngsters away from crime.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Home Office is providing £500,000 this year to the core running costs of Crime Concern, the national crime prevention organisation which has established the kickstart youth activity clubs, with funding from Legal and General. Crime Concern was specifically set up by the Government to seek sponsorship from the private sector for crime prevention projects.

The kickstart scheme was launched nationally by Crime Concern on 14 May 1993. We fully support the work of Crime Concern in this area, and generally, to steer young people away from crime.

South Yorkshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to visit south Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have no plans to visit south Yorkshire at present.

Stolen Property

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total value of property recorded by police as stolen in 1991; what percentage of this was not recovered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The total value of property stolen recorded by the police in England and Wales in 1991 was £3·6 billion, of which 66 per cent. was not recovered.

Crime

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes were recorded in Britain in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There were 5,591,717 notifiable offences recorded by the police in England and Wales in 1992. The figures for Scotland are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent in 1991-92 *(a)* in the criminal justice system on crime and *(b)* by the Home Office to prevent crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Public expenditure on the criminal justice system in England and Wales in 1991-92 was £8·7 billion. Of that sum, £5·4 billion was expenditure on the police, one of whose key functions is crime prevention. Estimated expenditure on all aspects of crime prevention was £167 million in that year, of which Home Office expenditure was £15·6 million.

Strip Searching

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female prisoners in Great Britain have been subjected to forcible strip searching since March 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 2 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the forcible strip-searching of women prisoners.

Prisons are not required to maintain statistics of the number of strip searches carried out.

Strip-searching is a routine security measure carried out under the provisions of Rule 39 of the Prisons Rules 1964. The action that would follow a refusal to be searched would depend on the circumstances but in some situations there might be no alternative to the use of force.

Prisoners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who decides whether a convicted prisoner is placed in an open or closed prison.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 2 December 1993;

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about who decides whether a convicted prisoner is placed in an open or closed prison.

Decisions about security category, including whether or not to place a prisoner in open conditions, are taken by the governor holding the prisoner except in the case of category A prisoners and transfer of life sentence prisoners to open conditions. Decisions about category A prisoners are made at Prison Service headquarters. Life sentence prisoners may be moved to open prisons as part of their pre-discharge preparation. The decision to make a recommendation for such a transfer is taken at Prison Service headquarters and then referred for decision to Ministers.

The criteria and procedures to be used in reaching decisions are set out in Circular Instructions 7/1988 and 2/1991, copies of which I recently sent to you and which are also available in the House of Commons Library.

Male Rape

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make male rape a formal legal offence.

Mr. Maclean: Non-consensual buggery of a male is already an offence under section 12 of the Sexual Offences Act 1956, as qualified by the Sexual Offences Act 1967.

Car Crime

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce fines for the victims of car crime.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government have no such plans.

While we shall continue to encourage car owners to take all reasonable security precautions, if their vehicles are stolen it must be the thieves who are held fully responsible for their crimes.

Visas

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each country whose nationals will need a visa to enter the European Union under the proposals put forward on 24 November by the European Commission.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The European Commission has not yet published its proposals in respect of the list of countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa when crossing the external borders of the member states. When it does so, they will be made available to Parliament in accordance with the normal scrutiny arrangements.

Mr. Tony Lundy

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis giving the total cost of investigating allegations made against ex-Detective Superintendent Tony Lundy by both the Metropolitan police and the South Yorkshire police; and if he will make a statement giving the reasons for the time taken to complete the investigations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: These are matters for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Vandalism

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the reported number of cases of vandalism in each of the police divisions covering the South Yorkshire area in each of the last four years, and the current year to date.

Mr. Maclean: The available information by division relates to offences of arson and criminal damage and is published annually in the report of the chief constable of South Yorkshire. Copies of this publication are available in the Library.

James Bulger Murder

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the length of time the two boys sentenced for the murder of James Bulger will be detained.

Mr. Howard: I have not yet received the views of the judiciary on this case. When I do, each offender will be informed, as soon as is reasonably practicable, of the substance of the judicial recommendations. The boys, or those acting on their behalf, will then be given the opportunity to submit written representations before I decide the period to be served for retribution and deterrence. My decision will be conveyed to the two boys —or their representatives—and, if it differs from the period recommended by the judiciary, reasons will be given.

The arrangements for determining the period of custody which those convicted of murder are required to serve in order to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence were set out in my replies of 27 July, *Official Report*, columns *863-65*, and 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *376-78*, to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence).

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Howard: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Males (Convictions)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of males have a conviction before the age of 35 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It is estimated from the offenders index that 35 per cent. of males[1] born in 1953 had a conviction for at least one offence on the "standard list"[2] by the age of 35. Further information is published in "Digest 2: Information on the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales", which is available in the Library.

[1] Estimates from the Home Office offenders index covering all convictions for "standard list" offences since 1963. Results from the 1953 birth cohort sample.

[2] Mainly indictable offences but includes some summary offences such as assault on a constable and cruelty to or neglect of children.

Custody

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the total number of persons in custody in 1990, 1991 and 1992 who were *(a)* awaiting trial or *(b)* imprisoned in default of payment of fines.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. David Nicholson, dated 2 December 1993:

Receptions of untried prisoners and fine defaulters

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the total number of persons in custody in 1990, 1991 and 1992 who were *(a)* awaiting trial or *(b)* imprisoned in default of payment of a fine.

Information for 1990 and 1991 was published in the 1991 edition of "Prison statistics England and Wales" (Table 1.14 of the 1991 edition, Cm 2157) a copy of which is in the library. Information for 1992 is only currently available from 1 January to 31 August 1992. During this period 35,689 untried prisoners and 13,308 sentenced fine defaulters were received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of hospital beds at each of the London prisons as of 22 November; and what was the number of prison inmates being held in each of these prison hospital wings on that date.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 2 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of available hospital beds at each of the London prisons on 22 November and the number of occupied on that date. The information requested is as follows:

	Number of beds	*Number of beds occupied*
HMP Belmarsh	73	47
HMP Brixton	66	62
HMYOI Feltham	30	26
HMP Holloway	86	85
HMP Pentonville	26	18
HMP Wandsworth	39	36
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	51	48

Victim Support

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to increase funding of *(a)* the victims support scheme in general and *(b)* Lewisham victim support scheme.

Mr. Maclean: Additional funding for Victim Support was included in the public expenditure plans presented to Parliament by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 30 November. The Home Office grant to Victim Support in 1994-95 is being increased by 20 per cent. to just over £10 million. Two further annual increases of 8 per cent. are planned, taking projected funding for 1995-96 and 1996-97 to £10·8 million and £11·7 million respectively.

The allocation of the Home Office grant to local schemes and branches and the priorities which guide that allocation are matters for the Victim Support local funding panel, a sub-committee of Victim Support's national council.

Deaths (Fires)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in *(a)* south-east London and *(b)* in the London borough of Lewisham died as a result of a fire in a bed-sitter or multi-tenant flats in each year since 1980.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is not available centrally.

Public Houses

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will carry out a review of licensing procedures in those cases where a lessee of a public house passes the lease and the licence to a holding company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: No.

Swansea Prison

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes are planned in prisoner numbers at Swansea prison over the next five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 2 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about whether any changes are planned in prisoner numbers at Swansea prison over the next five years.

The present certified normal accommodation of Swansea prison is 232 with an operational capacity of 285.

Current plans for Swansea include an extension to D Wing and the building of a new houseblock.

It is planned to close D Wing in March 1994 to enable work to commence on the redevelopment. Although there will be an initial loss of 78 operational capacity places, this is part of a wider plan to increase the overall operational capacity to 125. This work should be completed by June 1996.

Work should then commence on the building of a new houseblock, providing an additional 70 single cells by March 1998.

B Wing is programmed to close in December 1994 with a loss of 60 operational places.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the provision of modesty screening for Swansea prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from D. Lewis to Mr. Alan Williams, dated 2 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about representations he received about the provision of modesty screening for Swansea prison.

Provision of 24 hour access to sanitation for prisoners at Swansea is part of the overall sanitation programme set out in the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice". Given the high population and extensive refurbishment programme at Swansea, it was decided that simple sanitation would be the most appropriate system to install. This involves the installation of a toilet and washbasin in each two person cell, but without any modesty screening. Sixty cells, each accommodating two prisoners, have been converted to date. The bunk bed in the cell is positioned on the same side of the cell as the toilet.

No representations have been received about the lack of modesty screening. It is understood that prisoners are generally content with the arrangement.

Siemion Serafimowicz

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement of the status of Siemion Serafimowicz as a resident in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: It is not our practice to make public information from immigration records relating to individuals.

Fraud Trials

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will reconsider his response to the recommendations of Lord Roskill about the handling of fraud trials.

Mr. Maclean: The majority of the recommendations made by the Fraud Trials Committee, chaired by Lord Roskill, were accepted by the Government and implemented in the Criminal Justice Act 1987.

The operation of that Act, and the handling of fraud trials generally, is kept under review. In particular, in June 1993, the Lord Chancellor's Department produced the interim report of the working group on long criminal trials, which examined ways of shortening and simplifying such trials, including fraud trials. The recommendations in that report are being considered alongside those made by the Royal Commission on criminal justice relating to the investigation, pre-trial arrangements and conduct of fraud trials. In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General announced a review of the Serious Fraud Office and the fraud investigation group of the Crown Prosecution Service on 18 October.

Sentences

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to amend the Criminal Justice Act 1988 so that sentences in all cases can be referred to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have already announced an intention to extend the scope of the Attorney-General's power to refer unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal to incorporate the most serious sexual and violent offences that are triable either way. There are no plans to bring sentences in all cases within the scope of section 35 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Refugees

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many refugees have been admitted to Britain from former Yugoslavia over the past year;

(2) how many women from former Yugoslavia have been allowed into the United Kingdom as refugees *(a)* in their own right and *(b)* as dependants over the past year.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

In the 12 months October 1992 to September 1993 inclusive around 4,500 nationals of the former Yugoslavia —excluding dependants—applied for asylum in the United Kingdom. The large majority of these applications are still under consideration and the applicants are being allowed to remain here in the meantime. Comprehensive data on the gender of these principal applicants are not yet available, but provisional data suggest that about 45 per cent. were female.

Reliable information on dependants of these applicants is not yet available.

In addition, we have announced that the United Kingdom is willing to accept 1,000 particularly vulnerable individuals—including ex-detainees—from Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia, together with their dependants, totalling perhaps 4,000 in all. As of 30 November 1993, around 450 particularly vulnerable individuals and 650 of their dependants have arrived since my initial announcement of these arrangements on 30 November 1992. Most dependants are wives and children. Also a small proportion of vulnerable individuals are women.

EMPLOYMENT

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 24 November to the hon. Member for Chingford, (Mr. Duncan Smith), *Official Report,* column 72, what was the voting record of member states at the meeting of the European Community's Social Affairs Council held on 23 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There were no formal votes at the Labour and Social Affairs Council on 23 November. However:

- on the draft directive on working time, the council reached final agreement with the United Kingdom abstaining;
- on the draft directive on young workers, the council agreed to a common position with Spain and Italy abstaining;
- on the draft directive on the protection of workers on board fishing vessels, the Council reached final agreement, with the United Kingdom and France abstaining; and
- a declaration to end the European Year of the Elderly and of solidarity between generations was agreed unanimously.

Workstart

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many long-term unemployed have taken up the workstart pilot scheme in Cornwall and Devon.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the period to 23 November, three long-term unemployed people had been placed in workstart supported employment. Originally Devon and Cornwall training and enterprise council, which is managing this pilot, used its own staff to identify suitable people from the target group for workstart jobs, but this has not worked well. There are difficulties in matching individuals to vacancies in an area as large as Devon and Cornwall.

Following a discussion with Employment Department officials, the TEC has now agreed to work more closely with the employment service's wider network of local offices. This should improve performance in matching individual unemployed people to specific vacancies, which will in future identify suitable clients and match them with vacancies.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people living in *(a)* York travel-to-work area and *(b)* York parliamentary constituency who were registered unemployed at the most recent date for which data is available had been unemployed for (i) less than six months, (ii) between six and 12 months and (iii) more than 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the following table:

Claimant Unemployment in York, by Duration (October 1993)

Duration of Unemployment	*Travel-to-work area*	*Parliamentary Constituency*
Up to 6 months	3,688	2,204
Over 6 and up to 12 months	1,351	808
Over 12 months	2,043	1,431

Note—Claimant unemployment figures by duration are available on a quarterly basis for the months of January, April, July and October and are not adjusted for seasonal influences.

Employment Service

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the outcome of interviews carried out by the Employment Service for (i) 1992-93 and (ii) 1993-94, showing the *(a)* number of adviser new claims taken, *(b)* number of administrative officers new claims taken, *(c)* total new claims not pursued, *(d)* first letters sent for main restart interview, *(e)* contact rate with restart interview client group, *(f)* main restart interviews carried out, *(g)* other interviews carried out, *(h)* caseload interviews carried out, *(i)* offers not made, *(j)* offers not accepted, *(k)* job placings, *(l)* EAS—business start-up—starts, *(m)* ET/TFW starts, *(n)* employment action starts, *(o)* other benefit starts, *(p)* sign offs as a direct result of client adviser action, *(q)* restart course starts, *(r)* jobplan workshop starts, *(s)* jobclub starts, *(t)* job interview guarantee starts, *(u)* job search seminar starts, *(v)* attended job referral service interviews and *(w)* job review workshop starts.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Ms Clare Short, dated 2 December 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Questions to him about the outcome of interviews carried out by the Employment Service for (i) 1992-93 and (ii) 1993-94, showing the *(a)* number of adviser new claims taken, *(b)* number of administrative officers new claims taken, *(c)* total new claims not pursued, *(d)* first letters sent for main Restart interview, *(e)* contact rate with Restart interview client group, *(f)* main Restart interviews, *(g)* other interviews, *(h)* caseload interviews, *(i)* offers not made, *(j)* offers not accepted, *(k)* job placings, *(l)* EAS (Business Start Up) starts, *(m)* ET/TFW starts, *(n)* Employment Action starts, *(o)* other benefit starts, *(p)* sign offs as a direct result of client adviser action, *(q)* Restart Course starts, *(r)* Jobplan Workshop starts, *(s)* Jobclub starts, *(t)* Job Interview Guarantee starts, *(u)* Job Search Seminar starts, *(v)* attended Job Referral Service interviews and *(w)* Job Review Workshops starts. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It is important to recognise that these figures are only a partial indication of the effectiveness of advisory interviews. Equally important is the effect they have in causing people to leave the register earlier than they would otherwise have done.

The attached table contains the information you requested. During the 1992-93 operational year all the information you asked for was collected and is represented in column 1 of the table. The Employment Service has changed its performance monitoring at national level for 1993-94 and the information for this year cannot be given in exactly the same format as the previous year. Information for April 1993 to October 1993 is shown in column 2 of the table.

Notes at the foot of the table explain the differences in the information collected for each year.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

	1 1992-93	*2 1993-94 (to October)*
EO New Claims Taken	4·2 million	1·3 million
AO New Claims Taken	270,000	1·3 million
Total New Claims Not Pursued	481,000	237,000
1st Letters Sent (main Restart int)	3·2 million	2 million
Contact Rate	99 per cent.	99 per cent.
Main Restart interviews	2·4 million	1·6 million
Other Restart Interviews[1]	364,000	302,400
Caseload Restart Interviews	87,000	—
Offers Not Made[2]	419,000	—
Offers Not Accepted[2]	438,000	—
Outcomes—All Advisory Interviews:[3]	—	—
Job Placings	112,000	65,300
EAS (Business Start Up) Starts	12,300	—
ET/TFW Starts	115,000	—
Employment Action Starts	29,000	—
ED Programme Starts—client left register	—	85,000
Other Benefit Starts	104,000	59,400
Sign Offs—Result of CA Action	78,300	54,000
Restart Course Starts	116,460	—
Jobclub Starts	142,617	—
JIG Starts	50,340	—
Job Search Seminar Starts	66,046	—
Attended Job Referral Service	118,002	—

	1 1992-93	2 1993-94 (to October)
Job Review Workshop Starts	32,755	—
ED Programme Starts—client remains on register	—	423,173

[1]For 1993-94 this category includes Follow-Up and Caseload Restart Interviews.
[2]Not Collected in 1993-94.
[3]For 1993-94 starts on programmes are not collected individually but included in one of two categories.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Grace and Favour Apartments

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many grace and favour apartments there are in *(a)* St. James's palace, *(b)* Kensington palace and *(c)* Windsor castle; to whom they are awarded; and which members of the royal family have apartments at each palace.

Mr. Sproat: There are 22 grace and favour residences at St. James's palace, 37 at Kensington palace and 122 at Windsor castle and the home park. Grace and favour apartments are awarded to royal household staff for the better performance of their duties.

Members of the royal family have apartments or residences at each palace as follows:

Windsor Castle
- Her Majesty the Queen
- His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh

Royal Lodge, Windsor
- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

St. James's Palace (including Clarence House and York House)
- Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother
- The Prince of Wales
- The Duke and Duchess of Kent
- Princess Alexandra

Kensington Palace
- The Princess of Wales
- Princess Margaret
- Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester
- The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester
- Prince and Princess Michael of Kent

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Sproat: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

BBC Contracting

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will establish a public inquiry into BBC contracting.

Mr. Brooke: No. I am satisfied that the management of the BBC is well seized of the need for effective financial controls in all its areas of activity, and is able and willing to investigate and rectify any irregularities which may come to light.

EC Cultural Affairs Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), *Official Report*, column *57*, what was the voting record of member states at the meeting of the European Community's Cultural Affairs Council held on 5 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: At the Cultural Affairs Council on 5 November, decisions and conclusions were reached by consensus. No votes were taken.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Goodlad: Official transport for Ministers is provided by the Government car service at an annual cost in 1992-93 of £453,917.

Six vehicles are provided.

Manchester United Supporters

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department received about the treatment by the Turkish police of supporters of Manchester United football club at the time of the club's recent European cup match in Turkey; what replies were given; what subsequent action was taken by Her Majesty's Government in regard to complaints of violence used by Turkish police officers against the club's supporters and some of its players; how many people from Manchester complained of maltreatment by Turkish police officers and how many of them were charged with an offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs first raised our concern over events surrounding the football match, particularly those leading to British fans being detained, with the Turkish ambassador on 8 November. Our ambassador in Ankara also pressed the Turkish authorities for an early report. We have now sent the Turkish ambassador detailed allegations of mistreatment of British fans and tourists and asked for the Turkish authorities' comments.

I am glad to say that the six fans who were detained were unconditionally released on 30 November and that the Turkish authorities are to hold a judicial inquiry into the events.

Western Sahara

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on when he expects a referendum will be held on the future of the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Secretary-General states in his latest report dated 24 November that he hopes that the referendum will take place in mid-1994 subject to the co-operation of both parties.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent to which the Government of Morocco are co-operating with United Nations attempts to hold a free and fair referendum in the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Secretary-General's latest report makes no criticism of the co-operation he has received from either Morocco or the Polisario Front, but he has stressed that their continued co-operation is essential if the referendum is to be held next year.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Morocco about the future government of the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have used our contacts with both sides to this dispute to urge full co-operation with the United Nations Secretary-General in the implementation of the United Nations settlement plan.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from the United Nations Special Representative to the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative reports to Mr. Boutros Ghali. The Secretary-General's latest report was issued on 24 November.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the number of Moroccan troops in western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no information on the precise numbers of Moroccan troops in the western Sahara.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about recent settlement in western Sahara by Moroccans.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no reliable information about recent settlement in the western Sahara by Moroccans.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether United Nations troops in western Sahara have the necessary freedom to undertake their mission successfully.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary-General's latest report pays tribute to the military personnel of the United Nations mission for the referendum in the western Sahara —MINURSO—for the contribution they have made to the maintenance of the ceasefire in western Sahara. It contains no suggestion that they lack the necessary freedom to undertake their duties successfully.

European Community and Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the use of the terms *(a)* European Community and *(b)* European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The European Community—which was formerly the European Economic Community —continues in being and also includes the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. Together, these Communities constitute one of the "pillars" of the Union. Government policy is to use the term "European Community" when describing matters specific to that pillar and to use the term "European Union" when referring to all three pillars collectively or to matters specific to the two intergovernmental pillars outside the Community.

Nigeria

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what recent international meetings he has raised the crisis in Nigeria; and what was the outcome.

Mr. Goodlad: We have been consulting closely our partners in the European Union, and in the wider international community. The European Union has decided to press the new regime to take urgent steps to restore democratic rule, unhindered by the military, and has reached agreement on measures to add to those imposed by the European Community last June.

We fully support the position of the European Union. The new measures will be implemented nationally as follows:

the movement of Nigerian defence staff outside London will in future be restricted without prior permission;

new export licence applications for defence equipment to Nigeria will be reviewed; on a case-by-case basis, with the presumption of denial;

those Nigerian military students still on courses in the United Kingdom will be asked to leave;

the offer by ODA of a £23 million grant for the power sector will be withdrawn.

The measures imposed by the United Kingdom on 24 June will remain in place.

We will keep the situation in Nigeria under close review and will modify these measures, or add to them, in the light of progress towards the establishment of democratic civilian rule.

Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *79*, (1) if he will consult widely with interested bodies concerned with human rights before writing and submitting the United Kingdom's next report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in August 1994;

(2) what opportunities are available for non-governmental organisations and hon. Members to submit evidence to his Department prior to the writing and submission of the United Kingdom's next report to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations in August 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

Periodic reports in the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which are submitted in accordance with article 40 of the international covenant on civil and political rights, are a factual account of the measures taken by the Government to give effect to the rights recognised in the covenant. As such, we do not look to those outside Government to submit evidence or otherwise contribute to

the writing of the reports. But non-governmental organisations, hon. Members and others are consulted widely in the formulation of the policies recorded in these reports.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 24 November, *Official Report,* column *79,* if he will place in the Library a draft of the United Kingdom's next report to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations prior to its submission in August 1994.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

In accordance with our usual practice, a copy of the United Kingdom's fourth report will be placed in the Library on the day that it is submitted to the Committee.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Equal Opportunities

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on progress under the programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity in the civil service for people of ethnic minority origin.

Mr. David Davis: There has been further progress this year; the proportion of ethnic minority staff in the civil service continues to rise. A report summarising progress during 1992-93 is being published today. Copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

Council for Science and Technology

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many social scientists are members of the Council for Science and Technology.

Mr. Waldegrave: No social scientists are members of the Council for Science and Technology. Council members were chosen in their personal capacities to provide a top-level overview of science and technology issues, rather than for expertise in specific areas, or as representatives of particular sectors.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Westminster Customer Care

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee what is the expected cost of teaching staff at Westminster Customer Care.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply as the Member answering for the House of Commons Commission.

The cost of the customer care training programme for the Serjeant at Arms Department was met from that Department's training budget for which the overall figure was £20,000 in 1993-94. I have asked the Serjeant at Arms to write to the hon. Member with the details.

Palace of Westminster

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee if he will itemise the changes made within the Palace of Westminster during the summer recess with the precise cost of each and the names of those who authorised them and agreed to their cost.

Mr. Ray Powell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on 27 October, *Official Report,* column *667.*

Members' Rooms

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Accommodation and Works Committee how many of the rooms available to hon. Members are available to office holders; and which office holders are so accommodated.

Mr. Ray Powell: The Deputy Speakers, Government Ministers, the Government Whips, the Leader of the Opposition, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Cabinet, the Opposition Whips, the leader of the third party, the third-party Whips and the Whips of other parliamentary parties occupy a total of 93 rooms or suites of rooms.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money the Government have saved by not conducting any nuclear tests at the Nevada test site in the last 12 months.

Mr. Aitken: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to publish costs associated with the testing of British nuclear weapons.

Polaris

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the figure given for the annual operation and maintenance costs of Polaris to the Defence Committee on 30 January 1985, HC 37 (1984-85), p159, 935, included *(a)* the cost of refits, *(b)* a share of the running costs of the Clyde submarine base, Faslane, *(c)* manpower and related costs of the crew and associated civilian staff, *(d)* a share of the intramural and extramural running costs of the atomic weapons establishments and *(e)* the cost of stores, personnel and the transport of stores.

Mr. Hanley: It would not be possible to carry out a detailed examination of the basis for the figure given in 1985 without incurring disproportionate cost.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident that occurred at AWE Aldermaston recently involving a leak of uranium contaminated oil from a machine used for manufacturing weapons components.

Mr. Aitken: During routine operations in a workshop at AWE Aldermaston, a small quantity of coolant spilled from a machine used for making weapons components. The coolant, which was contaminated with uranium from normal machining operations, was immediately contained and safely disposed of. There was no release of material beyond the immediate area surrounding the machine and no contamination of personnel occurred. There was no risk to the public or the environment from the incident.

In the interests of safety the machine, and a small number of similar machines, were immediately isolated and taken out of service. Remedial action to remove the contaminated material to safe storage has now been completed. The Health and Safety Executive was informed about the incident and issued two prohibition notices. The machines concerned will not be brought back into use until the Health and Safety Executive is satisfied that adequate safety arrangements are in place.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the sludge solidification plant at AWE Aldermaston to become fully operational.

Mr. Aitken: We expect the plant to be fully operational in 1997.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the incident that occurred at AWE Aldermaston on 11 November in the liquid treatment plant.

Mr. Aitken: During routine monitoring operations a higher than normal level of radioactive material was detected in a storage tank in the liquid effluent treatment plant, at AWE Aldermaston. The material has been disposed of in a safe and controlled manner, but as a precaution, employees and contractors' personnel were temporarily excluded from the immediate vicinity of the effluent plant. The remainder of the site continued to operate normally and there was no risk to personnel, the public or the environment.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects red commissioning of the A90 plant at AWE Aldermaston to commence.

Mr. Aitken: White commissioning is progressing well. I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on red commissioning in the next few months.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what form and quantity barium is used by the atomic weapons establishment, Aldermaston.

Mr. Aitken: Elemental barium is not used at AWE Aldermaston; varying quantities of barium compounds are used for experimental and analytical purposes.

Trident

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technical difficulties are involved in adapting the Trident missile system so it may carry anything between one and eight nuclear warheads.

Mr. Aitken: None.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much liquid radioactive waste was dealt with by the present liquid radioactive waste treatment plant at AWE Aldermaston during 1992.

Mr. Aitken: The amount of liquid radioactive waste treated at AWE Aldermaston during 1992 was 12,450 m^3.

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much liquid radioactive waste is expected to be dealt with by the new A91 building at Aldermaston when it becomes fully operational.

Mr. Aitken: The specification for the A91 plant is based upon an annual throughput of 15,000 m^3 per annum. However, it is expected that waste minimisation initiatives will reduce the annual throughput to 10,000 m^3 per annum by the time the plant becomes operational.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown for *(a)* Aldermaston atomic weapons establishment, *(b)* Burghfield atomic weapons establishment, *(c)* Cardiff atomic weapons establishment, *(d)* Devonport dockyard, *(e)* Rosyth dockyard, *(f)* CSB Faslane and *(g)* RNAD Coulport of individual radiation dose exposures for workers in the bands (i) 0 to 10, (ii) 10 to 15, (iii) 15 to 20, (iv) 20 to 30, (v) 30 to 40 and (vi) greater than 40 mSv for the year 1992.

Mr. Aitken: The information requested is given in the following tables. It is not possible to split the band 0 to 15 into 0 to 10 and 10 to 15 in respect of Devonport and Rosyth dockyards, CSB Faslane and RNAD Coulport. There are no workers who have received doses greater than 10 or 15 mSv respectively.

Atomic weapons establishment sites	*Exposure (mSv) 0 to 10*
AWE (A)	3,132
AWE (B)	220
AWE (C)	157

Other sites	*Exposure (mSv) 0 to 15*
Devonport dockyard	1,188
Rosyth dockyard	1,153
CSB Faslane	309
RNAD Coulport	272

A1 Yamamah Contract

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the A1 Yamamah contract in relation to the future of Cleveland Guest (Engineering) Ltd.

Mr. Aitken: Sub-contracts under the Al-Yamamah programme are a matter for British Aerospace as prime contractor to the Ministry of Defence.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice about protection was offered to service personnel exposed to radiation during British nuclear tests since 1963; what additional or different advice is given by his Department to service pesonnel in the same circumstances today; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Stringent safety regulations were published by, or on behalf of, the Ministry of Supply and were promulgated in HM Forces orders for each atmospheric nuclear test. These were strictly enforced under normal HM forces command and disciplinary arrangements. The successful implementation of these

regulations is shown by MOD records which demonstrate that test participants were not exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. This is confirmed by the lack of any excess of death or malignant disease among nuclear test veterans subsequently.

As the United Kingdom no longer conducts atmospheric nuclear weapon tests and has not done so since 1958, the MOD no longer has a need to promulgate such advice to service personnel.

Public Record Office

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why there is a discrepancy between his answer of 3 November, *Official Report*, columns *291-92*, on the date unrestricted access to the Department's archives in the Public Records Office in Hayes will be possible and the reply sent to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson) by the Benefits Agency war pensions directorate based on information from the war pension disablement liaison officer to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: While the date for unrestricted access to the whole of the Hayes archive was correctly stated by the War Pensions Directorate as February, now slipped to March 1994, priority is being given to the section holding service documents to which full access will be possible in December.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when additional cold weather personal equipment was sent to British forces in the former Yugoslavia; when the stores were received at Split; how many truck loads they represent; what prioritisation for this equipment was sought by BRITFOR HQ; when the equipment will be delivered to personnel in central Bosnia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: Additional cold weather clothing was issued from the United Kingdom on 29 October and 1 November. It arrived in Croatia on 5 November and was cleared by Croatian customs on 8 November. The clothing consignment consisted of three 20 ft containers and was accorded due priority by BRITFOR HQ, consistent with other operational requirements at the time. The equipment was delivered to central Bosnia on 27 November.

Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* serving officers and *(b)* other ranks serve on the board of NAAFI.

Mr. Hanley: The board of NAAFI includes three serving officers, one for each service who are appointed in a non-executive capacity to represent the interests of the services. There are no other ranks on the board.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with James Rucker, the managing director of NAAFI, about his letter to Aims of Industry of 14 March 1991.

Mr. Hanley: None.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will dismiss James Rucker as managing director of NAAFI.

Mr. Hanley: There are no grounds for doing so.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants from his Department serve on the board of NAAFI.

Mr. Hanley: None.

Customer Hospitality (Guidelines)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines are given to civil servants in his Department in accepting hospitality from defence industry customers.

Mr. Aitken: Guidelines are given in staff regulations and in instructions issued annually. They explain that crown servants should not be placed in a position where their actions might give the impression that they may have been or might be influenced to show favour or disfavour to any person or organisation.

Next Steps Agencies

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of his Department to next steps agencies joining Aims of Industry.

Mr. Aitken: Next steps agencies remain part of their parent Department and it would be inappropriate therefore for them to join organisations which promote particular developments in Government policies.

Vickers Defence Systems

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his civil servants accepted invitations from Vickers Defence Systems to attend Twickenham on Saturday 27 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: From time to time companies invite members of staff to attend a variety of functions. Acceptance of such invitations is covered by official guidelines. A total of one civilian and four military members of Ministry of Defence staff attended Twickenham on Saturday 27 November as guests of Vickers Defence Systems.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cambodia

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the funds that the British Government have committed to Cambodia in 1993-94 through the United Nations have actually been released; and how the funds have been disbursed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Government have committed $1·2 million of financial assistance through the United Nations in 1993-94. We provided $1 million of budgetary aid to the United Nations Secrtary-General's fund to help meet the costs of civil administration in the interim period prior to the establishment of a constitutional Government. We have pledged $0·2 million to a United Nations

development programme trust fund to enable the Cambodia mine action centre—CMAC—to continue mine clearance operations; expenditure arrangements are being finalised with the United Nations development programme.

We are also co-financing two on-going health projects with the United Nations through UNDP. These are concerned with strengthening Cambodia's health systems, and controlling malaria and will cost an estimated £450,000 in 1993-94.

In addition, the United Kingdom contributes 6·373 per cent. on the United Nations scale of assessment to United Nations peacekeeping operations. The final calls for payment for the liquidation phase of UNTAC have yet to issue, but for the financial year 1993-94 the total United Kingdom assessed contribution is expected to be £17·59 million.

PRIME MINISTER

THORP

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters in regard to the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield were discussed in his recent meetings with *(a)* Prime Minister Brundtland of Norway and *(b)* Chancellor Kohl of Germany.

The Prime Minister: In my recent meetings with Prime Minister Brundtland of Norway and Chancellor Kohl of Germany, we discussed a range of issues.

Iraq (Weapons)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the evidence given to the Scott inquiry in relation to the former Prime Minister's answer of 21 April 1989, *Official Report*, column *311*.

The Prime Minister: No. While Lord Justice Scott's inquiry continues, it would not be right to comment on any of the evidence that has so far been taken.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Food Labelling

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had regarding EC food labelling for products made and sold solely in Scotland; what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts regarding the subject; if his Department will investigate the effect of EC food labelling on the Scottish market; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has received no representations on this matter. The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in EC discussions on food labelling; and interested parties in Scotland are consulted on all EC food labelling issues prior to any legislation being made.

Scottish Nuclear

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what considerations underlay his decision to discourage Scottish Nuclear from providing issue specific information to the public on its operations.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend does not discourage Scottish Nuclear from providing information to the public.

Ethnic Minority Grant

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his Department's criteria for the allocation of the annual ethnic minority grant of £100,000; and who the advisers are on the eligibility of the applicants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The decision on which projects should be awarded ethnic minority grant is taken by Ministers following consideration of the applications. Competitions are held regularly and any voluntary organisation can submit a project which meets the scheme's objectives of reducing racial disadvantage and promoting racial equality.

Council House Sales

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the rules regarding succession of tenancy for discount purposes in the purchase of council houses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The legislative provisions governing the succession of a tenancy and the calculation of discount for the purchase of a council house are set out in sections 52 and 61 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 as amended.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to complete his consideration of the remaining third wave NHS trust applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Following the announcement by my noble and learned Friend, the Minister of State, on 15 October nine applications for trust status have been under consideration. These involve the Glasgow Royal infirmary, Western infirmary and Gartnavel hospitals, Stobhill, Inverclyde Royal, Renfrewshire Healthcare, Queen Margaret hospital Dunfermline, Kirkcaldly Acute hospitals, Angus unit and the Highland Communities unit.

My right hon. Friend has considered the applications very carefully, taking into account the comments made during the public consultations. He has concluded that they meet the published criteria and should be approved. Orders establishing the trusts are being signed today and the new trusts will become operational on 1 April 1994. This will bring the total number of trusts in Scotland at that date to 39.

Operating within the national health service, the trusts, between them, will be responsible for approximately 90 per cent. of hospital and community health services in Scotland. As the longer established trusts have already demonstrated, they will be able to develop services of a more local character and better adapted to meet patient needs. This augurs well for the health service in Scotland.

The latest batch of trust approvals also means that four health boards will join Grampian and Ayrshire and Arran in no longer having day-to-day operational responsibilities for hospitals in their areas. This will allow these boards to concentrate on their crucial role of determining the health needs of those in their area, securing services to meet those needs, and monitoring the services provided.

Urology Contract

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on contracts between the Ayrshire and Arran health board and the Dumfries and Galloway health board before the award by the former board of a contract for urology services;

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]*:

There is no contract between Ayrshire and Arran health board and Dumfries and Galloway health board for urology —or any other service—for services to Dumfries and Galloway residents. Any contract for services to residents of Dumfries and Galloway is a matter for Dumfries and Galloway health board in conjuction with whichever NHS trust, directly managed unit or other provider from which that board chooses to purchase services.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the re-submitted bids tendered for the urology contract in Ayrshire and Arran were amended by the Ayrshire and Arran health board before a final decision on the bids.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* Prior to consideration by the health board, the evaluation panel re-arranged figures in both bids, to ensure a "like for like" comparison in the preparation of its evaluation report. There was no question, however, of the health board itself amending any of the bids before a final decision was taken.

Overseas Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many visits abroad he has made during 1993; and what was *(a)* the cost of each visit to public funds and *(b)* the purpose of each visit.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* I have made four overseas visits during 1993:

Destination	*Date*	*Cost* £
Brussels	25 January	389
United States	25-27 March	4,690
Brussels	20-21 September	480
Far East (Hong Kong, Korea and Japan)	14-23 October	8,860

The visits to the United States and the far east involved inward investment and trade promotion. The visits to Brussels were to attend the Joint Foreign Affairs and Agriculture Council and the Transport and Environmental Council. Costs include travel, accommodation, local transportation and interpreting service, where applicable.

Golf

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Golf Union to discuss the role of golf in Scotland; what is his most recent estimate of the revenue that golf in Scotland attracts from inward investment; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* My right hon. Friend and I have no immediate plans to meet any representatives of the Scottish Golf Union to discuss any aspect of the game of golf. I would, of course, be only too willing to meet with the Scottish Golf Union to discuss any matters of mutual interest if a request for a meeting was made to me. It is not possible to quantify the revenue that golf in Scotland attracts from inward investment, but it is obviously a very considerable sum.

Motorways

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last assessed the level of disruption caused by unmanned roadworks on the main motorway routes between London and Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* My right hon. Friend is responsible for the trunk road network in Scotland, where roadworks are subject to the code of practice set out in "The Reduction of Delays of Roadworks" issued by the Scottish Office in 1992. The operational effect of all roadworks on the trunk road network, including motorways, in Scotland is monitored on the basis of fortnightly reports provided by the regional councils, as agent authorities, for the roads directorate of the Scottish Office Industry Department.

A key element in the efforts to reduce delays has been the introduction of lane rental on major maintenance contracts on the strategic core network. Under lane rental the contractor pays for the length of time traffic lanes or carriageways are closed and effectively receives a bonus for early completion or conversely incurs a penalty if the contract overruns. This has led to significant reductions in the time taken to complete roadworks and has minimised delays and inconvenience to road users.

Disabled Employees

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many disabled people in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Strathclyde currently benefit from the special aids to employment scheme; and how many disabled people he expects to lose their jobs once employers have to pay 50 per cent. of the cost of special aids in the work place.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* The numbers of disabled people receiving benefit from the special aids to employment scheme in Inverclyde and Strathclyde respectively are: *(a)* 2; *(b)* 68. Changes to the Employment Service's current special schemes for helping people with disabilities, and which include the introduction of a limited employers' contribution, to provide help for existing employees who have worked for them for more than six months, are aimed at helping more people with disabilities to get and retain jobs and at making a much wider range of help available. The Employment Service is currently finalising details of these changes with these aims in mind.

NHS Land

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of acres owned by the national health service for each of the past 14 years.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* Figures for each of the past 14 years are not held centrally in the form requested. The available information, excluding the state hospital and the health education board for Scotland, is as follows:

Period	*Acres*
December 1989	10,009
July 1990	9,415
December 1990	9,503
March 1992	8,766
September 1992	8,840

This information is taken from reports on national health service vacant and surplus property by the Scottish health management efficiency group.

Earnings

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the average weekly earnings for *(a)* full-time male workers and *(b)* full-time female workers in (i) Inverclyde, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* Information relating to average gross weekly earnings for full-time male employees and full-time female employees in Strathclyde and Scotland is shown in the table. Information relating to average earnings is not available below the level of Scottish regions.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates

	Males £	*Females* £
Strathclyde	326·6	240·6
Scotland	333·0	237·4

Source: New Earnings Survey 1993

Local Government Finance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appeals against banding under the council tax have been made in the current year in *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland; what is the average length of time taken to hear such appeals; and how many were successful.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 1 December 1993]:* The process of requesting a change to the council tax valuation list involves two stages. First, a proposal is lodged with the assessor's department. If the proposal cannot be resolved it proceeds as an appeal to the Valuation Appeal Committee. Proposals unresolved after six months are automatically cited for appeal. The tables set out the relevant available information supplied by assessors to the Scottish Office on proposals and appeals up to end-September 1993. Tables 1 and 2 show the outcome of proposals lodged. Table 3 shows the time taken to settle those proposals and appeals that have been settled; this includes cases where proposals are withdrawn by the appellant or the valuation list is adjusted by the assessor as well as cases decided by an appeal committee.

No information is collected centrally as to how many appeals are successful since it is not clear what that would mean in each case. It must be assumed that in all cases where an appellant withdraws his or her proposal or the assessor adjusts the valuation list then an agreed outcome has been reached.

Table 1

	Proposals lodged 1 April 1993-30 September 1993	*Withdrawn by appellant*	*Of which: List adjusted by assessor*	*Still to be dealt with*	*Proceeding as appeals to valuation appeal committee*
Proposals					
a. Strathclyde	32,975	1,704	7,507	23,764	0
b. Scotland	75,629	3,255	10,863	60,774	737

Table 2

	Appeals cited to be heard	*Withdrawn by appellant before hearing*	*Of which: List adjusted by assessor before hearing*	*Heard and resolved*	*Still to be dealt with*
Appeals					
a. Strathclyde	0	0	0	0	0
b. Scotland	737	152	145	16	424

Table 3
Analysis of proposals/appeals settled: time taken from date of lodgement of proposal until settlement

	Within 1 month	*Within 1-2 months*	*Within 2-3 months*	*Within 3-4 months*	*Within 4-5 months*	*Within 5-6 months*	*Total*
Proposals/Appeals resolved without hearing							
a. Strathclyde	1,019	1,874	2,541	2,683	1,054	40	9,211
b. Scotland	1,394	2,352	3,491	4,248	2,485	445	14,415

	Within 1 month	Within 1-2 months	Within 2-3 months	Within 3-4 months	Within 4-5 months	Within 5-6 months	Total
Appeals cited and heard:							
a. Strathclyde	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b. Scotland	0	0	0	0	2	14	16

"Scotland's Children"

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which elements of the White Paper, "Scotland's Children" he intends to bring forward into legislation.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 23 November 1993]:* The care of children calls for a clear and coherent legislative framework and a Bill which takes forward the proposals in the White Paper should be seen as an important first step towards a consolidation of law relating to children, besides including such important subjects as the emergency protection of children including the proposed exclusion order; the extension of local authorities' existing social welfare duties; the revision of the statutory authority for the transfer of parental rights; the duties of local authorities towards children in their care; and various provisions to strengthen the children's hearings system. Work is proceeding on these topics and others which involve central guidance. They will be the subject of further consultation, as appropriate.

HEALTH

Prescriptions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether a general practitioner may prescribe a substance on a private prescription where to do so would be cheaper for a patient than getting the same prescription on an NHS prescription.

Dr. Mawhinney: A general practitioner can offer patients the choice of between receiving a prescription on the national health service or purchasing an over the counter product themselves if the cost of the product is cheaper than the NHS prescription charge. Of course, many people are exempt from prescription charges and the GP could be regarded in breach of his terms of service if this point were overlooked. If an NHS patient requests a private prescription the GP is not precluded from providing one but may not charge a fee. The costs of dispensing a private prescription would have to be met by the patients.

Suicide

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has as to the relationship between anti-depressants and suicide deaths broken down by individual drug.

Mr. Bowis: Suicide deaths and undetermined deaths involving poisoning by an anti-depressant drug are shown in the tables, which are derived from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys "Mortality Statistics: Injury and Poisoning for England and Wales" (Series DH4 No. 17), copies of which are available in the Library. In many cases the anti-depressant was taken in combination with or in addition to another type of drug.

Deaths by Poisoning-Suicide-England and Wales 1991 by Anti-depressant Drugs
(Anti-depressant shown in bold)

Drug	Number of Persons
Aftershave dettol **lofepramine**	1[1]
Amitriptyline	36(5[1])
Amitriptyline chloral hydrate	1(1[1])
Amitriptyline chloral hydrate chlorpromazine	1
Amitriptyline chlorpromazine	1
Amitriptyline chlorpromazine procyclidine	1
Amitriptyline codeine	1
Amitriptyline desmethyldothiepin dothiepin nortriptyline	1
Amitriptyline diazepam **dothiepin**	1
Amitriptyline dihydrocodeine	1
Amitriptyline lofepramine	1
Amitriptyline nortriptyline	1
Amitriptyline paracetamol	1
Amitriptyline paracetamol salicylate (Nos)[2]	1(1[1])
Amitriptyline temazapam	5(1[1])
Amitriptyline theophylline	1
Amitriptyline thioridazine	2
Amitriptyline trifluoperazine	1
Amitriptyline oxazepam	1
Amitriptyline Soldapeine	1
Amoxapine	1(1[1])
Amoxapine chlorpromazine	1
Amoxapine tranyicypromine	1
Amylobarbitone **dothiepin** quinalbarbitone	1
Anadin extra co-proxamol **lofepramine Prothiaden**	1(1[1])
Benzodiazepine (Nos) **dothiepin** temazepam	1(1[1])
Benzodiazepine (Nos) opiate (Nos) paracetamol propoxyphene **tricyclic antidepressant**(Nos)	1
Benzodiazepine (Nos) **tricyclic antidepressant**(Nos)	1(1[1])
Butriptyline desalkyflurazepam paracetamol **Prothiaden**	1
Caffeine **Prothiaden** paracetamol salicylate (Nos) temazepam	1(1[1])
Chlormethiazole **dothiepin trimipramine**	1
Chlorpromazine **dothiepin** procyclidine	1
Chlorpromazine **imipramine**	1
Clomipramine	1
Clomipramine dextropropoxyphene paracetamol	1
Co-proxamol **dothiepin**	2
Co-proxamol **imipramine**	1
Codeine **dothiepin** salicylate (Nos.)	1
Desipramine imipramine terodiline	1
Desmethyldothiepin dothiepin temazapam	1
Dextropropoxyphene **Fluoxetine** norfluoxetine paracetamol thioridazine	1
Dextropropoxyphene paracetamol **Prothiaden**	1
Diazepam **diothiepin**	3
Diazepam **imipramine**	1
Diazepam **Prothiaden**	1(1[1])
Dicamba Herbicide **dothiepin**	1
Dihydrocodeine **dothiepin**	1
Distalgesic **dothiepin**	1
Disulfiram **dothiepin** nitrazepam thioridazine	1
Dothiepin (Prothiaden-31)	87(7[1])
Dothiepin desmethyldothiepin norpropoxyphene paracetamol propoxyphene temazepam	1
Dothiepin doxepin thioridazine Veganin	1
Dothiepin naftidrofuryl temazepam terodiline trimethoprim	1
Dothiepin nortriptyline	1
Dothiepin paracetamol	2
Dothiepin paracetamol temazepam	1
Dothiepin prochlorperazine	1
Dothiepin propoxyphene	1
Dothiepin temazepam	2

Drug	Number of Persons
Dothiepin Eltroxin	1
Doxepin	3
Faverin temazepam	1
Fluoxetine	1
Gamanil	1
Imipramine	10(1[1])
Imipramine paracetamol temazapam	1
Impramine temazapan	1
Ludiomil	1
Morphine **Prothiaden**	1
Motival	1
Nitrazepam **Tryptizol**	1(1[1])
Nortriptyline	1
Nortriptyline Stelazine	1
Paracetamol **trycyclic antidepressant (Nos.)**	1
Paracetamol **Prothiaden**	2
Phenothiazine **Prothiaden**	1
Prothiaden sinequan	1
Salicylate (Nos.) **trimipramine**	1
Sertraline	1(1[1])
Trazodone	1
Tricyclic Antidepressant (Nos.)	1
Trimipramine (Surmontil-1)	4(1[1])
Triptafen	1
Tryprizol	1
Viloxazine	1
Total	230(26[1])

[1] Number of deaths with mention of alcohol.
[2] Nos=Not otherwise stated ie refers to drugs within a particular sub-group—eg tricyclic antidepressants, benzodiazepines, salicyclates, etc., which are not separately identified in the table.

Deaths by Poisoning—Undetermined whether Accidentally or Purposely Inflicted—England and Wales 1991 by Anti-Depressant Drugs (Anti-Depressant shown in bold)

Drug	Number of persons
Amitriptyline	25(3[1])
Amitriptyline aspirin benzodiazepine (Nos) codeine temazapam	1
Amitriptyline carbomazepine	1
Amitriptyline chlorpromazine	2
Amitriptyline codeine	1
Amitriptyline dextropropoxyphene paracetamol	1
Amitriptyline diazepam	2
Amitriptyline diazepam methadone thioridazine	1(1[1])
Amitriptyline dihydrocodeine	2
Amitriptyline lithium temazepam	1
Amitriptyline methadone thioridazine	1
Amitriptyline nortriptyline	2
Amitriptyline paracetamol	2(1[1])
Amoxapine	2
Amphetamine **dothiepin**	1
Artane Piportil **Prothiaden**	1
Aspirin **dothiepin**	1
Baclofen buprenorphine Celevac **clomiparine** indomethacin nitrazepam	1
Benzodiazepine (Nos) dihydrocodeine **dothiepin**	1
Carbamazepine **dothiepin**	1
Carbamazepine phenothiazine **Prothiaden**	1(1[1])
Chloral Hydrate chlordiazepoxide **trazodone**	1
Chlordiazepoxide **Parnate** propranolol	1
Chlormethiazole **Prothiaden**	1(1[1])
Chlorpromazine **clomipramine** paracetamol procyclidine	1
Clomipramine	1
Clomipramine diazepam paracetamol temazepam	1(1[1])
Clomipramine procyclidine	1
Co-proxamol **dothiepin**	1
Codeine **dothiepin** paracetamol	1
Desipramine	1
Desipramine ibuprofen paracetamol procyclidine temazepam	1
Dextropropoxyphene **dothiepin**	1
Diazepam **doxepin**	1(1[1])
Dihydrocodeine **dothiepin**	1
Distalgic **Prothiaden**	1
Dothiepin (Prothiaden-31)	62(5[1])
Dothiepin haloperidol Modecate procyclidine	1
Dothiepin paracetamol	2(1[1])
Dothiepin propoxyphene	1
Dothiepin thioridazine	1
Fluoxetine Prothiaden	1
Imipramine	9(1[1])
Imipramine paracetamol	1
Imipramine salicylate (nos)	1
Imipramine temazapam	1
Nortriptyline	1
Prothiaden temazepam	1
Sulpiride **trimipramine**	1
Trimipramine	1(1[1])
Trimiparine trimiparzine	1
TOTAL	151(17[1])

[1] Number of deaths with mention of alcohol.
Nos=Not otherwise stated i.e. refers to drugs within a particular sub-group—eg tricyclic antidepressants, benzodiazepines, salicyclates, etc., which are not separately identified in the table.

Patients Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what point a complaint under the patients charter concerning the right of a patient to a clear explanation of a proposed treatment, including any risks or alternatives, becomes a complaint concerning clinical judgment.

Dr. Mawhinney: If there is a complaint that a health professional in the exercise of clinical judgment did not provide an explanation of a proposed treatment, including risks or alternatives, then it is a complaint concerning clinical judgment from the moment it is made, since the decision on how much information to provide to a patient, and the terms in which any warning of any risks is given prior to treatment is a clinical decision.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients and other mentally ill people *(a)* under 65 and *(b)* over 65 years are provided with beds or places in each type of accommodation illustrated in figure 2 of the Yates report by short and long stay.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally for all the types of accommodation shown in figure 2 of the Yates report. The information for staffed residential care homes is shown in the table.

Residents in Staffed Residential Homes Caring Primarily for Mentally Ill People By Sector, Age and Length of Stay: 31 March 1987 to 31 March 1992

England

	Local Authority		Voluntary Homes		Private Homes		All Homes	
	Under 65	65 and over	Under 65	65 and over	Under 65	65 and over	Under 65	65 and over
Long Stay								
1987	1,452	2,558	686	261	1,260	1,805	3,398	4,624
1988	1,585	2,607	1,009	537	1,941	3,814	4,535	6,958
1989	1,574	2,907	1,308	574	2,557	4,103	5,439	7,584
1990	1,610	2,870	1,632	733	3,102	4,732	6,344	8,335
1991	1,603	2,819	2,051	820	3,506	4,804	7,160	8,443
1992	1,529	2,569	2,408	1,079	3,865	5,247	7,802	8,895
Short Stay								
1987	183	145	146	27	58	30	385	202
1988	283	148	189	20	91	100	563	266
1989	269	199	245	10	105	27	619	236
1990	230	173	254	8	143	14	627	195
1991	259	219	157	10	108	18	524	247
1992	271	182	285	27	142	16	698	225

Source: DH Return RACS.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the figures are for the different types of provision illustrated in figure 3 of the Yates report.

Mr. Bowis: The figures are shown in the table.

Mental illness available beds—places: England

	Local Authority mentally ill and elderly mentally ill places	Voluntary mentally ill and elderly mentally ill places	Private-mentally ill and elderly mentally ill places	Private hospital beds	NHS other beds	NHS main hospital beds
1982	4,173	1,603	764	1,994	15,145	68,555
1983	4,242	1,693	865	2,394	16,276	65,362
1984	4,363	1,952	1,219	2,176	16,969	61,795
1985	4,470	2,134	1,731	2,340	17,730	57,967
1986	7,549	2,377	4,151	3,165	18,771	53,434
1987-88	7,568	2,640	6,959	4,507	22,657	44,470
1988-89	7,916	2,648	7,680	5,862	19,712	43,287
1989-90	7,584	3,080	9,066	7,693	20,415	38,875
1990-91	7,715	3,508	9,724	10,772	21,246	33,993
1991-92	7,552	4,303	10,382	12,653	21,285	28,993

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the source of the information about private hospital provision for mentally ill people given in the Yates report, published by her Department.

Mr. Bowis: The source of this information is in the Korner return KO36, "Private Hospitals, Homes and Clinics registered under Section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984", copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what redress, under the patients charter patients, or their family, have if they are not given a clear explanation of the treatment proposed, including any risks and any alternatives.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the patients charter, patients have a general right to have complaints thoroughly investigated. If the patient is still unhappy about the way in which a complaint has been investigated then the patient may take the matter up with the Health Service Commissioner.

The patients charter has introduced the additional provision that if a patient believes that they have been denied a specific charter right, the patient or their family may write to the chief executive of the national health service who will arrange for the matter to be investigated.

Paediatric Intensive Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has as to the number of children in each English region who did not receive paediatric intensive care owing to the shortage of such beds.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on which to base such an estimate is not available centrally. Decisions on the referral of critically ill children are taken by clinicians in the light of the condition of the child and the proximity of available treatment facilities. A survey carried out by the British Paediatric Association in connection with preparation of the report, "The Care of Critically Ill Children" showed that, in 1991, 51 per cent. of children receiving intensive care were treated in dedicated paediatric intensive care units, 29 per cent. in high dependency beds in children's wards and 20 per cent. in adult intensive care units. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

The Department, in collaboration with appropriate professional bodies, will act on the recommendation in the report, for outcomes for children requiring paediatric intensive care to be audited to provide this information for the future.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to set targets for the number of paediatric intensive care unit beds in each of the next five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The recently published report from the British Paediatric Association, "The Care of Critically Ill Children", copies of which are available in the Library, offers recommendations on the number and distribution of paediatric intensive care beds required to take account of developments in this highly specialised area of child health care. Health authorities will be asked to draw up plans for an effective and co-ordinated response to this report and these may include locally determined targets.

Leptospirosis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the risk of contracting leptospirosis from drinking direct from bottles or cans.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responses she has had to the Department of Health consultation paper "De-monopolising the Provision of Secure Accommodation"; and if she will place them in the Library.

Mr. Bowis: Forty-two written responses were received from local authority associations, voluntary organisations and private sector companies. There was no understanding that the responses would be made public and so I do not think it would be appropriate to place copies in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals her Department has put forward to privatise secure accommodation for juvenile offenders; and what arrangements will be made to advertise the contracts.

Mr. Bowis: Proposals for legislative changes to enable the voluntary and private sectors to provide secure accommodation will be introduced to Parliament in due course.

Medical Alert

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written notices are routinely issued to patients who are the subjects of any medical alert or warning indicating they are subject to the information contained in the alert; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department does not routinely issue written notices to patients concerning alerts or warnings relating to problems involving medical devices. The Department's policy in such cases is to issue safety warnings to aid clinicians in making informed decisions with respect to individual patients.

Pacemakers

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what sources her Department arrives at a figure for deaths of patients implanted with pacemaker lead models 1010T, 1050T and Prototype 93.

Mr. Sackville: Data relating to the number of patient deaths for individuals implanted with the pacemaker leads are obtained from the national pacemaker database located at the Royal Brompton National heart and lung hospital, London.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how implant centres and follow-up centres are informed that pacemaker lead model 1010T includes prototype 93.

Mr. Sackville: Centres were informed of a fault in the Siemens pacemaker lead model 1010T by the Department of Health pacemaker technical note No. 48, which included the Siemens medical advisory as an attachment. Paragraph 5 of the attachment identified all associated leads and their prototypes, including the T93 prototype. Copies of the technical note are available in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been implanted with pacemaker lead models 1010T, 1050T and prototype 93.

Mr. Sackville: According to the National Pacemaker Registry a total of 4,675 pacemaker leads of models 1010T, 1050T and prototype T93 have been implanted in patients within the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the identification of pacemaker lead prototype 93 in Pacemaker note No. 48.

Mr. Sackville: Attention was drawn to the prototype T93 in two separate communications to all relevant clinicians. The details were contained in the manufacturer's advisory notice which was attached to the Department of Health technical note No. 48, and which had been issued previously by the company. Copies of the technical note are available in the Library.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance her Department has issued in respect of the identification of those deaths in patients fitted with pacemakers which may be due to faulty pacemaker leads.

Mr. Sackville: No guidance has been issued by the Department of Health. Identification of the cause of death is made by the relevant medical practitioner.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will issue guidance to NHS trust hospitals on the practice of publicity advertising the private use of such hospitals on behalf of commercial organisations.

Mr. Sackville: No.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance has been issued on the role and objectives of trust non-executive directors;

(2) what training non-executive directors receive on corporate governance on joining trust boards.

Dr. Mawhinney: Non-executive directors of national health service trusts are appointed by regional health authority chairmen and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. They are provided, on appointment, with guidance produced by the NHS Management Executive on their role and functions. It is for individual trust chairmen to ensure that non-executive directors receive any necessary induction and training. The corporate governance task force is expected to make recommendations before the end of the

year to the chief executive of the Management Executive on the role and functions and induction-continuing development of chairmen and non-executive directors. Copies of the guidance will be placed in the Library.

Medical Devices Directorate

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proposals she has to ensure the medical devices directorate has the power to require a response to a medical alert from those to whom it is issued;

(2) whether she will issue guidelines to the medical devices directorate on monitoring of centres receiving alerts;

(3) what monitoring the medical devices directorate carries out to ensure that all hospitals comply with medical alerts.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to issue guidelines to the medical devices directorate on monitoring of centres which receive alerts. The medical devices directorate currently has no powers to require a response to, or compliance with, safety warnings and we have no plans to grant such powers. The medical devices directorate does not monitor compliance with medical alerts sent to hospitals.

Medical Devices

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is responsible for assessing the effects of faults in medical devices.

Mr. Sackville: The Department, through the medical devices directorate is responsible for assessing the effects of faults in medical devices.

Royal Sussex County Hospital

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide details of current patient waiting times for the Brighton Health Care national health service trust and projected treatment waiting times when the Royal Sussex County hospital redevelopment is completed.

Dr. Mawhinney: Brighton healthcare trust was established in 1993 and information on their waiting times is not yet available centrally.

Brighton healthcare trust will continue to comply with both local standards and patients charter guarantees after the Royal Sussex hospital redevelopment is completed.

Pesticides

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to publish the revised edition of the notes for the guidance of medical practitioners on pesticides.

Mr. Sackville: Work on the revision is underway. As soon as this is completed the notes will be sent for publication. The Department holds a small stock and can provide copies of the current book to doctors or hospitals if required.

NHS Employees

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice has been issued by her Department to national health service employers regarding the payment of unsocial hours allowances for staff.

Mr. Sackville: For staff whose pay and conditions are determined nationally, a variety of agreements have been reached for different staff groups as part of their overall pay and conditions of service package.

Smoking

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the total number of cigarettes smoked by children every year.

Mr. Sackville: Figures taken from the 1992 Office of Population Censuses and Surveys survey of smoking among secondary school children for the mean consumption of cigarettes per pupil, give an estimate of around 690 million cigarettes smoked every year by pupils aged 11 to 15 in England.

Drug Prescribing

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money in real terms would be saved from drug prescribing if the exemption for pregnant and nursing mothers were removed.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is no firm evidence to suggest that there would be a reduction in prescribing, and consequent savings in drugs bill expenditure, if prescription charge exemption for expectant and nursing mothers were to be removed.

Steroids

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ensure that a list of side effects are given whenever steroids are dispensed.

Mr. Sackville: Patient information leaflets are an important way for patients to receive easily understood information about the medicines that they use. We have recently implemented a European Community directive to take effect from 1 January 1994, one effect of which makes patient information leaflets compulsory for all medicines unless all the information is shown on the label. These leaflets will contain important information on how medicines should be used and useful information on side effects. Pharmaceutical companies will be implementing this requirement progressively over the next five years.

Maternity Leave

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has made to her colleagues in the Department of Employment on extending the right to maternity leave and allowance to mothers of newly adopted babies or young children.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Waiting Lists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the latest available figures for the total number of patients on the waiting list in each EC country.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on the number of patients on the waiting list in each country of the European Union is not available centrally. Information on waiting times for in-patient and day case treatment for England is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England" published twice yearly, copies of which are available in the Library.

Specialists

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase the number of specialists in hospitals.

Dr. Mawhinney: Our policy is to encourage the shift towards a consultant-based service, envisaged in the agreements between the national health service and the medical profession set out in "Achieving a Balance", copies of which are available in the Library. This suggests a minimum consultant expansion rate of 2 per cent. per year. However, it is a matter for each employing body to determine the number of consultants needed in each specialty in the light of local needs and competing priorities. Between 1987 and 1992 the number of medical consultants working in NHS hospitals in England increased by 2,240, a rate of 3 per cent. per year.

Tobacco Advertising

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will support a tobacco advertising ban at the next European Health Ministers' meeting; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Government have made clear that they oppose the draft European Community directive banning tobacco advertising. We do not believe that it is necessary for the completion of the single market.

Leptospirosis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority for the last five years, and this year to-date the number of people who have been infected by leptospirosis desease.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Number of persons infected by Leptospirosis disease

Regional Health Authority	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*March and June 1993*
Northern	2	2	2	1	0	1	3
Yorkshire	2	3	5	3	4	1	1
Trent	3	1	3	1	1	2	1
East Anglian	1	3	1	3	0	2	0
North West Thames	2	2	2	0	2	3	0
North East Thames	1	1	1	0	1	3	0
South East Thames	0	2	3	3	2	1	0
South West Thames	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Wessex	5	2	2	0	1	1	1
Oxford	0	0	3	1	2	2	0
South Western	2	5	2	2	2	4	3
West Midlands	2	5	4	2	0	4	0
Mersey	2	2	3	3	1	0	1
North Western	2	4	0	0	1	3	0

Optic Neuritis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list *(a)* by year for the last five years and the current year to date and *(b)* by regional health authority the number of cases of the disease optic neuritis that have been reported.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Patient Relocations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to inform health authorities and trusts of the circumstances in which patients may be relocated in other parts of the country *(a)* if they are being treated under section 19 of the National Health Act 1983 and *(b)* otherwise.

Mr. Bowis: There are no plans to issue guidance on these cases. Clinicians refer all patients to units which most appropriately meet their needs. This applies equally to patients detained under the Mental Health Act and who are transferred under section 19.

Patients Charter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by regional health authority the hospitals that have currently been penalised financially for failing to treat patients within the waiting time limits set by the patients charter; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is not available centrally. Allocations from the waiting times fund are linked to regions performance on waiting times. Deductions are made for specific breaches of the patients charter guarantees. These deductions act as an incentive to good management and some regions therefore pass them on to the responsible provider units.

University College Hospital

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for resolving the financial problems of University College hospital, London; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The University College London hospitals group reports directly to North East Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Stavely, chairman of the regional health authority for details.

NHS Reforms

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis she has made of the cost benefit of the national health service reforms.

Dr. Mawhinney: The benefits of the national health service reforms are tangible: more patients are now being treated than ever before; people are waiting shorter times for treatment; general practitioner fund holders are able to back their clinical judgment and local knowledge with national health service funds to the benefit of all patients; increased numbers of people are being treated as day cases without the need for a stay in hospital. These are some of the real and important benefits flowing from the reforms —which clearly illustrate we have achieved our main aims: improvements to the quality of care; responsiveness to individuals and value for money.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to ask the Audit Commission to investigate the payments to chairmen and non-executive directors of national health service trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: The independent external auditors appointed by the Audit Commission examine payments to chairmen and non-executive directors as part of their routine audits.

Infant and Perinatal Mortality

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the infant mortality and perinatal mortality rate in each EC country in the latest available year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Infant and perinatal mortality rate in each European Community country for 1991

	Infant mortality rate[1]	*Perinatal mortality rate*[2]
Belgium	[3]7·0	n/a
Denmark	7·3	n/a
Germany	6·9	5·8
Greece	9·0	11·1
Spain	[3]7·8	n/a
France	7·3	8·2
Ireland	[3]8·2	[3]9·9
Italy	[3]8·2	[3]10·5
Luxembourg	9·2	9·6
Netherlands	6·5	9·1
Portugal	10·8	13·6
United Kingdom	7·4	8·1

[1] Deaths under 1 year per 1,000 livebirths.
[2] Deaths under 1 week and stillbirths per 1,000 live and stillbirths.
[3] Provisional.
n/a—Not available.
Source: Eurostat Demographic Statistics 1993.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking regarding overspending by general practitioner fundholders in the Doncaster area in respect of drug prescribing; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: General practitioner fundholders nationally are proving to be extremely successful in improving the cost effectiveness of their prescribing and can vire between the elements of their budgets to achieve the most appropriate care for patients. Regional health authorities are responsible for managing the GP fundholding scheme in their areas.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *307*, about general practitioner surgery in Liverpool, South Sefton, Knowsley and St. Helens and Wirral health authorities, how many of the general practitioners are fund holders; and how many fund holding general practitioners are in single-handed practices, in each of the four health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional health authorities are responsible for managing the general practitioner fundholding scheme in their areas. Detailed regional information is not available centrally.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to hold centrally, records of the revenue spending on *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients by regional health authorities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 21 October her intention to abolish regional health authorities, subject to the approval of Parliament.

Coronary Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the waiting times for each *(a)* regional health authority and *(b)* district health authority for coronary (i) artery bypass grafting and (ii) angioplasty.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on waiting times by treatment or condition is not available centrally. Information for in-patient and day case treatment by specialty for district and regional health authorities is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", published twice yearly since 1987, copies of which are available in the Library.

Clinics (Closure)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what obligation there is on community care services and NHS trusts to inform or consult hon. Members about the closure of clinics in their constituencies.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is no obligation on national health service trusts to inform or consult hon. Members when considering changes to the service which they provide. We encourage trusts to develop good communications with local MPs. The precise arrangements are matters for individual trust boards.

Blood Donors

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ban the import of blood and blood products from countries which use paid donors.

Mr. Sackville: This country is self-sufficient in blood obtained from our voluntary, unpaid donors and we do not

obtain supplies from other sources. It is our long-standing policy to pursue self-sufficiency in blood products made from voluntary, unpaid donations and to seek to maximise the use of those products. We nevertheless recognise the clinical freedom of doctors to prescribe other products if considered more appropriate for individual patients.

Community Care

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what method she intends to distribute the community care special transitional grant in 1994-95; and what conditions she intends to attach to its use.

Mr. Bowis: The special transitional grant for community care in England will amount to some £736 million in 1994-95. It will be distributed to local authorities on the basis of the personal social services standard spending assessment—PSS SSA. We have decided in the light of early experience of the new arrangements, and of a change to the way in which numbers of residents in independent sector care homes are reflected in PSS SSAs, that it is no longer necessary to base part of the distribution on historic patterns of income support spending on residential care.

There will be conditions attached to the use of the grant similar to those applied in 1993-94. Full details of the grant conditions will be announced separately.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available to elderly people about the variety of accommodation and services available to them under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities must publish annual plans outlining the ways in which community care will operate in their area. We expect local authorities to build on these plans to provide their local population with comprehensive details of the services available. This way users of services will be able to make the informed choice which is central to our community care system.

Genetics Laboratories

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of NHS funding for regional genetics laboratories.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government remain committed to the research and development strategy. We have made it clear that the NHS Management Executive will continue to work closely with purchasers and providers to ensure that the high levels of services which are presently delivered, including those provided by the regional genetics laboratories, are maintained.

Gene Therapy

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the membership of her committee on the ethics of gene therapy; and if she will list each member's current professional position.

Mr. Sackville: The Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy was disbanded on 19 November 1993. It has been replaced by the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee, which met for the first time on 22 November 1993.

The new committee is chaired by Professor Dame June Lloyd DBE, MD, FRCP formerly Professor of Child Health at the Institute of Child Health, and a past-president of the British Paediatric Association.

The membership of the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee was announced on 15 November 1993.

The 16 members of the Committee are:

Dr. Elizabeth Anionwu, PhD, RGN, HV Tutor-Lecturer in Community Genetic Counselling, Institute of Child Health;

Mrs. Rosemary Barnes,—Director, "Wellbeing";

Professor Martin Bobrow, DSc, MB, BCh, FRCP FRCPath—Prince Philip Professor of Paediatric Research, United Medical and Dental Schools of Guy's and St. Thomas's Hospitals, University of London;

Professor Derek Crowther, PhD, MB, BChir., MA, MSc, FRCP, FRCR—Professor of Medical Oncology, Christie Hospital and Holt Radium Institute and University of Manchester;

Professor Anthony Dayan, MD, FRCP, FRCPath., FFPM, FIBiol. —Professor of Toxicology, University of London; Director, Department of Toxicology, St. Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College;

The Rev. Canon Dr. Keith Denison—Director of Education for Diocese of Monmouth and Vicar of Whitson, Newport;

Dr. Brenda Gibson, MB, ChB, MRCP, MRCPath., DFM—Consultant Haematologist, Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow;

Mrs. Rosemary Knights, RGN, OND, DN—Chief Executive, Warrington Hospital NHS Trust. Previously Regional Nursing Officer, Mersey RHA;

Professor Peter Lachmann, FRCP, FRCPath., FRS—Professor of Immunology, University of Cambridge;

Dr. Theresa Marteau, MSc, PhD, CPsychol—Head, Psychology and Genetics Research Unit, UMDS, London;

Professor Norman Nevin, BSc, MD, FRCP, FRCPath—Professor of Medical Genetics Queen's University Belfast from 1975 to date;

Miss Eleanor Platt QC;

Dr. Brian Richards, BSc, PhD—Chairman, British Biotechnology Group;

Mr. Nick Ross—Broadcaster and journalist;

Dr. Michael Steel, MB, ChB, PhD, DSc, FRCPEd, MRCPath —MRC Human Genetics Unit Edinburgh. From 1 January 1994, Professor in Medical Science, St. Andrews University;

Professor Robin Weiss, PhD, FRCPath., Hon. MPCP—Professor of Viral Oncology and Director of Research, Chester Beatty Laboratories Institute of Cancer Research, University of London.

NHS Estates

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set out the date and the terms upon which NHS Estates took out a lease at 1 Trevelyan square, Leeds.

Mr. Sackville: The property occupied by National Health Service Estates at 1 Trevelyan square, Leeds is held on the property holdings common user estate by virtue of a lease dated 11 November 1992 and made between Nonpariel Securities Limited and the Secretary of State for the Environment. The area demised by the lease comprises the first, second and part of the third floors having a total area of 22,450 square feet together with 20 basement car parking spaces. The lease is held from the 11 November to 24 November 1992 and thereafter for a term of 25 years subject to a break in the tenant's favour only at the expiration of the 15th year.

The rent which is subject to five-yearly rent reviews is £370,425 per year effective from 14 May 1993, the landlord having granted a six months and three days rent free period. In addition the landlord made a capital contribution of £58,496 exclusive of value added tax towards the fitting out costs. The quarterly on account service charge is currently £14,100.

Mr. Ivan Biddle

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of her code of practice in relation to the case of Ivan Biddle, who was sacked by Barnet general hospital, for expressing to his trade union his concern about the running of the hospital mortuary.

Dr. Mawhinney: Mr. Biddle was dismissed from his post as anatomical pathology technician at Barnet general hospital in October 1990. The National Health Service Management Executive's "Guidance For Staff On Relations With The Public And The Media" (EL(93)51) was issued on 8 June 1993, copies of which are available in the Library.

Redundancy Payments

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each year since 1988, and the first six months of 1993, the gross amount of redundancy payments given out by *(a)* region, *(b)* district, *(c)* special health authorities and *(d)* trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Spectacle and Contact Lenses

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the average price of spectacle lenses and contact lenses for NHS patients, for each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available in the form requested. Until 1986 national health service spectacles were available free of charge to children. Adults choosing NHS spectacles paid a contribution for their spectacle lenses which was determined by the complexity of the prescription. Since 1986 people who are entitled to help with the cost of spectacles and contact lenses have received a voucher which they can use towards the cost of these.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 29 November 1993, *Official Report,* column *307,* about general practitioner surgery in Liverpool, South Sefton, Knowsley and St. Helens and Wirral health authorities, what is *(a)* the largest list and *(b)* the smallest list size of general practitioner practices in the health authorities.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the tables.

FHSA	*Practice with smallest list size*	*Number of general practitioners in practice*
Liverpool	1,131	1
St. Helens and Knowsley	504	1
Sefton	1,262	1
Wirral	1,060	1

FHSA	*Practice with largest list size*	*Number of general practitioners in practice*
Liverpool	13,158	6
St. Helens and Knowsley	14,161	6
Sefton	16,047	7
Wirral	15,464	8

The data relate to 1 April 1993.

All data relate to partnerships. Some partnerships may practice from more than one surgery.

Partnerships may include one or more general practitioners who are restricted principals. A restricted principal is a GP who either *(a)* provides the full range of general medical services but whose list is limited to the staff of one or more hospitals or institutions in which he is employed or to patients resident in one or more schools or institutions; or *(b)* provides maternity medical services and/or contraceptive services only.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans she has to increase the budgets of those hospital trusts whose chief executives are to receive a salary increase; and if she will make a statement;

(2) when she was first informed of recent increases in salaries for the chief executives of various hospital trusts; what her response was; what plans she has to take action to countermand these increases; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The salaries of chief executives and other directors of trusts are matters for the chairmen and non-executive directors. The budgets of national health service hospital trusts are established on the basis of contracts for services between them and national health service purchasing authorities.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to all chairmen on 12 November 1992 requiring settlements for 1993-94 to conform with the public sector pay restraint limits of 0-1·5 per cent.

Immunisation

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths, occuring within 48 hours of immunisation, were reported on yellow cards or otherwise to the Department or to the Committee on the Safety of Medicines in each year from 1986 to 1992; and how many of these deaths occured after the injection of triple or pertussis vaccines.

Mr. Sackville: The total number of reactions or deaths that occur within 48 hours of immunisation is not available. Spontaneous reports of adverse drug reactions are received from doctors and dentists under the voluntary "Yellow card" scheme in the United Kingdom. In addition there is a statutory requirement for companies to report adverse reactions to their medicines. The receipt of a report does not necessarily indicate that a specific drug caused the reaction, merely that there was a suspicion that the drug is associated with the reaction specified, many other factors may contribute.

The table lists the number of deaths reported to the Committee on the Safety of Medicines in association to vaccines containing pertussis, from 1986 to 1993. Pertussis vaccine is usually given combined with diptheria and

tetanus vaccine as a triple (DTP) vaccine starting at two months of age. It is therefore not possible to determine which one, if any of these vaccines causes a particular reported reaction.

Number of deaths reported to the CSM to a pertussis containing vaccine

Year	Number
1986	0
1987	2
1988	1
1989	0
1990	2
1991	[1]6
1992	[1]6
1993	[1]2

[1] In 1990, the age for routine immunisation was lowered, and coincided with the peak age for deaths due to sudden infant death syndrome. It was therefore anticipated that there would be an increase in sudden infant death syndrome coincidentally associated with vaccine administration. Research studies have demonstrated that the association is temporal and not causal.

Influenza Vaccine

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laboratories in the United Kingdom are currently engaged in the production of influenza vaccine for the NHS; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: One at Evans Medical's premises in Speke, Liverpool. Other distributors import supplies of influenza vaccine.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current availability of influenza vaccine; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) on 29 November at column *305*.

Patient Hotels

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give *(a)* the number and location of each patient hotel, *(b)* the number of deaths that have occurred in patient hotels, *(c)* the nursing to patient ratio in the hotels, *(d)* the percentage of non-qualified staff attending to patients in hotels, *(e)* the number of private companies contracted to provide patient services in hotels, *(f)* details of all ministerial discussions concerning the introduction of charges for facilities in hotels and *(g)* what consideration she is giving to changing the name patient hotel to convalescent unit.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is not available centrally. No ministerial discussions concerning the introduction of charges for facilities in hotels have taken place nor are we currently giving any consideration to what these units should be called.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what purposes a district health authority which no longer manages the provision of health care is authorised to apply or spend charitable trust funds retained after health care was transferred to the trusts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have been asked to reply.

A district health authority is authorised to apply or spend charitable trust funds for all or any purposes relating to the national health service. In doing so, it acts as a charity trustee. Under section 90 of the National Health Service Act 1977 it is not necessary for the particular purpose to relate to health service provision made by that authority.

The purposes for which any particular fund is to be applied are to be gathered from the written instrument regulating that fund—failing which from the appeal literature. The authority is required to promote these purposes and no others in its use of the funds.

In circumstances where such purposes now fall within the responsibility of a NHS trust, the authority should consider asking the Secretary of State for Health for an order under section 92 of the National Health Service Act 1977 transferring the trust property from the authority to the NHS trust. Unless and until the funds are lawfully transferred under that section or otherwise to a new charity trustee, the authority remains fully responsible for the due application of the charitable trust funds.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Administration

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the administration from Glasgow of Department of Social Service benefits to Ealing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Harry Greenway, dated 1 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking what assessment he has made of the administration from Glasgow of Department of Social Security benefits to Ealing.

Between August 1989 and June 1991 the processing work of 21 London offices was relocated to three Benefit Centres; at Glasgow, Belfast and Ashton in Makerfield. Both Euston and Ealing districts had their work relocated to Glasgow Benefits Centre. It was envisaged that the Benefits Agency's service to its customers would be improved by moving work which did not require face to face contact with the public away from hard pressed London offices.

Since the processing of claims from benefit customers in Ealing was relocated in 1991, there has been a general improvement in service delivery. As regards Income Support (IS), which is the most frequently claimed benefit, the number of days it takes to clear a claim have been reduced by half. Currently it takes, on average, seven days to clear an IS claim.

Furthermore, accuracy on IS claims has improved from 71 per cent. of claims being processed accurately, prior to relocation, to a rate of 85 per cent. currently.

Similar improvements have been achieved on claims to Sickness Benefits. Prior to relocation it took on average, 29 days to clear a claim, whereas now it takes nine days. The accuracy of processing these type of claims has improved from 92·7 per cent., prior to relocation, to 94·3 per cent. currently.

If you require any further specific information about the administration of benefit claims from Glasgow I would be happy to provide it.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those local authorities who disregard war pensions and war widow's pensions when pensioners claim *(a)* housing benefit, *(b)* council tax benefit and *(c)* other benefits.

Mr. Burt: The discretion to disregard up to the full amount of any war pension applies only to housing benefit and council tax benefit, which succeeded community charge benefit in April 1993.

The information requested with regard to housing benefit has been compiled from the latest information from local authorities for the financial year 1990-91 and is listed in the table. No details are available for council tax benefit.

Local authorities operating a local scheme in housing benefit to disregard an amount of war disablement or war widow's pension in addition to the £10 statutory disregard.

Aberconwy
Aberdeen
Adur
Amber Valley
Angus
Annandale and Eskdale
Arfon
Argyll-Bute
Arun
Ashfield
Ashford
Aylesbury Vale
Badenoch
Banff and Buchan
Barking
Barnet
Basingstoke
Bassetlaw
Bath[1]
Bearsden and Milngavie
Berwickshire
Beverley
Birmingham
Blaby[1]
Blackburn
Blackpool
Blaenau Gwent
Bolton[1]
Boston
Bournemouth
Bracknell
Bradford
Braintree
Breckland
Brent
Brentwood
Brighton
Broadland
Bromley[1]
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
Broxtowe
Burnley
Bury[1]
Caithness
Calderdale
Cambridge[1]
Camden
Cannock Chase
Canterbury
Cardiff
Carlisle
Carrick
Castle Morpeth[2]
Castle Point
Ceredigion
Charnwood
Chelmsford
Cheltenham
Cherwell
Chester[2]
Chesterfield
Chichester
Chiltern
Chorley
Christchurch
Clackmannan
Clydebank
Clydesdale
Colwyn
Congleton
Copeland
Corby[1]
Cotswold
Coventry
Craven
Crawley
Crewe and Nantwich
Cumbernauld
Cumbernauld (DC)
Cumnock and Doon
Cunninghame
Dacorum
Darlington[1]
Dartford
Daventry
Delyn
Derby[1]
Derbyshire Dales
Doncaster[1]
Dover
Dudley
Dumbarton
Dundee
Dunfermline
Dwyfor
Ealing
East Cambridgeshire
East Devon
East Dorset
East Hampshire
East Hertfordshire
East Kilbride
East Kilbride (DC)
East Lothian
East Staffordshire[1]
East Yorkshire
Eastleigh
Eastwood
Eden
Edinburgh
Ellesmere Port
Elmbridge
Epping Forest
Epsom and Ewell
Erewash
Ettrick and Lauderdale
Exeter[1]
Falkirk
Fareham
Fenland
Forest Heath
Forest of Dean
Gedling
Gillingham
Glanford
Glasgow
Glenrothes (DC)
Gloucester
Glyndwr
Gordon
Gosport
Great Yarmouth
Grimsby[1]
Guildford

Hackney
Halton
Hambleton[1]
Hamilton
Hammersmith
Harborough
Harlow
Harrow
Hart
Hartlepool
Hastings
Havant
Havering[1]
Hereford
Hertsmere
High Peak
Hillingdon
Hinckley and Bosworth
Holderness
Horsham
Hounslow
Hove
Huntingdon
Hyndburn
Inverclyde
Inverness
Ipswich
Irvine (DC)
Isles of Scilly
Islington
Islwyn
Kennet
Kilmarnock
Kincardine and Deeside
Kingston-upon-Thames
Kingswood
Kirkcaldy
Kirklees
Knowsley
Kyle and Carrick
Lambeth
Lancaster
Langbaurgh
Leicester
Lewes
Lewisham
Lichfield
Lincoln
Liverpool
Livingston (DC)
Llanelli
Lliw Valley
Lochaber
Luton
Macclesfield
Maidstone
Maldon
Malvern Hills
Mansfield
Medina
Meirionnydd
Melton
Mendip
Merton
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Suffolk
Mid Sussex
Middlesborough[1]
Midlothian
Milton Keynes
Mole Valley
Monklands
Monmouth
Montgomery
Moray
Motherwell
Nairn
Neath
New Forest
Newark
Newbury
Newcastle under Lyme
Newham
Newport[1]
Nithsdale
North Bedfordshire
North Cornwall
North Dorset
North East Derby
North East Fife
North Hertfordshire
North Kesteven
North Shropshire
North Tyneside
North Warwickshire
North West Leicester
North Wiltshire
Northampton
Northavon
Nottingham
Nuneaton
Oadby and Wigston
Ogwr
Oldham[1]
Orkney
Penwith[1]
Perth and Kinross
Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Preseli
Preston
Purbeck
Radnor
Reading
Redbridge
Redditch
Reigate and Banstead
Renfrew
Rhondda
Rhuddlan
Ribble Valley
Richmond-upon-Thames
Richmondshire
Rochdale
Rochester on Medway
Rochford
Ross and Cromarty
Rossendale
Rother
Roxburgh
Rugby
Runnymede
Rushcliffe
Rushmoor
Rutland
Ryedale
Salford
Salisbury
Sandwell
Scarborough
Scottish Homes
Scunthorpe
Sedgefield
Sefton
Selby
Sevenoaks
Shetland
Skye and Lochalsh
Slough
Solihull
South Bedfordshire
South Buckinghamshire
South Cambridgeshire
South Derbyshire
South Herefordshire
South Holland
South Lakeland
South Norfolk

South Northants
South Oxfordshire
South Pembrokeshire
South Ribble
South Shropshire
South Somerset
South Staffordshire
South Tyneside
South Wight
Southampton
Southend-on-Sea
Southwark
Spelthorne
St. Albans
St. Helens
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stevenage[1]
Stewartry
Stirling
Stockport
Stockton-on-Tees[1]
Stoke-on-Trent
Stratford-on-Avon
Strathkelvin
Stroud
Suffolk Coastal
Surrey Heath
Sutherland
Sutton
Swale
Swansea
Tameside
Tamworth
Tandridge
Teignbridge
Tendring
Test Valley
Tewkesbury
Thamesdown[1]
Thanet
The Wrekin
Three Rivers
Thurrock
Tonbridge and Malling[1]
Torbay[1]
Torfaen[1]
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Tunbridge Wells[1]
Tweeddale
Vale of Glamorgan
Vale of White Horse
Vale Royal
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Wansbeck
Wansdyke
Watford
Waverley
Wealden
Welwyn Hatfield
West Lothian
West Norfolk
West Oxfordshire
West Wiltshire
Western Isles
Westminster
Wigan
Wigtown
Winchester
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wirral
Woking
Wokingham
Wolverhampton
Woodspring
Worcester
Worthing
Wycombe
York[1]

[1] Denotes those authorities who operate a scheme to disregard war disablement pensions only.

[2] Denotes those authorities who operate a scheme to disregard war widows' pensions only.

[3] Denotes an authority which operates a scheme to disregard war disablement pensions and war widows' pensions for housing benefit rent rebates only.

Income Support

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of people are living in a household dependent upon income support in *(a)* the Govan constituency, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* Strathclyde region, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available for the Govan constituency, Glasgow, Strathclyde region or Northern Ireland.

The latest available information for Scotland and Great Britain is in the table.

Beneficiaries as a percentage of population

	per cent.
Scotland	17·1
Great Britain	17·0

Notes:
1. Source—Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 1992. Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.
2. Percentages are correct to one decimal place.
3. Beneficiaries are the number of claimants plus partners and dependents.
4. The population figures used are estimates of the resident population in mid-1992.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of children under 15 years are living in families in receipt of income support in *(a)* the Govan constituency, *(b)* Glasgow, *(c)* Strathclyde region, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available for the Govan constituency, Glasgow, Strathclyde region or Northern Ireland.

The latest available information for Scotland and Great Britain is in the table.

Children under 15 as a percentage of population

	per cent.
Scotland	24·5
Great Britain	25·6

Notes:
1. Source—Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, November 1992. Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys.
2. Percentages are correct to one decimal place.
3. Children under 15 are the number of children aged under 15 of Income Support recipients.
4. The population figures used are estimates of the number of children aged under 15 resident in Scotland and Great Britain in mid-1992.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes will be made in the income support

claim form B1 in the light of the comments made by the Social Security Commissioner in decision No. CIS/663/19[illegible]

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 1 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what changes will be made in the Income Support claim form B1 in light of the comments made by the Social Security Commissioner in decision No. CIS/663/1992.

The Benefits Agency is currently reviewing the wording on the Income Support claim form B1 and other Income Support claim forms in light of the Commissioner's decision No. CIS/663/1992.

Income Support claim forms are currently reviewed every 6 months and where necessary revised versions are issued. Any change required as a result of the Commissioner's decision will be incorporated into the current review. The amended forms resulting from this review will be available for use by customers from April 1994.

The Benefits Agency is committed to improving customer services and, therefore, welcomes any suggestions on how it can improve upon its forms.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Lone Parents

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the estimated numbers of lone parents in the United Kingdom in 1963, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 1992 or the nearest years to these for which figures are available, distinguishing where possible between lone fathers and lone mothers and between *(a)* widowed, *(b)* divorced or separated and *(c)* never married lone parents; and what were the numbers and percentages of lone parents in each year who were dependent on (i) supplementary benefit or income support or (ii) family income supplement or family credit.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the tables. The figures given are for Great Britain as UK figures for the total number of lone parents are unavailable. The first year for which data is available is 1971; figures for the marital status of lone fathers are unavailable.

000s	*Lone mothers*				*Lone mothers*	*Lone fathers*	*Total*
	Single	*Separated*	*Divorced*	*Widowed*			
1971	90	170	120	120	500	70	570
1980	140	190	300	140	770	100	870
1990	395	235	415	75	1,120	110	1,230
1991	430	240	420	80	1,170	100	1,270

Note:
1971-1990 figures are taken from the General Household Survey.
1991 figures are provisional based on a combination of GHS and census data.
The figures may not sum due to rounding.

	Per cent. on IS/SB	*Per cent. on FC/FIS*	*Number on IS/SB (000s)*	*Number on FC/FIS (000s)*
1971	43	3	246	15
1980	39	6	336	50
1990	66	10	812	122
1991	70	10	895	132
1992	N/A	N/A	985	162

Note:
All data refer to May in each year apart from FIS in 1971 which refers to August. N/A=not available.

Child Support Agency

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances an attachment of earnings order for the collection of child maintenance by the Child Support Agency can be served on an organisation which provides a training programme funded by the European social fund requiring the organisation to make deductions from either *(a)* a training allowance paid to the trainee or *(b)* a wage paid to the trainee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: A deduction from earnings order is made where the Secretary of State decides this is needed to secure the payment of child support maintenance by a liable person; it is an instruction to that person's employer to make deductions from earnings and to pay the amount direct to the Secretary of State. Earnings in this context include wages or salary, from whatever source, but do not include training allowances.

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what ways a full-time training allowance paid to a person participating in European social fund training course is taken into account by the Child Support Agency in assessing maintenance payments when the allowance is *(a)* paid to the parent with care or *(b)* paid to the absent parent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The treatment of training allowances in the assessment of maintenance by the Child Support Agency does not depend on the source from which they are funded. Allowances under the youth training scheme are ignored. Other training allowances, net of additions such as those for travel or being away from home, are treated as part of the parent's income. These arrangements apply equally to parents with care and absent parents.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to instruct the Child Support Agency to ensure that maintenance payments are phased in over a reasonable period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: There are existing provisions for phasing in child support maintenance assessments. These provisions apply where an absent parent with a court order or written maintenance agreement has a second family and a new

liability of less than £60. In these circumstances the amount of any increase will be limited to £20 for the first 12 months.

Benefit Statistics

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people and what percentages of the population, showing families with children, separately, were dependent on national assistance, supplementary benefit and income support in 1963, 1969, 1979, 1989 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not available for 1963 and 1969. The latest year for which figures are available is 1992.

Information for 1979, 1989 and 1992 is in the tables.

Beneficiaries as a percentage of population

1979	*Per cent.*
Couples with dependants	1·3
Couples without dependants	1·5
Single with dependants	1·6
Single without dependants	3·6
Total	8

Beneficiaries as a percentage of population

1989	*Per cent.*
Couples with dependants	2·8
Couples without dependants	1·3
Single with dependants	3·7
Single without dependants	4·8
Total	12·6

Beneficiaries as a percentage of population

1992	*Per cent.*
Couples with dependants	3·8
Couples without dependants	1·4
Single with dependants	4·8
Single without dependants	5·7
Total	15·7

Notes:

1. *Source:* Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Statistical Annual Enquiries 1979-1989-1992, Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys. Population Estimates Unit.
2. Percentages are correct to one decimal place and are based on beneficiaries as a proportion of the population.
3. A dependent is aged under 19 living in the parental home.
4. For Income Support, temporary separated have been included in couples and therefore the partner may not be a beneficiary.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update each part of the answer given to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) of 15 December 1989, *Official Report*, column 855, showing the distribution of child benefit expenditure according to *(a)* the gross income bands, *(b)* the equivalised gross income bands and *(c)* the equivalised net income bands of recipient families using (i) each band of £5,000 up to £25,000 and (ii) over £25,000.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

Estimates are given for the combined years of 1990 and 1991. The figures relating to the distribution of gross and net income are calculated on the basis of sample survey data which are subject to normal sampling and response variations. The income levels are based on current weekly family income scaled up to an annual equivalent and may not therefore accurately reflect true annual income, which cannot be reliably measured from the Family Expenditure Surveys.

Distribution of Child Benefit Expenditure by Annual Income Bands

Income Bands £	*No. of children (000's)*	*CHB expenditure (£ millions)*
(a) Gross Income		
Under 5,000	730	300
5-10,000	2,640	1,030
10-15,000	2,310	890
15-20,000	2,290	900
20-25,000	1,750	690
25,000 and above	2,600	1,040
TOTAL	12,320	4,860
(b) Equivalised Gross Income		
Under 5,000	1,460	560
5-10,000	3,920	1,530
10-15,000	3,210	1,250
15-20,000	1,760	710
20-25,000	900	360
25,000 and above	1,070	450
TOTAL	12,320	4,860
(c) Equivalised Net Income		
Under 5,000	2,040	780
5-10,000	5,440	2,120
10-15,000	2,940	1,170
15-20,000	1,080	440
20-25,000	390	160
25,000 and above	440	190
TOTAL	12,320	4,860

Notes:

1. Estimates do not all sum due to rounding.
2. Estimates are taken from the 1990 and 1991 FES. The second quarter of 1991 data is omitted due to data deficiencies related to the late receipt of revised community charge bills. The reply is based on data used for the "Households Above Average Income" (HBAI) publication. As a result the income and expenditure figures are those recorded at the time of the survey and unlike the previous answer no attempt has been made to project these forward.
3. Gross income is the family's total income from all sources including benefits before housing costs.
4. Equivalence scales are calculated giving a married couple a value of 1·00—the method used in the "HBAI" publication.

Unemployment Benefit

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of unemployed people over a full operational year who would lose unemployment benefit if the length of entitlement were reduced from one year to six months; how many of them would be male or female; how many of those men and women would then be eligible for income support; what the net saving to the Exchequer would be; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: An estimated total of 240,000 unemployed people at any one point in an operational year would lose unemployment benefit if the length of entitlement were reduced from one year to six months. Of the 170,000 men, 120,000 would be eligible for income support. Of the 70,000 women, 30,000 would be eligible for income

support. Caseloads over a full year are not available. The full year net saving to the Exchequer in 1993-94 would be about £210 million.

All figures are based on an assumption of 2·8 million unemployed and the durational distribution of 1993-94. Rates of benefit are also at 1993-94 levels.

Payment Recovery

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the value of payment recovery, resulting from awards of compensation and other similar moneys to claimants, for each year from 1988.

Mr. Scott: The provision of statistical data concerning the amount of monies recovered under the compensation recovery scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 1 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency I am responsible for answering questions on relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking what was the value of payment recovery, resulting from awards of compensation and other similar monies to claiments, for each year from 1988.

Under the Compensation Recovery provisions, only benefits payable from 1 January 1989 are recoverable. The amounts recovered since that date are as follows:

Period	*Amount recovered £ million*
3 September 1990 to 31 March 1991	3·7
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	25·3
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	51·3
1 April 1993 to 31 September 1993 (first half of current financial year)	34·4

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Family Credit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of eligible households in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland which do not claim family credit; what means are used to improve the take-up rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: There have been family credit (FC) advertising campaigns every year since 1989 which have stimulated claims and increased awareness. As a result, the number of people receiving FC has increased from 280,000 in 1989 to around half a million now. The 1993 campaign has involved a major "Back to work" initiative aimed at the unemployed, with FC advertising on television and in the press playing an important part. In addition, the FC helpline was launched in April this year, fulfilling our manifesto pledge. It now receives over 30,000 calls a week.

An important aspect of FC awareness is the personalised message in the child benefit order book (or notification of ACT payment), which tells the family concerned how much earnings they can have and still be eligible for FC. We have also set special fast track procedures for people just starting work which enables the vast majority of urgent claims to FC to be cleared, and payment issued, within one week. And from October 1993, FC awards of £4 a week or less have been paid as a lump sum at the start of the award period. This provides one-off payments of up to £104, encouraging more people to claim and helping with back to work expenses.

The administration of family credit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with details of the number of FC recipients in Inverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 1 December 1993:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to write to you with details of Family Credit recipients in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland.

I should explain that take-up figures for Family Credit (FC) are not available on a regional basis. However, the latest Policy Study Institute figures (1991) for the take-up of FC for Great Britain, estimate that 71 per cent. of available benefit was claimed.

For your information, I have provided figures to show how many FC recipients there are in Inverclyde, Strathclyde and Scotland as a whole. The figures represent the number of recipients as at 29 October 1993 and are as follows:

	Numbers
Inverclyde	1,902
Strathclyde	24,617
Scotland	58,971

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Cold Weather Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security where is the weather station which provides the recordings to enable cold weather payments to be made to citizens resident in Inverclyde; what proposals he has to change the location of the weather station in relation to Inverclyde; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the cold weather payments scheme is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 1 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking where is the weather station which provides the recordings to enable cold weather payments to be made to citizens resident in Inverclyde; what proposals he has to change the location of the weather station in relation to Inverclyde.

The weather station which provides the information used to determine Cold Weather Payments in Inverclyde is Glasgow Airport. There are no proposals to use another weather station for the Inverclyde area.

I home that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Benefits Agency

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled persons are employed on *(a)* a full-time basis and *(b)* part-time in Benefits Agency local

offices in (i) Strathclyde, (ii) Scotland and (iii) elsewhere in Great Britain; what proportion of the staff these employees represent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: The responsibility for Benefits Agency staff is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 1 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am, therefore, replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many disabled persons are employed on (a) a full-time basis and (b) part-time in Benefits Agency local offices in (i) Strathclyde, (ii) Scotland and (iii) elsewhere in Great Britain; and what proportion of the staff these employees represent.

Attached at Annex A are the figures requested. I should explain that the figures quoted for disabled staff only relate to those who are registered as disabled. Information is not available for disabled staff who are not registered.

I have attached at Annex B a list of the Agency's local offices which have been included in the figures for Strathclyde.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Breakdown of Registered Disabled staff in the Benefits Agency

	Full-time		*Part-time*	
	Number of RD staff	*RD staff as percentage of all staff*	*Number of RD staff*	*RD staff as percentage of all staff*
Strathclyde	66	1·72	8	1·28
Scotland	109	1·94	8	0·88
England and Wales	1,069	1·72	89	0·87

Benefits agency local offices in Strathclyde

Glasgow City
Glasgow (Cranstonhill)
Glasgow Maryhill
Special Hardship Claims Unit
Transitional Protection Unit
Glasgow Shettleston
Glasgow Bridgeton
Glasgow Provan
Glasgow Laurieston
East Kilbride
Glasgow Rutherglen
Glasgow South West
Glasgow Craigton
Glasgow Anniesland
Glasgow Partick
Renfrew
Glasgow Springburn
Glasgow (Cumbernauld)
Greenock
Port Glasgow
Motherwell
Hamilton
Lanark
Shotts
Wishaw
Coatbridge
Airdrie
Belshill
Irvine
Kilmarnock
Clydebank
Dumbarton
Ayr
Cumnock

Student Incomes

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many students in 1992-93 on further education courses whose parents are on income support, lost the additional allowance and child benefit on achieving their 19th birthday part way through a course; and how many such students failed to complete their studies.

Mr. Burt: This information is not available.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 26 October (ref 6/3644/43) and to his letter of 25 October (ref 6/3644/55) and the two letters of 1 November concerning constituents; and if he will give the reason for the delay in answering and why no acknowledgments were sent for the last two letters.

Mr. Burt: I have now sent replies to the hon. Member's letters. Increased levels of correspondence on child support have meant that replies are in some instances taking longer than usual. The temporary lapse in the issue of acknowledgment cards resulted from a computer error.

WALES

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what powers training and enterprise councils have to switch their allocation of funds between various parts of their budgets; to what extent each TEC in Wales transferred funds from the budgets they were allocated for both youth training and employment training in 1992-93; for what purposes the funds were subsequently allocated; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The operating agreement between the Welsh Office and TECs provides that a TEC may increase or decrease its payment ceiling for youth training or training credits, training for work—which replaced employment training and employment action—compacts, education business partnerships and business and enterprise support by up to a maximum of 5 per cent. of the payment ceiling for each of the initial budgets agreed by the Secretary of State and set out in the business plan, provided that the payment ceiling for the sum of those budgets set out in the business plan shall not be exceeded. Such flexibility enables TECs to respond to local needs that develop in-year.

During the 1992-93 financial year, six of the seven TECs in Wales used this facility to transfer funds from

youth training into employment training, employment action and business and enterprise support budgets. Details are shown in the table.

Switches from youth training

TEC	Amount (£)	Additional provision purchased
Gwent	594,226	Employment Training
Mid Glamorgan	702,761	Employment Training
North West Wales	241,959	Employment Training
Powys	140,074	Employment Training
South Glamorgan	68,850	Business and Enterprise Support
West Wales	724,424	Employment Training
		Employment Action
		Business and Enterprise Support

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the outturn expenditure given to each TEC in Wales in 1992-93 at 1993-94 prices; and what is the budget for each TEC in 1993-94 in total and broken down in the same way as given in the answer from the Secretary of State for Employment to the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), of 18 February 1993, *Official Report*, column *335-38*.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will write to the hon. Lady and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Redwood: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Training Schemes

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people were participating in *(a)* training for work (employment training/employment action), *(b)* community action, *(c)* learning for work, *(d)* the business start-up allowance and *(e)* youth training in each month since March; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested on the numbers participating in the respective training schemes is provided in the table for the first five four-weekly periods of 1993-94.

Figures for learning for work figures are not available for these periods as it did not start until September 1993. Community action is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Numbers in training in Wales

	Period ending				
	25 April 1993	*23 May 1993*	*20 June 1993*	*18 July 1993*	*15 August 1993*
Youth Training	13,404	12,947	12,619	12,770	12,530
Training Credits	1,468	1,513	1,591	1,867	2,009
Training for Work	11,821	10,831	10,191	9,155	9,124
Business Start-up	2,015	1,919	1,954	2,002	1,955
Learning for Work[1]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] This spring budget announced programme did not start until September 1993.

Wind Power

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent communications he has received from the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales on wind power development in the Principality.

Mr. Redwood: The Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales—CPRW—wrote to me on 22 November setting out its new statement of policy on wind power stations in Wales. The matter was also raised at a meeting I had with it on 23 November 1993.

Energy Policy

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on energy policy in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: As in the rest of the United Kingdom, the aim of the Government's energy policy in Wales is to ensure secure, diverse and sustainable supplies of energy in the forms that people and businesses want, and at competitive prices.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to establish an energy policy advisory panel for Wales; and what discussions he has had with the President of the Board of Trade over energy provision in the Principality.

Mr. Redwood: I am satisfied that the Energy Advisory Panel containing representation from Welsh industry, recently set up by my colleague the Minister for Energy to advise the Government on the preparation of an annual energy Report, will cover Welsh interests. I am in frequent contact with the President of the Board of Trade about energy matters in Wales.

Weil's Disease

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by regional health board for the last five years, and the current year to date, the number of people who have been infected by Weil's disease.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Notifications in Wales of leptospirosis—Weil's disease—for each of the last five years and the current year to date are shown in the table:

Wales	*Number*
1988	3
1989	0
1990	1
1991	1
1992[1]	1
1993[1]	[2]2

[1] Provisional.
[2] To week ending 12 November.
Source: OPCS communicable disease statistics (Series MB2) Registrar General's weekly return.

Home Insulation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to encourage householders in Wales to install solid wall insulation; what grants are available to assist in such installation; and if he will estimate the amount of energy that could be saved by a major insulation programme on the Welsh housing stock.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There are no grants for solid wall insulation.

A number of other, more cost-effective techniques, such as loft insulation and draught stripping have been actively promoted through campaigns such as the home energy efficiency scheme and "Helping the Earth begins at Home".

These schemes are being promoted because of the obvious advantages for energy savings and reduced expenditure while no specific estimate is available of the amount of energy that could be saved by a programme of insulation of the Welsh housing stock.

Waste-to-Energy Plants

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of energy used in Wales is provided by waste-to-energy incineration plants; and what applications for such plants he is currently considering.

Mr. Redwood: The amount of energy used in Wales provided by waste-to-energy incineration plants is not readily available.

My colleague the Minister for Energy will be responsible for considering applications for such plants under the third order of the non-fossil fuel obligation which is due next year.

Non-elective Surgery

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average waiting time for non-elective surgery at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor, Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Patients who require non-elective or emergency surgery do not have to join a waiting list as they are admitted to hospital immediately.

Wales Tourist Board

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each grant over £25,000 in value made by his Department and the Wales tourist board to tourism-related projects in the principality since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not readily available and cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost. However, since 1 April 1986 to date, the Wales tourist board has provided grant over £25,000 to 260 separate projects.

From 1987, the board's annual report lists all grant support over £10,000.

All Projects over £25,000 from 1 April 1986 to date

Project Name	*Assistance* £
Welsh Mountain Zoo	77,100
Penhow Castle, nr Newport	99,063
Menai Fron Hotel, Bangor	44,000
Ael Y Bryn Hotel	40,000
Castell Heights Golf Club	26,050
Bryn Meadow Golf Club, Hengoed	140,000
Cwrt Bleddyn Hotel, nr Usk	77,710
Saracen's Head Hotel	100,000
North Gower Hotel, Gower	70,000
Coed Y Mwstwr Hotel, Coychurch	123,000
Holyhead Exchange, Holyhead	41,000
Mostyn Hotel, Llandrindod Wells	40,000
Royal Pier, Aberystwyth	37,800
Picton Sea Eagle, Swansea	70,000
Oakwood Adventure Centre	100,000
Imperial Hotel, Llandudno	37,500
Bear Hotel, Crickhowell	106,000
Castle Hotel, Neath	90,000
Ector Centre, Llangollen	28,000
Loggerheads Country Park	30,000
Little Chef Lodge, Sarn Park	117,435
Llyn Brenig Visitor Centre	50,000
Bodelwyddan Castle, Bodelwyddan	139,949
Grand Theatre, Llandudno	43,475
Llanfair PG Railway Station	164,000
Castle Hotel, Llandovery	30,000
Seiont Manor, Llanrug	75,000
Trecco Bay Park, Porthcawl	50,000
Ski Llandudno, Great Orme	100,000
Butlins Holiday Camp, Pwllheli	200,000
Port Dinorwic Yacht Harbour	30,000
Ynys Hywel Countryside Centre	55,251
Lake Vyrnwy, nr Oswestry	90,200
Tywyn Leisure Centre, Tywyn	36,000
Hotel Metropole, Llandrindod	55,000
Lower Treginnis Farm, St. Davids	54,000
Beaumaris Experience	32,500
Dwyfor Leisure Centre	115,000
Carreg Bran Country Hotel	80,000
Youth Hostels Association	110,330
Maerdy Hotel, Pencoed	37,000
Caernarfon Air Museum	44,000
Dyffryn Seaside Estate	32,700
Rossett Hall Hotel, Clwyd	42,977
Cwrt Bleddyn Hotel, Llangybi	100.000
Y Gorlan Hotel, Tywyn	32,500
Presthaven Sands Haven Holiday	60,000
Penmachno Woollen Mill	26,224
Bryn Howel Hotel, Llangollen	54,700
Millmoor Farm Cottages	40,000
Conwy Touring Car Park	36,500
Fairbourne Hotel, Gwynedd	25,994
Anglesey Sea Zoo, Brynsiencyn	70,500
Machynlleth Leisure Centre	45,000
Waterloo Hotel, Betws y Coed	200,000
West Arms Hotel, Llanarmon DC	51,000
Wild Pheasant Hotel, Llangollen	200,000
Cambrian Cruisers, Pencelli	36,000
White Hart Inn, Llandeilo	61,000
Welshpool Heritage Centre	58,820
Knighton Hotel, Knighton	95,000
Jane Hodge Holiday Centre	200,000
Caeau Farm Hope, nr Wrexham	60,000
Riverside Caravan Park	142,800
Bodnant Gardens, Glan Conwy	37,500
Roman Lodge Inn, Caerleon	65,000
East Trewent Farm, Freshwater East	30,000
Red Lion Inn, Tredegar	61,377
Parkway Hotel, Cwmbran	80,000
Pembroke Castle, Pond	75,780
Outward Bound (Wales) Aberdyfi	200,000
Rhondda Heritage Park	50,000
Barmouth Leisure Centre	90,000
Crewe-Holyhead Steam Train	30,000
Trearddur Holiday Bungalows	25,665
Rossett Hall Hotel, Wrexham	200,000
Clyne Farm Activity Centre	60,000
East Nolton Riding Stables	30,000
Tir Prince Harness Racing	159,750
Richard Wilson Art Centre	94,000

Project Name	Assistance £
Royal Victoria Hotel, Llanberis	176,000
Ty Mawr Holiday Park, Towyn	35,000
Gyro Tower Promenade, Rhyl	60,000
Anglesey School Sea Canoeing	83,000
Welcome Cafe, Pendine	30,000
Pendine Holiday Village	100,000
Ffynnon Glas Hotel, Rhymney	33,100
Tregynon Farm, Fishguard	43,650
Greenhill Hotel, Caerphilly	33,000
Piggery Pottery, Llanberis	32,500
Festiniog Railway, Porthmadog	80,000
Llanerchindda Farm, Llandovery	42,000
Plough Inn, Rhosmaen	80,000
David Bryant Bowls Centre	100,000
Colliers Arms, Pontardawe	51,300
Old Ship's Bell, Moelfre	27,693
Parkway Hotel, Cwmbran	101,200
Oakwood Leisure Park	100,000
Ammon Hotel, Glanamman	64,850
Dinorwic Power Station	198,553
North Wales Tennis Centre	50,000
Bwlch Mawr Caravan Park	26,000
Park Hotel, Ebbw Vale	80,000
Big Pit Blaenavon	180,000
Bell Inn, Llanyre Llandrindod	33,000
Pen y Fan Caravan and Leisure	67,000
Fontygary Caravan Park	200,000
Cwmdu Llandeilo	85,970
Pwllheli Holiday World	265,792
Kinsale Hall, nr Holywell	150,000
Indoor Bowling Centre	82,623
St. Davids Hotel, Ewloe Clwyd	200,000
Crazy Golf Barry Island	44,812
Fullmoon Inn, Aberaman	36,000
Hotel Maes y Neuadd Talsarnau	64,000
Ffynnon Glas Hotel, Rhymney	26,680
Llechwen Hall, Llanfabon	51,043
Copthorne Hotel, Cardiff	200,000
Aberafon Hotel, Aberafon	85,000
Royal Lion Hotel, Tenby	105,000
Holiday Wales, Swansea	44,000
Rhyl Theatre, Rhyl	200,000
Chepstow Education Centre	60,317
North Wales Shire Horse Centre	35,000
Lloyd George Museum	50,000
Hafod Arms Hotel, Devils Bridge	80,000
Welshpool Tourism and Leisure	60,000
Plas Penmaenucha Hotel	132,000
Llangollen Cark Park and Walks	45,000
Llangollen Eisteddfod Field	300,000
Kinmel Manor Hotel, Abergele	40,000
Llangollen Railway	48,000
Clarence House Hotel, Tenby	27,500
Tic Barry Island	59,261
Rhondda Heritage Park	150,000
Nant Mill Phase I	32,318
Min y Mor Hotel, Barmouth	26,000
Centre for Alt. Technology	150,000
Lord Nelson Hotel	28,000
Riverside Hotel, Monmouth	65,702
Pwll Cam Harbour Enhancement	79,730
Atlantic Hotel, Tenby	81,550
Pedestrianisation St. Mary St.	38,190
Cefn Lea Christian Holiday	70,000
Llanerch Vineyard, Hensol	30,000
Aleppo Merchant Inn, Carno	81,250
Lake Vyrnwy Hotel	200,000
Scimitar Hotel, Holyhead	60,000
Belmont Hotel, Llandudno	140,000
Bryn Meadows Golf Club	100,000
Oakwood Park, Narberth	105,000
Barry Island Pleasure Park	49,000
Glen yr Afon House Hotel, Usk	112,500
Countryman Inn, Bedwellty	100,000
Sands Hotel, Prestatyn	175,000
Tic Brecon	47,460
Trearddur Bay Hotel, Holyhead	91,000

Project Name	Assistance £
Tenby Town Scheme	33,125
Aberdulais Falls, Neath	50,000
St. Mary's Golf Club, Pencoed	68,000
Bala Leisure Centre	34,750
Underground Car Park, Rhyl	200,000
Hotel Mariners, Haverfordwest	46,415
Canolfan Ozanam, Llanllyfni	60,000
Lodge Hotel, Tal-y-Bont	35,000
Plas Glyn y Weddw, Pwllheli	33,000
Sea Wales Centre, Rhyl	200,000
Mason Arms, Blackwood	32,250
Great Orme Tramway, Llandudno	50,000
Portmeirion Hotel	50,000
Conwy Leisure, Conwy	43,450
Traeth Ganol Guest House	39,500
Greenhills Hotel, St. Florence	30,000
Llandrindod Wells Bowling Club	40,000
Minera Clywedog Valley	41,250
Rebleen Guest House, Tenby	39,407
Winkups Camp Ltd.	50,000
Ten Pin Bowling, Glanllyn	98,200
Tredegar Arms, Merthyr Tydfil	32,000
Southfield Car Park, Monmouth	30,500
Marine Holiday Park, Rhyl	158,000
Riverside Caravan Park, Swansea	31,000
Chepstow Castle Car Park, TIC	94,834
Groundwork, Cheshire	37,453
Plas y Bryniau, Llanon	43,323
Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar	36,250
Cwmtwrch Farm, Nantgaredig	39,100
Noble Court Caravan Park	50,000
Alyn Waters Country Park	42,500
Grand Pavilion, Llandrindod	125,000
Great House, Laleston	47,550
Quarry Tours, Blaen Ffestiniog	34,360
Ski Lodge, Llangrannog	31,080
Cilwych Country Activities	50,300
Village Inn, Trehafod	27,737
Gaer Cottages, Cribyn	27,000
Rose and Crown, Eglwysilan	30,500
Tourism South Wales, Swansea	47,077
Tenby Town Scheme Phase III	30,000
Atlantic Hotel, Tenby	118,450
Conwy Town Scheme	30,000
Bron y Wendon Touring Park	55,000
Groundwork Trust	44,218
Seion Chapel Art Gallery	40,000
Three Wells Farm, Howey	70,000
Masons Arms, Bryncethin	27,000
Quasar Barry Island	31,215
Dan yr Ogof Showcaves	30,000
Touchwood Centre, Felinheli	49,800
Marina Services Building	45,000
Amelia Trust Farm	27,225
Court Hotel, Lamphey	200,000
Wern Goch Caravan Park	34,500
Minera Phase II	32,785
Bryn Morfydd Hotel, Denbigh	32,500
North Wales Theatre	200,000
Empire Hotel, Llandudno	50,000
Hand Hotel, Chirk Clwyd	44,234
Shell Island	37,500
Imperial Hotel, Llandudno	50,000
Parc Cwm Darren, Hengoed	30,875
Ship Inn	41,000
Cambrian Line Speed	55,519
Palins Holiday Park	50,000
Edwards Leisure Park, Towyn	29,517
Conwy RSPB Visitor Centre	79,650
Bodysgallen Hall	200,000
Urdd Gobaith Cymru	160,000
Cliffe North Hotel, Tenby	89,354
Hotel Metropole	25,550
Black Lion Hotel, Cardigan	60,000
Ystumgwern Hall Farm	36,961
Tenby Town Scheme	36,875
Glan Aber, Hotel	45,558

Project Name	Assistance £
Pentre Mawr Caravan Park	60,000
Heronston Hotel, Bridgend	50,000
Fourcroft Hotel, Tenby	65,500
Dryslwyn Fawr Llanarthne	30,500
Bear Hotel, Crickhowell	50,000
Lake Country House	50,000
Tic Cardiff	26,525
Wrexham Maelor Town Scheme	28,114
Cambria Caravan Park	29,676
Middle Sontley Farm, Wrexham	30,000
Pwllheli Promenade	40,000
Bodelwyddan Castle	200,000
Chatsworth House Hotel	48,154
Fishguard Bay Hotel, Goodwick	30,000
Parc Coed-Machen Farm, Cardiff	40,261
Dinefwr Park	52,337
Oakfield Caravan Park	50,000
Bear Hotel, Cowbridge	50,000
Passenger Facility	100,000
Lancaster Square, Conwy	34,000
National Techniquest	200,000
Green Meadow Community Farm	100,000
National Wildlife Centre	80,000
The Stackpole Centre Homefarm	55,241
Conwy Town Scheme	35,000
The King Arthur Hotel	29,000
Number of projects	260

Arts Centre, Llandudno

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the annual running costs of the new North Wales theatre and arts centre at Llandudno is to be met by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: None.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what grants his Department has given towards the building of the new North Wales theatre and arts centre at Llandudno; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No grant has been given. Aberconwy borough council was awarded supplementary credit approval of £2 million in 1992-93 towards the capital cost of this project.

Community Care Legislation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to amend the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 in its application to Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I shall be considering whether it will be necessary to amend the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 in order to facilitate the merger of health authorities with family health services authorities. Other than this, I have no plans to propose amendments to the 1990 Act.

Appointments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the names of all persons appointed by him and the salaries paid to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is contained in "Public Bodies: Appointments made by the Secretary of State for Wales", available in the Library of the House.

Quangos

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total annual cost of the quangos in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This information is shown in the annual publication "Public Bodies", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Local Authority Elections

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date in May 1994 elections to existing district councils will take place in Wales; when the last such elections took place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Elections to the four district councils in Wales which have elections by thirds will take place on Thursday 5 May 1994. The last such elections took place in May 1992. The Local Government (Wales) Bill will cancel the elections for all district councils which are due to be held in May 1995.

Health Service, Pembrokeshire

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the review by Mr. Brian Jones, the chief executive of Clywd health authority and Mr. David Galley of the Macleod hospital trust, into the health service in Pembrokeshire; and to what extent the costs of that review are being borne by the Welsh Office.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer of 23 November 1993, *Official Report*, column 22.

EDUCATION

Independent Schools

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is his policy on providing additional funding to independent schools seeking to attain grant-maintained status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: An independent school cannot be established as a grant-maintained school without first closing. Any funding available to a new GM school could be used only for the purposes of that school. The Secretary of State's approval of applications to establish new GM schools will depend on a variety of factors, including evidence of need for places in the area.

Grant-maintained Schools (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Hoon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will identify all the specific purpose grants given to each grant-maintained school in Nottinghamshire for each financial year since 1991-92, including the current year; and if he will give the purpose of each grant.

Mr. Robin Squire: The following self-governing schools in Nottinghamshire have received special purpose grants (SPGs):

School	Amount paid (£) for each financial year 1992-93	1993-94
Greenwood Dale School, Nottingham		
SPG (Transitional)	100	47,540
SPG (Development)	—	24,098
SPG (VAT)	—	891
SPG (Premises)	—	4,500
Ravensdale Grant Maintained Middle School, Mansfield		
SPG (Transitional)	40,890	—
SPG (Development)	8,999	13,940
SPG (Restructuring)	6,763	—
SPG (VAT)	3,009	4,531
SPG (Premises)	—	2,438
The George Spencer School, Stapleford		
SPG (Transitional)	34,410	23,670
SPG (Development)	—	39,780
SPG (Restructuring)	—	13,262
SPG (VAT)	—	12,242
SPG (Premises)	—	4,500

The purpose of each of the SPGs is as follows:

Special Purpose Grant (Transitional)
Available to help with the costs incurred as a result of the school's acquisition of self-governing status.

Special Purpose Grant (Development)
Available to fund management training, staff development and implementation of the national curriculum.

Special Purpose Grant (Restructuring)
Available to help with essential staff restructuring which involves costs arising from premature retirement, redundancy or voluntary severance of teaching staff.

Special Purpose Grant (VAT)
Compensates for the payment of VAT on supplies and services, which self-governing schools may not claim back.

Special Purpose Grant (Premises)
Assists self-governing schools with the additional cost of school premises insurance.

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Forth: In the financial year 1992-93, the Government car service for Ministers cost the Department £217,197·48. Five vehicles were involved for the majority of the year. In addition, this figure includes eight days' use of one further vehicle for the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for sport, whose portfolio fell within the remit of the Department for Education until 8 April 1992.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fish Conservation

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, if she will make it her policy to take steps to suspend the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1993, and replace it with the proposals put forward by the National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: *(pursuant to his reply 25 November 1993 c.117):* The High Court has now delivered its judgment on the application for judicial review by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. The court noted that there is total agreement between the applicants and the Government that there is a need to prevent overfishing of certain stocks of sea fish by the United Kingdom fleet. Nevertheless, it decided to refer the matter to the European Court of Justice. We are now urgently considering the implications of the judgment for days at sea and related policies, including decommissioning.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Rechar II

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether it is his Department's policy to support the Rechar II initiative proposed by the European Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The future of European structural funds community initiatives has yet to be discussed by the Council of Ministers in Brussels.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what approval or guidance British Nuclear Fuels plc has been given regarding a delay of 50 years in the decommissioning of THORP following the plant's closure; and what additional financial provision would be required if the plant were to be decommissioned immediately following closure.

Mr. Eggar: The decommissioning of a nuclear facility is a matter for the operators, taking account of the requirements of the regulatory authorities.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal approaches have been made to Her Majesty's Government, from utilities with a contract with British Nuclear Fuels plc for the use of THORP, to cancel or vary the contract or its terms; and what steps have been taken to alert other departments.

Mr. Eggar: None.

Public Appointments

Dr. Marek: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will place in the Library details of all public appointments made by him to public bodies which are concerned exclusively with Wales, in the same form as the Secretary of State for Wales's list dated 1 September.

Mr. Eggar: The details of all public appointments made by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade to the public bodies which are concerned exclusively with Wales will be placed in the Library of the House.

Company Registration

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the current requirements of companies to be registered; with whom they must register; and how many companies are so registered.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Most Great Britain companies are formed and registered under the Companies Act 1985. They are registered by the Registrar of Companies either in England and Wales or in Scotland

Under the Act there are a number of requirements to be met before a company is registered. The following documents must be delivered to the Registrar:—

the company's memorandum and articles;

particulars of its directors, secretary and intended registered office;

a statutory declaration that all the requirments of the Act in respect of registration have been complied with.

The Registrar may not register a company unless he is satisfied that all such requirements have been complied with, but he may accept the statutory declaration as sufficient evidence of this. He will then issue a certificate of incorporation.

At 31 March 1993 there were 1,136,400 registered companies in Great Britain, of which 175,800 were in liquidation, or in the course of being removed from the register.

Imported Coal

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the sources of imported house coal in 1993.

Mr. Eggar: Data on imported coal by sector are estimated and it is assumed that about a quarter of imported steam coal, other than coal for electricity generation, is used in the home. In the first nine months of 1993 the major sources of imported steam coal, which includes imports for use in power stations and industry as well as the domestic sector, were Australia, Colombia, Poland, Russia, South Africa, and the USA.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the quantity and cost of imported *(a)* industrial and *(b)* house coal in each year since 1990 and 1993 to date.

Mr. Eggar: The split of imported coal between sectors are estimated, the figures for industrial users and house coal are as follows:

	Industrial[1]		*House coal*[2]	
	Quantity thousand tonnes	*Value*[3] *£ million*	*Quantity thousand tonnes*	*Value*[3] *£ million*
1990	850	34	260	10
1991	1,600	57	500	17
1992	2,720	89	880	28
[4]1993	1,070	38	330	11

Source: HM Customs and Excise.

[1] Estimated as 10 per cent. of anthracite imports, plus 75 per cent. of steam coal imports other than coal for electricity generation.

[2] Estimated as 25 per cent. of steam coal imports other than coal for electricity generation.

[3] The value has been based on the average cost of the total steam coal and anthracite imports multiplied by the quantity.

[4] The 1993 figures also include some estimation for intra-EC trade based on information for extra-EC trade pending the availability of full monthly statistics for intra-EC trade from the Central Statistical Office.

European Regional Development Fund

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received concerning the restrictions on local authority capital spending in relation to ERDF funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Many local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales have written to me and to the Ministers responsible for local authority finance in England, Scotland and Wales. These Ministers have replied to such representations in view of their direct responsibility for the matter.

Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of publishing the 70,000 copies of "Working with Business: a code for enforcement agencies," referred to in his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *345;* and if he will list those 70 enforcement agencies which are aiming to publish their own code of practice by 1 January 1994.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The cost of publishing the 70,000 copies of "Working with Business: a code for enforcement agencies" was £8,296·03. All 70 agencies listed in the code agreed that they were aiming to publish their own codes of practice by 1 January 1994.

Regulations (Impact Assessment)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those topics he has so far identified where he believes current statutory Acts or regulations inhibit the operation of economic activity of benefit to the local community or nation stating in each case the relevant instrument, its date of introduction, or its predecessors, when it first came into effect and its general purpose.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: As part of the deregulation initiative, Government Departments are currently reviewing all legislation which impacts on business, considering whether the legislation remains necessary and, if so, whether it achieves its objective in a way which is proportionate and imposes the minimum burden on business. The reviews are scheduled to be completed by April 1994. In addition the Government have appointed eight task forces from business and the voluntary sector to make recommendations on priorities for amendment or repeal. These recommendations will be published in due course. The Deregulation Bill announced in the Gracious Speech will address changes which require primary legislation. Its contents will be published in the usual way when the Bill is introduced.

Brewery Industry

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that individual brewers are making it possible for the lessees to sell a guest beer.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The requirement to allow tenants to sell a guest beer is one of the provisions of the Beer Orders. Monitoring compliance with the Beer Orders is the responsibility of the Director General of Fair Trading. I have therefore written to him, asking that his office reply to your question as soon as possible.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will place in the Library the evidence available to his Department to show that the brewing companies have carried out their obligation under the Beer Orders *(a)* to free a certain percentage of public houses and *(b)* to allow a guest beer.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Monitoring compliance with the Beer Orders is the responsibility of the Director General of

Fair Trading (DGFT). Information which is supplied by the brewers to the OFT about the composition of their estates is commercially confidential. However, I have written to the DGFT, asking that his office write to you explaining the position as soon as possible.

EC Internal Market Council

Mr. Barnes: To ask the president of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Members for Gateshead, East (Ms Quinn) and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) of 24 November, *Official Report*, column 92, what was the voting record of member states on *(a)* the adoption of food additive common positions and *(b)* its common position on equipment for use in explosive atmospheres at the meeting of the European Community's Internal Market Council held on 11 November; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: On food additives, the framework directive and sweeteners common positions were adopted unanimously at the Internal Market Council on 11 November. The common position on colours was adopted by qualified majority with Netherlands and Luxembourg voting against and Germany and Denmark abstaining.

The common position on equipment for use in explosive atmospheres was agreed unanimously.

Coal Industry

Mr. Booth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the legislation governing rights of access to coal and other minerals in the light of the privatisation of the coal industry.

Mr. Eggar: At present, under the Opencast Coal Act 1958, British Coal has access to special procedures governing the compulsory acquisition of rights to explore for and work opencast coal, and related matters. These procedures are not available to other mineral industries. The Government do not regard it as satisfactory in the longer term for the coal industry to have access to special procedures which are not generally available. However, a period of transition is needed before an alternative regime is put in place.

Under the Coal Industry Bill published today, the provisions of the Opencast Coal Act 1958 will continue to be available to coal operators, within a modified framework offering improved safeguards for the interests of landowners, up to 31 December 1999 but not thereafter. After the end of this transitional period, the Government intend that the procedures for opencast coal should be unified with the general regime for all minerals contained in the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Act 1966 and 1974.

My Department will therefore be conducting a review of the general provisions contained in the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts to determine what amendment, revision or reform to the legislation is appropriate to provide an integrated regime for the next century. The review will have regard to the need to exploit the country's mineral resources including coal, to the perception that current procedures under the Mines (Working Facilities and Support) Acts are expensive and time consuming, and to the need to protect the rights of land owners.

Following initial consideration of the issues, I intend to publish a consultative document in due course. I invite those interested in submitting representations or evidence for the preparation of the consultative document to write to me by 31 January 1994.

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will announce the Government's proposals for British Coal pensions after privatisation.

Mr. Eggar: In September the Government published a consultation paper on proposals for British Coal pensions after privatisation. Comments have been received from the trustees of British Coal pension schemes, from the corporation, from industry unions and from over one thousand individuals.

Careful consideration has been given to all responses to the consultation paper. In the light of these responses, and taking full account of the recent recommendations of the Pension Law Review Committee, the Government have decided that:

Existing schemes

(i) all pensioners and deferred pensioners of the mineworkers pension scheme (MPS) and British Coal staff superannuation scheme (SSS) and all currently contributing members would be able to leave their past-service entitlements in the schemes at privatisation, if they so choose;

(ii) the MPS and SSS would be closed to new members at privatisation and the new private-sector owners of the industry would not participate in them;

(iii) the Coal Industry Bill would provide for both the MPS and SSS to be given a Government solvency guarantee that would ensure that pensions and deferred pensions are increased after privatisation in line with the retail price index (RPI) by reference to their level at privatisation;

(iv) beneficiaries would in addition be able to benefit from any fund surpluses through pension payment increases over and above RPI levels, but surpluses, and benefits from them, will not be subject to guarantee from the taxpayer;

(v) provision would be made for the beneficiaries and the Government, as guarantor, to receive equal shares of any distributable surplus;

(vi) in order to assist the management of the funds any share of surplus payable to the Government would only be receivable in equal installments over a 10-year period;

(vii) deficiency payments due under the guarantee would also be payable over 10 years;

(viii) existing obligations on British Coal to make 'additional contributions' in respect of early and enhanced pensions would be honoured in full by the Government;

(ix) there would be triennial valuations of the schemes, as at present, and if a valuation subsequent to a deficiency reveals a surplus, or vice versa, there should be an immediate settling of balances before further payments by or to Government are determined (including a safeguard to ensure that beneficiaries and Government have received equal shares of any unsustained surplus distribution);

(x) the Coal Industry Bill would provide for the rules of the MPS and SSS to be modified in order to give effect to the necessary changes;

(xi) the Bill would also safeguard the interests of the taxpayer, as ultimate guarantor, by providing for the Government to be able to secure that the trustees of the MPS and SSS have proper regard to the interest of the taxpayer in performing their fiduciary duties (the precise details of how this safeguard would operate in practice are still under discussion with the trustees and the Corporation and will be contained in Regulations and scheme documents which are yet to be published);

New industry-wide schemes

(xii) new pension schemes would be created for employees of British Coal and its subsidiaries who are transferred to employment in successor companies;

(xiii) the new schemes would follow on, separately, from the MPS and SSS and would be required by statutory regulations to provide the same package of benefits as the corresponding existing scheme;

(xiv) the Coal Industry Bill would provide protected person status for employees transferred to the new schemes and the schemes would contain measures regarding their maintenance, membership, use of surpluses and any eventual winding up;

(xv) the new schemes would operate on an industry-wide basis and the Coal Industry Bill would provide for all new employers of protected employees to participate in the schemes;

(xvi) continuing employees would be able to transfer their past-service entitlements to the new schemes if they so choose or they would alternatively be able to transfer them to another scheme operated by their new employer, depending on its terms, or to a personal pension scheme;

(xvii) the Coal Industry Bill would provide for the new Coal Authority to make pension provision for its employees, including any transferred from British Coal.

The Government believe that these proposals meet in full its commitment to protect MPS and SSS pensions. The proposals will provide security for pension entitlements earned from service with British Coal and will provide protection for pension entitlements from future service with successor companies. The Coal Industry Bill would provide the necessary statutory underpinning for all the safeguards proposed.

It is intended that drafts of the regulations giving statutory effect to the details of the new arrangements would be made available during Commons consideration of the Bill.

The consultation paper on British Coal pensions listed in an appendix a number of other pension schemes with which British Coal is involved. The Government will be assuming responsibility for the six unfunded pension arrangements listed in the appendix. From discussions with trustees and scheme representatives it appears that pension entitlements from all of the funded pension schemes listed in the appendix can be adequately safeguarded without direct Government involvement through guarantees or statutory protection. The Government are nevertheless taking a close interest in the future arrangements that are being proposed and will report to Parliament on them in due course.

Konver Programme

313. **Mr. Simon Burns** (Chelmsford): To ask the President of the Board of Trade, when he expects to announce his decisions on the bids for Konver funding by Essex county council and others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[pursuant to his reply 25 November 1993,* column *112]:* I am pleased to announce that grants totalling £15·6 million have been approved to 150 applicants under the United Kingdom's Konver programme, including grants of over £350,000 to Essex. There was keen competition for the grant available. The successful projects are of high quality. I expect them to bring real benefits to the areas which are dependent on defence spending.

I am placing a copy of the list of grants approved in the Library of the House.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

The Attorney-General: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

UDR Four

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Attorney-General what was the date of the Appeal Court hearing in Northern Ireland at which three of the UDR Four were released; what were the recommendations of the court about prosecutions of persons involved in the case; what action has been taken by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland; what matters remain upon which the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland has yet to make a decision; and when the expects such decisions to be taken.

The Attorney-General: The Court of Appeal for Northern Ireland delivered its judgment in the appeal of R *v.* Neil Fraser Latimer, James Irwin Hegan, Noel Richmond Bell and Alfred Winston Allen on 29 July 1992.

The court made no recommendations in respect of prosecutions. The court directed that its judgment be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland so that he could consider the bringing of prosecutions against officers who he considered had committed criminal offences in connection with the trial of the appellants.

On 5 August 1992, 10 February 1993 and 27 April 1993, the director issued interim directions to the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary requesting that further reports, information and witness statements be obtained. When these had been received, the director considered all the facts and information before him. In Northern Ireland the test for prosecution applied by the director is that criminal proceedings are instituted where he is satisfied that the evidence which can be adduced in court is sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of obtaining a conviction and that such proceedings are in the public interest.

The director concluded that the evidence in this case was sufficient to warrant prosecution of a number of individuals. Accordingly, on 26 July 1993, the director issued a direction to prosecute three serving and two former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for offences of perjury and doing acts with intent to pervert the course of public justice in connection with the trial of the appellants. The director further concluded that the evidence was insufficient to institute criminal proceedings in respect of any other police officers who had been the subject of report. There were a number of other matters in respect of which the director requested the Chief Constable to carry out inquiries. Additional papers have now been received from police and are presently being considered.

Subsequently, a solicitor acting on behalf of one of the persons in respect of whom prosecution had been directed, submitted a medical report. The director then arranged that this person be independently examined by a consultant physician and a further report obtained. When this report had been received and considered, the director concluded that the prosecution of that individual should not proceed. Accordingly, a direction of no prosecution was issued on 1 September 1993.

Roger Levitt

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General if he will investigate the conduct of the case against Roger Levitt.

The Attorney-General: I have investigated the conduct of the case against Mr. Levitt and I am satisfied that the prosecution by the Serious Fraud Office was fairly, properly and vigorously conducted.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Attorney-General if he will refer the case of Roger Levitt to the Court of Appeal.

The Attorney-General: Rulings of the trial judge in the course of the trial related to matters within his discretion and are not matters of law which can be referred to the Court of Appeal under section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972.

Sentencing is always a matter for the independent judiciary. The Attorney-General has power, under the Criminal Justice Act 1988, to refer unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal in respect of offences which are triable exclusively on indictment. Fraudulent trading is an offence triable either on indictment or summarily and therefore, under the present law, sentences imposed for it cannot be referred to the Court of Appeal.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 3 December 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration Appeals Office

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the establishment of the immigration appeals office in London and *(a)* in each of the past five years and *(b)* in the current year; what plans there are to increase the staff establishment and the number of adjudicators in (i) London and (ii) Leeds.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Staff establishment levels in past years at the immigration appellate authorities—IAA—are available only for the IAA as a whole and not for individual centres. The figures in each of the past five years were as follows:

	Numbers
1989-90	77
1990-91	94½
1991-92	97
1992-93	95½
1993-94	117

The number of staff allocated to the centre at Thanet house in London for the year 1993-94 is 63.

There are currently no plans to increase either the staff establishment or the number of adjudicators at either Thanet house in London or in Leeds, although these will be kept under review in light of the current and projected workloads.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the total number of appeals awaiting processing by the immigration appeals office in London; what is the average time taken between the receipt of papers from British overseas posts and the listing of appeals before adjudictors, in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Leeds: what action he is taking to expedite the hearing of appeals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: As of 31 October 1993 there were 19,074 appeals outstanding before the adjudicators within the IAA as a whole. As of 26 November 1993, there were 324 appeals which had been received at Thanet house in London and had not yet been processed.

Figures are not available for the average time taken between the receipt of papers from British overseas posts and the listing of appeals before adjudicators. However, upon receipt of the explanatory statement and notice of appeal from the post overseas, the IAA normally dispatches copies of the case papers to to the parties' representatives in the country within five days. The parties must then prepare the case for the hearing. The current average time between the IAA receiving a certificate of readiness from a party to the date of the hearing for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Leeds is as follows:

	Short appointment	*Long appointment*
(a)	12 weeks	13½ weeks
(b)	9 weeks	12 weeks

Where an earlier hearing date is available at a different IAA centre, appellants are offered a hearing at that centre.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are 45 files in the Lord Chancellor's Department—out of a total of 90,974 files—marked "not for NAO eyes". These refer to individual file parts. For each NAO study a number of divisions may be involved and each may possess a file with a number of parts.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

EDUCATION

Advertising

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much his Department spends annually on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising and *(c)* press advertising; and what were the corresponding figures for 1985 and 1979.

Mr. Forth: The latest estimate of expenditure on advertising in the current financial year and the corresponding figures for 1985-86 and 1979-80 are as follows:

	£000s 1993-94 (estimated)	*£000s 1985-86*	*£000s 1979-80*
Television advertising	0	0	0
Radio advertising	29·2	0	0
Press advertising	1,105·8	14·8	91·6

Press and Publicity Officers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Mr. Forth: The Department currently employs 27 permanent press and publicity officers. The comparable figures for 1985-86 and 1979-80 are 23 and 22.

Information Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he has incorporated the code of practice for information security management, published by the British Standards Institution, into relevant contracts with information technology suppliers.

Mr. Forth: The code of practice for information security management was developed by and established for use by commercial organisations and does not specifically address the requirements for the protection of official information. The security requirements for IT systems and services used by central Government Departments are stated in the Government's IT security policy document. The IT security policy is supported by use of the CCTA risk analysis and management method—CRAMM—and baseline security for IT systems—BSITS—risk analysis methods and by supporting advice and guidance published by the Government IT security authorities. These are regularly reviewed to ensure best practice, have been developed specifically for use within government and have been in operation for some time.

The Department for Education's IS security policy is in line with the Government's IT security policy and all major contracts with information technology suppliers follow the guidelines in Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—CCTA—model agreements.

Teachers (Dress)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what guidelines he plans to offer to teachers about their form of dress.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend expects teachers to set a good example to their pupils in everything they do. How best to achieve that is for local determination. He has no plans to issue national guidelines.

School Meals Service

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the future of the school meals service.

Mr. Forth: Local education authorities and, where appropriate, governing bodies of self-governing—grant-maintained—schools have responsibility for providing school meals, and determine the appropriate level of service in the light of local priorities.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Forth: The Department has 39 files—out of a total of over 500,000—marked "not for NAO eyes".

This marking is used in accordance with the agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they remain current.

Fitzherbert School, Brighton

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the total cost of providing security at the former Fitzherbert school site in Brighton during the period it was in the ownership of the City Technology Colleges Trust and the Michael Faraday Trust.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cost of providing security at the former Fitzherbert school site in Brighton during the said period was some £233,000.

Student Loans Company

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of acquiring the Student Loans Company from its previous owners.

Mr. Forth: The Government acquired the Student Loans Company in December 1989 at a cost of £10.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education for each city technology college, what is the amount of Government grant received each year since establishment, the pupil roll for each year and the amount of private sector sponsorship received each year.

Mr. Robin Squire: Grants approved for payment by the Department to each city technology college for recurrent funding purposes in the current academic year are shown in the table, together with the numbers of funded pupils.

Amounts of grant include provision for diseconomies of scale during the build up of colleges to full capacity and for services provided by local education authorities to their schools.

As for all other schools, any additional funding by private sector sponsors for recurrent expenditure purposes is a matter for the schools and sponsors concerned.

1993-94

College	*Recurrent grant £ million*	*Funded numbers*
1 Kingshurst	3,604	1,250
2 Djanogly	2,565	844
3 Macmillan	2,826	912
4 Emmanuel	1,929	600
5 Dixons	2,456	730
6 Leigh	3,361	1,140
7 Harris	3,187	1,000
8 Britschool	2,914	686
9 Bacons	3,926	1,050
10 Haberdashers	4,806	1,150
11 Thomas Telford	2,485	664
12 Brooke Weston	2,448	735
13 ADT	2,770	600
14 Landau Forte	1,958	450
15 John Cabot	1,292	150

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Incitement to Racial Hatred

Mr. Shore: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases of incitement to racial hatred under the Public Order Act 1986 were referred to him by the Crown Prosecution Service in each year since 1987; how many were not proceeded with *(a)* through insufficient evidence, *(b)* because prosecution was judged not to be in the public interest and *(c)* for other reasons.

The Solicitor-General: I am causing inquiries to be made into the matters raised by the right hon. Member and I will reply as soon as possible.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Mates: To ask the Attorney-General if he has anything to add to his statement to the House on 30 June concerning the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: Shortly after my statement to the House about the Serious Fraud Office on 30 June 1993 at column 965, Mr. Asil Nadir's former solicitor, Mr. Peter Knight of Vizards, wrote in response to a general invitation from the director of the Serious Fraud Office that those concerned about the working of the office should bring specific anxieties to his attention. Mr. Knight wanted the Serious Fraud Office to give further consideration, among other things, to its handling of privileged papers during the preparation of its case against Mr. Nadir.

The director has therefore looked into this matter again, in great detail, and has now written to Mr. Knight. I am placing the exchange of letters in the Library. The director's findings show that my statement, responding to the personal statement by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) on 29 June at column 823, was incomplete on the issue of privileged papers and therefore misleading. I am taking the earliest opportunity to correct this.

In April 1991 the Serious Fraud Office acknowledged to Mr. Nadir's solicitors that two sealed bags of documents subject to a claim for privilege had been opened in January and February in breach of an undertaking given to the solicitors on 5 December 1990. Documents, which the Serious Fraud Office understood and still believes were not privileged, had been copied to the administrators of Polly Peck International Plc—PPI. This breach of the Serious Fraud Office's undertaking, which it regretted, was acknowledged in my statement and in my predecessor's letter to my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire dated 20 October 1991 which is already in the Library.

However, it now appears that copies of privileged documents were circulated to the prosecution team on two occasions. The first occasion was on 26 November 1990, before the giving of the undertaking but after a general claim for privilege had been made by Mr. Nadir's solicitors. In error, copies of these privileged documents formed a small part of a very large distribution of documents routinely copied and circulated to the prosecution team after the search at PPI. The administrators of the company were entitled to access to the vast majority of these documents and were therefore given access to the circulated copy documents, including—apparently because the mistake was not then recognised—access to and copies of certain privileged material. The second occasion was on 10 January 1991 when copies of documents seized from Mr. Nadir on his arrest were circulated to the prosecution team in the apparent belief that the documents in question could not from their description be privileged, despite the fact that a claim had been made by Mr. Nadir's solicitors.

I regret that the fact that copies of privileged documents had been circulated was not acknowledged by the then case controller to Mr. Nadir's solicitors, and that no decisive attempt was made to retrieve them until December 1991, despite Vizards' frequently expressed concern about the matter and the fact that the then case controller appears to have recognised at least by January 1991 that copies of potentially privileged documents had been circulated. The reason is being pursued further by the director of the Serious Fraud Office. It is, however, right to say that the director of the Serious Fraud Office is not aware of any attempt to use the documents in conscious breach of privilege when preparing the prosecution case, although on two occasions privileged documents were used, apparently inadvertently.

A thorough check has been made of files of the prosecution team to seek to ensure that all copies of the privileged documents have now been retrieved. Remaining copy documents found on two master files have been secured. However, by reason of the system agreed between the parties, only Mr. Nadir's former solicitors knew precisely which documents had been adjudged by independent counsel to be privileged. Mr. Nadir's former solicitors are therefore being invited, at the Crown's expense, to provide full details to an independent counsel of all privileged documents taken from PPI and Mr. Nadir. The counsel will then be given full access to papers under the Serious Fraud Office's control to ensure that no privileged documents have been overlooked. The administrators will also be asked to co-operate in giving access to their documents.

Should Mr. Nadir believe that he has suffered prejudice as a result of what has occurred, he can raise this with the trial judge at the appropriate time. The prosecution would in any event bring the matter to the judge's attention.

Since my statement no futher evidence has come to light to substantiate any of the other allegations which have been made about the Serious Fraud Office's handling of Mr. Nadir's prosecution. I do not believe that the facts disclosed today, although regrettable, justify the independent investigation called for by my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire last June. Moreover, as I said in response to his personal statement there is no precedent for an independent inquiry in parallel to a trial. Mr. Nadir has already made the handling of his case by the authorities an issue in the case and the trial process itself is designed to deal with this. The right course remains for Mr. Nadir to return to this country to face trial; and, should he wish to make any complaints about the prosecution's handling of his case, to raise them with the trial judge.

TRANSPORT

Ashford International Station

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the up-to-date funding position for Ashford international station.

Mr. Freeman: The position remains that we have made provision for expenditure by British Rail to cover the track, signalling, platform and other railway works which were inaugurated by the hon. Member on 20 October. The station buildings, car parking and other facilities will be provided by the private sector; British Rail has received bids and is now evaluating these. It hopes to make a statement shortly.

Public Sector Projects

Sir Keith Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public sector transport projects where he is looking to private sector funding in whole or part and their estimated cost.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend has announced that the following projects are being considered for private sector funding in whole or in part. Private sector funding has already been secured for a number of major transport projects.

Project	Estimated cost £ million
Channel Tunnel Rail Link	3,000
Crossrail	3,000
Upgrading of west coast main line	400-600
Birmingham western orbital route	500
Croydon Tramlink	135
Midland Metro Line One	130
New Tamar crossing	100
Lower Thames crossing	[1]
Mersey crossing	100
New Scottish air traffic control centre	200

[1] No estimate available.

Seat Belts (Buses)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received on fitting compulsory seat belts in buses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department has received more than 200 letters from hon. Members and members of the public in the last three months calling for seat belts to be fitted in buses, coaches and minibuses. The Department is currently reviewing the full technical and cost implications of the compulsory fitment of seat belts in minibuses and coaches. It would not be right to take any decisions before we have considered the full reports of the recent tragic accidents and this work has been completed.

Coaches

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the effects of the 17-tonne gross vehicle weight limit on passenger coach manufacturers and operators in the United Kingdom; and when he plans to raise coach limit to 18 tonnes to conform with that of other EU countries.

Mr. Key: I have received a number of representations requesting an increase to the maximum permitted weight for coaches to 18 tonnes. Unfortunately, it is not practical to increase the gross weight without allowing for a higher weight on the drive axle. The Department is at present engaged on an exercise to assess and upgrade all the bridges in the United Kingdom to accept a heavier axle load. When this assessment is complete I shall be in a position to consider such an increase.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals *(a)* he and *(b)* the EC has to introduce seat belts in all new coaches as a legal requirement; what is his estimate of when such a new law is likely to be applied; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department is currently reviewing the full technical and cost implications of the compulsory fitment of seat belts in new coaches. Until this work has been completed and we have considered the full reports of the recent accidents we do not feel that it would be right to take any decisions on this question.

To date, there has not been the support necessary from member states for the EC to make seat belt fitment on all seats a mandatory requirement.

Spofforth Bypass

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether tenders have been submitted for the construction of the Spofforth bypass, near Harrogate; and when he expects the work to commence.

Mr. Key: These are matters for the highway authority concerned—North Yorkshire county council.

Port of London Authority

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he has made for the financial reconstruction of the Port of London authority following the privatisation of the port of Tilbury.

Mr. MacGregor: I have concluded with the Port of London authority—PLA—an agreement under which the PLA has paid my Department £1·851 million from its capital reserve. PLA will in addition make further payments to my Department, at the end of each financial year ending on 31 December, of sums representing both the profits of the PLA's property management company, Port of London Properties Ltd.—POLP—and the net proceeds from their disposal of specified properties owned by the PLA and its subsidiaries. These properties were valued at some £35 million at December 1992. A sum of £951,000 has been paid to my Department in respect of the year ending 31 December 1992.

These payments will be taken in payment of the repayable grants totalling some £147 million made to the PLA under the Ports (Financial Assistance) Acts of 1980 and 1981. The PLA's outstanding liability in respect of these repayable grants will be progressively reduced as these payments are made to my Department. When all of the specified properties have been disposed of, POLP will be wound up and the Department will relinquish its rights to any remaining repayable grants.

This agreement has advantages for both parties over the previous arrangements for the repayment of the repayable grants. For the Government, it has provided a more certain prospect of substantial receipts than under the time-limited conditions attached to those arrangements. For the PLA, it has removed a substantial contingent liability, which was a disincentive to sound financial management of the business.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Family Credit

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the extent of the delays currently affecting applications for family credit; and if he will take steps to ensure that all outstanding claims can be dealt with and completed before Christmas.

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. A. Wylie to Mr. Seamus Mallon, dated 30 November 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about delays affecting Family Credit claims and if the outstanding claims can be cleared before Christmas.

From April 1993 to October 1993 some 34,000 claims to Family Credit were received of which 89% were successful. The number of claims represents an increase of 21% over the same period last year. At the same time a new computer system for processing claims was introduced which brings a certain amount of disruption to the work and inevitably causes a slowdown in output during the first few months.

A recovery programme has been introduced to deal with the outstanding claims and I am confident that by 31 January 1994 we will have brought the situation back to normal.

I hope this explains the position for you and I am sorry for any inconvenience that has been caused to our customers.

Prison Officers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to review the employment status of prison officers in Northern Ireland.

Sir John Wheeler: I have reviewed the employment status of prison officers in Northern Ireland in the light of the temporary injunction granted to the Home Secretary against the calling of industrial action in the Prison Service in England and Wales. I have concluded that the employment status of prison officers in Northern Ireland should match that in England and Wales.

Legislation will therefore be introduced this Session confirming that it is unlawful for organisations representing prison officers in Northern Ireland to call for industrial action. This will also apply to organisations representing prison officers in the rest of the United Kingdom. At the same time the legislation will extend normal trade union status to organisations representing prison officers in Northern Ireland. It will also extend to prison officers the appropriate elements of employment protection legislation, including access to industrial tribunals, on a basis comparable to that for other workers. There will also be provision for regulations to be made to establish procedures for settling the remuneration of the staff concerned.

My officials will be in discussion with representatives of prison officers in Northern Ireland about these provisions.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Sproat: My Department, which was established in April 1992, has not yet reviewed the full range of files inherited from former parent Departments and it is not possible to give a figure for those bearing a marking "not for NAO eyes". Since April 1992 DNH has opened a very small number of new files with this marking.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

WALES

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Redwood: The estimated cost of providing a car service for Ministers during the 1993-94 financial year is £161,000. There are four official cars, including two based in Cardiff.

Coal Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1979 the number of operating deep-mine coal pits, the annual output of mined coal, and the amount of coal exported from and imported into Wales; and if he will estimate the total value to the Welsh economy of the coal mined from deep pits over the period since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: The number of deep-mine coal pits and their annual output for each year since 1979 is shown in the following table.

The remainder of the information is not readily available.

Year (to 31 March)	*Number of deep mines in Wales*	*Output (thousand tonnes)*
1979	39	8,415
1980	38	8,304
1981	36	8,356
1982	35	8,240
1983	35	7,625
1984	30	7,237
1985	30	628
1986	19	7,310
1987	15	7,062
1988	12	5,460
1989	10	5,530
1990	6	4,040
1991	5	3,740
1992	4	2,300
1993	2	n/a

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the persons currently serving on non-departmental public bodies in Wales as appointed by him had not been included in the register held by the Welsh Office for public appointments.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not collected centrally and could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Direct Service/Labour Organisations

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts awarded to Welsh local authority direct service/labour organisations have not been subject to the issuing of a section 13 or 14 notice, alleging anti-competitive behaviour under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988; and on how many occasions such actions have been taken.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the total number of contracts awarded is not held centrally. Only one authority has received a section 13 notice and section 14 direction. One other authority has received a section 13 notice.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many local authority direct service/labour organisations operating contracts in Wales under the terms of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 have achieved the required rate of return since 1988;

(2) if he will list, by authority, the surplus achieved since 1988 on trading accounts for *(a)* refuse collection, *(b)* street cleaning, *(c)* building cleaning, *(d)* schools and welfare catering, *(e)* other catering, *(f)* vehicle maintenance, *(g)* grounds maintenance and *(h)* sports and leisure management services delivered by direct service/labour organisations, under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988;

(3) if he will list, by authority, the surplus achieved since 1988 on trading accounts for *(a)* general highways work, *(b)* construction and maintenance of sewers, *(c)* works of new construction and *(d)* maintenance work delivered by direct service/labour organisations in Wales under the terms of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980;

(4) if he will list by authority and service area, as defined by the Local Government Act 1988, the surpluses achieved by local authority direct service/labour organisations in Wales;

(5) if he will list by authoity and service area, as defined by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, the surpluses achieved by local authority direct service/labour organisations in Wales since 1988;

(6) how many local authority direct service/labour organisations, operating contracts in Wales under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988, have achieved the required rate of return since 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many contracts awarded to Welsh local authority direct service/labour organisations have not been subject to the issuing of a section 19A or 19B notice, alleging anti-competitive behaviour under the terms of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and on how many occasions such actions were taken.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the total number of contracts awarded is not held centrally. Only one authority has received a section 19A notice and section 19B direction.

Local Government Administration

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the authorities that have been challenged by his Department, in relation to their internal arrangements for establishing client-contractor splits in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Surcharged Councillors

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many councillors in Wales have been surcharged or prosecuted as a consequence of taking decisions in relation to the Local Government Act 1988;

(2) how many councillors in Wales have been surcharged or prosecuted as a consequence of taking decisions in relation to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None to my knowledge.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: There are 97 files in my Department marked "not for NAO eyes". These figures refer to individual jackets—file parts. For each NAO study a number of divisions may be involved and each may possess a file with a number of parts.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Department and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Press and Publicity Officers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Mr. David Davis: The Office of Public Services and Science employs seven members of the Government information service in its information division. The Department did not exist in any comparable form before 1992. Figures for earlier years are not therefore available.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Davis: The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office—NAO—under which documents relating to the handling of relations between departments, the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee —PAC—are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current; 122 Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service and Science files are so designated.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in the last three years in relation to housing problems in England *(a)* from local authorities, *(b)* from housing associations and *(c)* from other sources; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My Department regularly discusses housing problems and successes with local authorities, housing associations and others. We value their contribution to policy development. Local housing authorities discuss their strategies and expenditure priorities each year with Ministers and with departmental officials as part of the annual housing investment programme resource allocation process; developing housing associations have similar discusions with the Housing Corporation. Twice a year I discuss local authority housing issues with representatives of the local authority associations in the Housing Consultative Council. In addition, we receive responses to consultation papers, and there is a wide range of formal and informal contact with local authorities and housing associations, and with Members of Parliament, members of the public, voluntary organisations and the private sector.

Green Belt

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions since 1960 he has used his powers under section 5(1) of the Green Belt (London and Home Counties) Act 1938 to refuse his consent to the disposal by a local authority or parish council of green belt land to which the section applies; and what are his criteria for refusing consent in the future.

Mr. Baldry: This information is not avilable, except at disproportionate cost. Consent has been refused on one occasion since January 1991. In that case the land was not designated as metropolitan green belt in a development plan. My right hon. Friend's primary concern in determining applications is to ensure that the land continues to fulfil the objectives of the 1938 Act and of green belt policy as set out in planning policy guidance note 2.

Council Tax Arrears

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what circumstances an attachment of earnings order for the recovery of council tax or community charge arrears can be served on an organisation which provides a training programme funded by the European social fund requiring the organisation to make deductions from *(a)* a training allowance paid to the trainee or *(b)* a wage paid to the trainee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A billing authority may serve an attachment of earnings order in respect of arrears of community charge or council tax on an employer following the issue of a liability order by a magistrates court. Deductions may be made from the net earnings as defined in regulation 32 of the Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1992 and regulation 27 of the Community Charge (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989.

Market Franchise Rights, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from Doncaster metropolitan district council in regard to proposals on market franchise rights; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have received representations from the council objecting to our proposal. All representations, both for and against the proposal, will be fully considered before any decision is made.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Gummer: On security grounds, this information is not available.

Housing Revenue Accounts

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) of 19 November 1993, *Official Report*, column *1*, what considerations led to his proposal to increase housing revenue account subsidy guideline rents by 7.5 per cent. and management and maintenance allowance by 4 per cent.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend took into account a number of considerations including the constraints on public expenditure; the need to move gradually towards income-related subsidies and a more market-related pattern of local authority rents which better reflects the value of accommodation provided in different parts of the country; the need to make further progress on the targeting of management and maintenance allowances by guaranteeing all authorities at least 95 per cent. of their target scores; and general movements in prices and earnings. The proposals are subject to consultation.

Housing Investment

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the gross aid net level of investment in housing proposed by his Department for 1994-95.

Sir George Young: Information on the Government's public expenditure plans for housing is contained in the Financial Statement and Budget Report, copies of which are available in the Library. More detailed information will be contained in my Department's annual report, to be published in the new year.

Peat Bogs

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations of raised peat bogs in England; and if he will make a statement as to their protection.

Mr. Baldry: A list of raised peat bogs in England is being prepared by Scottish Natural Heritage as part of work on a national peatlands resource inventory. This inventory will also summarise information on those sites designated as sites of special scientific interest—SSSIs. It is expected to be published during 1994 and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Government Car Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the response to date of advertisements placed in British and overseas journals in

respect of bids to take over the financial management of the Government car service; what classified information on the location of classified bids was given in these advertisements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The market test relates to the routine book-keeping work provided for the Government car service—GCS—and the Interdespatch service—IDS. Financial management will remain the responsibility of the GCS and IDS management.

Eight firms responded to the advertisement placed in the *European Journal* for the market-tested work. No classified information was given in this advertisement. Two tenders have been received and are now being evaluated. The decision should be announced shortly.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Gummer: The annual cost to the Department of Environment for their Ministers' car service was estimated at £265,00 in 1992-93. Six cars are provided by the Government car service with drivers and full back-up service.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the annual cost of the Government car service in each of the last three years; what was the comparable cost in 1979-80; how many vehicles form the Government car service; and what were the categories of cost in 1992-93.

Mr. Gummer: The current cost of the Government car service—GCS—for the last three financial years is:

	£ million
1990-91	6·95
1991-92	6·99
1992-93	7·19

The 1990-91 figure includes an estimate for pension contributions that were paid centrally at that time. These contributions are included in the 1991-92 and 1992-93 figures.

Information on the comparable cost in 1979-80 is not available.

There are currently 190 vehicles in the Government car service fleet.

In 1992-93 approximately 75 per cent. of costs were staff and 15 per cent. were vehicle costs.

"London, Making the Best Better"

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tenders for the publication of "London, Making the Best Better" were received from Asian businesses.

Mr. Gummer: It is neither possible nor desirable to group tenders according to the ethnic origin of their owners.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what day, date and times the two photographs that appear on page 10 of "London, Making the Best Better" were taken.

Mr. Gummer: Both photographs were taken between 2 pm and 3 pm on Thursday afternoons. The precise dates are not known but the "before" photograph was taken in late November or early December 1990 and the "after" photograph in late October or early November 1991.

London Boroughs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the full range of activities for which London boroughs *(a)* are currently responsible and *(b)* were responsible in 1979.

Mr. Baldry: The statutory activities of London Boroughs are described in the document entitled "The Functions of Local Authorities in England" published by my Department last year. As this was the first occasion on which a comprehensive review had been carried out, I regret that there is no equivalent for 1979.

Press and Publicity Officers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Mr. Gummer: There are currently 31 press and publicity officers employed by the Department of the Environment's information directorate.

Before 1989, the information directorate of this Department was part of the common services of DOE and Department of Transport and separate figures for the resources for each Department are not available. Global information for this period is published each year within the management information system for Ministers—MINIS—dating back to 1979 and is available in the Library.

Durham (Boundaries)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost *(a)* overall, *(b)* to the Local Government Commission, *(c)* to Durham county council and *(d)* to the district councils of Durham to date of the inquiry into local government boundaries in the county of Durham.

Mr. Baldry: Expenditure by the Local Government Commission and by local authorities in the area is a matter for them.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he is issuing regarding a timetable for the reconsideration of the Boundary Commission's final proposal regarding local government boundaries in the county of Durham.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has directed the Local Government Commission to start its further review of County Durham on 13 December 1993 and to report to him by 30 December 1994. The review will be conducted in accordance with the revised procedure guidance issued to the commission on 22 November. We will agree a target date for the report with the commission.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), *Official*

Report, column *380*, whether he envisages that the same organisations and individuals will be consulted in the new review of County Durham as in the original review.

Mr. Baldry: On 22 November my right hon. Friend issued revised procedure guidance to the Local Government Commission for England. Annexe A to this revised guidance sets out the organisations which the commission is required to consult in conducting its review of an area. Except for the addition of the chief inspector, magistrates courts service, and the Lords Lieutenant for the area, this list is unchanged from that annexed to the procedure guidance issued to the commission in July 1992. The commission should also consult representative local organisations, including voluntary organisations. Others will be welcome to express their views, which will be taken fully into account by the commission.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), *Official Report*, column *380*, which local authorities in County Durham made representations about fresh proposals on the basis of the new guidance.

Mr. Baldry: Four district councils—Derwentside, Easington, Sedgefield and Wear Valley—have asked for the revised policy guidance issued to the Local Government Commission on 2 November to be applied to County Durham and have indicated their willingness to consider fresh options for change.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), *Official Report*, column *380*, what weight he will now give to local views in determining the future structure of local government in Darlington.

Mr. Baldry: It is for the Local Government Commission to conduct a further review of County Durham and make recommendations to my right hon. Friend. The Government have said that they attach great importance to local consensus and that the commission will wish to measure proposals from local authorities against expressed views from those outside local government. Once the final report has been published, there will be an opportunity for interested parties to make representations before we take decisions about the implementation of any recommendations for change.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), *Official Report*, column *380*, what has been the cost to date of the Local Government Commission's review of local government in County Durham.

Mr. Baldry: Expenditure on the review of County Durham is a matter for the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), *Official Report*, column *380*, whether the same commissioners will be reviewing County Durham.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), what are the expected costs of his decision further to review County Durham.

Mr. Baldry: The resources which we are making available to the commission, £5·124 million in 1993-94 and £8·300 million in 1994-95, should be adequate to enable it to complete all the reviews of local government structure in the shire counties of England by the end of 1994.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1993 to the hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight), if he will make a statement on his reasons for not exempting Darlington from further review.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has directed the Local Government Commission, under section 15(6) of the Local Government Act 1992, to conduct a further review of County Durham because he is not at present satisfied that the commission's recommendations for the area meet the criteria in section 13(5) of that Act. He did not want to limit the possible options available for consideration in the further review, and there would also have been difficulties in implementing changes for part of the county in advance of the remainder. He therefore concluded that it would not be right to exclude Darlington from the area to be covered by the further review.

Surcharged Councillors

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many councillors in England have been surcharged or prosecuted as a consequence of taking decisions in relation to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980;

(2) how many councillors in England have been surcharged or prosecuted as a consequence of taking decisions in relation to the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Gummer: None, to my knowledge. The Department does not keep records of such actions.

Direct Labour Organisations

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the total number of contracts awarded to English local authority direct service or labour organisations which have not been subject to the issuing of a section 19A or 19B notice, alleging anti-competitive behaviour under the terms of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980; and on how many occasions such actions were taken;

(2) what was the total number of contracts awarded to English local authority direct service or labour organisations which have not been subject to the issuing of a section 13 or 14 notice, alleging anti-competitive behaviour under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988; and on how many occasions such actions have been taken.

Mr. Gummer: To date, 55 notices and 28 directions relating to anti-competitive behaviour have been issued under sections 19A and 19B of the 1980 Act or sections 13 and 14 of the 1988 Act. Information on the total number of contracts is not held centrally.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many local authority direct service or labour organisations, operating contracts in England under the terms of the Local Government Act 1988, have achieved the required rate of return since 1988;

(2) how many local authority direct service or labour organisations, operating contracts in England under the terms of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, have achieved the required rate of return since 1988.

Mr. Gummer: For the financial year 1990-91, my Department recorded just over 2,000 accounts for direct service or labour organisations under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and Local Government Act 1988, 1,670 of these accounts—83·5 per cent.—recorded that the DLO or DSO had met the statutory financial objective.

For 1991-92, 2,260 accounts were recorded of which 1925—85·2 per cent.—recorded that the financial objectives had been met.

Information on accounts for 1992-93 is not yet complete. Information on accounts for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities that have been challenged by his Department in relation to their internal arrangements for establishing client-contractor splits in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Gummer: To date, none of the statutory notices or directions given to local authorities under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 or the Local Government Act 1988 has concerned internal arrangements for establishing client-contractor splits.

Mineral Planning

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to conclude his consultations on changes to mineral planning guidance note 3; when he expects to announce any changes to MPG 3; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 25 March *Official Report,* columns *714-15,* that we intended to proceed to consultation on revised planning guidelines as soon as possible. This is still our intention.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Gummer: The only category of files not available for NAO view are those which relate to relations between the Department and the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee. This is fully in accordance with the standing agreement between the Treasury and the NAO. This applies to 214 files out of 1·4 million.

Docklands Light Railway

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Government contribution will be made towards the joint venture proposals for the extension to the docklands light railway to Lewisham, announced in his Budget speech; and what help Ministers will give in assembling the private finance needed for the project.

Mr. Baldry: No Government grant or subsidy will be made towards the costs of the extension to Lewisham of the docklands light railway. The joint venture will be taken forward by the London Docklands development corporation—owners of the railway—and Docklands Light Railway Ltd. My Department's private finance unit will provide advise and expertise where necessary to support their work.

Climate Change Convention

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about ratification by the United Kingdom of the climate change convention.

Mr. Yeo: The United Kingdom's instrument of ratification will be deposited with the United Nations very shortly. This will fulfil our commitment to ratify the framework convention of climate change by the end of this year.

Following the Budget statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in particular the commitment to future real terms increases in transport fuel duties, we now have in place all the elements to complete the United Kingdom's national programme under the convention. The programme, which includes measures aimed at returning United Kingdom emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000, will be published early in the new year. Publication of this programme will put the United Kingdom at the forefront of global efforts to implement the convention, which was signed by the Prime Minister at the Earth summit in Rio last year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

English Industrial Estates Corporation

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total budget allocated by his Department to the English Industrial Estates Corporation for expenditure in 1992-93 in *(a)* the northern region and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Sainsbury: Total capital expenditure by English Estates in the northern region in 1992-93 was £17·5 million out of a total capital expenditure in England of £54·3 million.

Press and Publicity Officers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's information division employs 19 press officers and 24 publicity officers. The figures do not include administrative support staff. Comparable details for 1985 and 1979 are not available.

Advertising

Mr. Grocott: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much his Department spends annually on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising and *(c)* press advertising; and what were the corresponding figures for 1985 and 1979.

Mr. Eggar: The details are as follows:

£000's

	1979-80	*1985-86*	*1992-93*
Television advertising	20	2,212	—
Radio advertising	5	—	1
Press advertising	1,529	2,805	1,138

The figures relate to centrally managed budgets and include expenditure by the former Department of Energy.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total amount spent by his Department on *(a)* regional enterprise grants *(b)* enterprise initiative schemes, *(c)* regional development grants and *(d)* regional selective assistance in 1992-93 in (i) the northern region and (ii) the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Sainsbury: The total amount spent by my Department on these schemes in 1992-93 is set out below together with the amount spent in the northern region.

DTI expenditure in 1992-93

£ million

	Northern region	*Total expenditure*
Regional enterprise grants	1·5	5·8
Enterprise initiative (including the SMART and SPUR schemes)	2·4	58·6
Regional development grants	8·3	11·0
Regional selective assistance	28·1	71·1

Expenditure on the enterprise initiative covers the whole of the United Kingdom whereas DTI expenditure on the other three schemes was paid in support of projects in England only.

Angling Products

Mr. William Ross: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the value of the manufacture of angling products in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years, the number of persons employed in such manufacture, the number of persons engaged in the sale of angling products in the United Kingdom, and the value of the retail sales of such products in those years; and if he will divide his figures into income for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sainsbury: The value of sales of fishing reels, rods and tackle—including hooks—by manufacturers in the United Kingdom was £13·5 million in 1990, £17·8 million in 1991 and £14 million in 1992. The other information requested is not available.

Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the nuclear reactors designated for inspection, and the period of inspection in each case, under the terms of the United Kingdom/Euratom/International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards agreement—Cmnd. 6730—since it came into force.

Mr. Eggar: The prototype fast reactor at Dounreay was designated and subject to joint International Atomic Energy Agency/Euratom inspections from 1980 until 1982 under the terms of the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which United Kingdom nuclear facility was the latest to be designated by the International Atomic Energy Agency for safeguards inspection under the terms of the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA safeguards agreement—Cmnd. 6730.

Mr. Eggar: The most recent United Kingdom nuclear facility to be designated by the IAEA for inspection, under the United Kingdom/Euratom/IAEA tripartite safeguards agreement, was the thermal oxide reprocessing plant receipt and storage pond at Sellafield; the facility was designated on 1 January 1993.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Eggar: No central record is kept by my Department of files marked "not for NAO eyes". For each NAO study, a number of divisions in different locations may be involved and each may possess in its registries a file with a number of parts—that is, individual jackets. The information requested is therefore not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

Coal Industry

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what figures he has on the costs per gigajoule of coal imports into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* The average prices of coal imported into the United Kingdom from January to September 1993—based on prices at the port of entry—are estimated from data available for Customs and Excise. This data provide information in £ per tonne and this has been converted to £ per gigajoule using a conversion factor of 26 gigajoules per tonne. The resulting prices of all coal imports and steam coal imports are as follows:

Coal type	*Cost per gigajoule (£)*
Steam coal imports	1·31
All coal imports	1·44

These prices are averages for coal of different grades and different calorific values with a variety of industrial and domestic uses. They include cost of transhipment from

other EC ports. The data cannot be used to distinguish the price of imports to power stations. But in the European Community as a whole the overall price of imports to power stations from extra-EC countries was £1·08/gigajoule for the first quarter of 1993.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Petrol

Sir Malcolm Thornton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the net gain to the Exchequer of increasing the excise duty on unleaded petrol so as to eliminate the differential between leaded and unleaded petrol.

Sir John Cope: Had my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer increased the excise duty on unleaded petrol in the Budget to eliminate the differential with leaded petrol this would have raised a further £1,050 million in 1994-95 beyond the figures shown in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Information Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has incorporated the code of practice for information security management, published by the British Standards Institution, into relevant contracts with information technology suppliers.

Sir John Cope: The security requirements for IT systems and services used by central Government Departments are stated in the Government IT security policy document. This document is supported by use of the CCTA risk analysis and management method—CRAMM—and baseline security for IT systems—BSITS—risk analysis methods and by supporting advice and guidance published by the Government security authorities. These are regularly reviewed to ensure best practice, have been developed specifically for use within government and have been in operation for some time. The code of practice for information security management was developed by and established for use by commercial organisations and does not specifically address the requirements for the protection of official information.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the operation of his Department's sensitive documents unit; how many staff are employed in its operation; and approximately how many documents per annum come within its purview.

Sir John Cope: The Treasury does not have a sensitive documents unit. Sensitivity checks are carried out on records being considered for release to the Public Record Office. In the period from October 1992 to October 1993, 97 linear feet of records were checked for sensitivity by 3·5 staff.

Customs Searches

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were stopped and searched by customs officers at each port of entry during 1992, broken down by ethnic origin.

Sir John Cope: The information requested is not available. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has recorded the ethnic grouping of persons selected for search of their person only since 1 January 1993.

Customs Local Offices

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *338-40*, if he will list the counties covered by each customs local office.

Sir John Cope: Customs group local offices to form collections. The counties covered by each collection are as follows:

Collection and Counties
Belfast
- Northern Ireland

Birmingham
- Staffordshire
- West Midlands
- Warwickshire

Dover
- Kent
- East Sussex

East Anglia
- Norfolk
- Suffolk
- Essex

East Midlands
- Derbyshire
- Lincolnshire
- Nottinghamshire
- South Humberside

Edinburgh
- Grampian
- Tayside
- Borders
- Central
- Shetland
- Fife
- Lothian

Glasgow
- Highland
- Orkney
- Western Isles
- Stratchclyde
- Dumfries and Galloway

Leeds
- West Yorkshire
- South Yorkshire
- North Humberside
- North Yorkshire

Liverpool
- Merseyside
- Cheshire
- Lancashire
- Clwyd
- Gwynedd

London Central
- Greater London

London North and West
- Bedfordshire
- Hertfordshire

London Port
- Greater London
- Essex

London South
- Greater London
- Surrey
- Kent

Manchester
- Greater Manchester
- Lancashire
- Cheshire

Northampton
- Bedfordshire
- Northamptonshire

Hertfordshire
Cambridge
Leicester

Northern England
Northumberland
Tyne and Wear
North Yorkshire
Durham
Cumbria
Cleveland

Southampton
Dorset
Hampshire
West Sussex
Isle of Wight

South Wales and Borders
Dyfed
Mid Glamorgan
South Glamorgan
West Glamorgan
Gloucestershire
Hereford and Worcester
Gwent
Powys
Shropshire

South West England
Avon
Somerset
Wiltshire
Cornwall
Devon

Thames Valley
Berkshire
Surrey
Oxford
Buckinghamshire

Value Added Tax

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *338-40*, if he will adjust the figures on VAT registrations and deregistrations to run from September each year.

Sir John Cope: As Customs only holds such information for calendar quarters, revised registration and deregistration figures, by year, from October 1987 to September 1993 are:

Registrations

Collections	*October 1987 to September 1988*	*October 1988 to September 1989*	*October 1989 to September 1990*	*October 1990 to September 1991*	*October 1991 to September 1992*	*October 1992 to September 1993*
Belfast	3,935	3,935	4,412	3,765	3,578	4,090
Birmingham	16,519	17,850	16,818	14,305	13,503	14,766
Dover	7,774	7,582	7,171	6,725	5,930	6,535
East Anglia	9,273	9,408	9,073	8,468	8,120	8,691
East Midlands	12,567	14,091	12,994	10,614	9,808	10,403
Edinburgh	7,898	7,975	8,193	7,023	6,452	7,007
Glasgow	6,662	7,775	7,747	6,939	6,293	6,536
Leeds	12,910	13,578	13,107	11,418	10,324	10,194
Liverpool	11,929	12,753	13,041	10,997	10,050	10,084
London Central	5,762	5,212	5,448	4,783	4,612	5,672
London North and West	13,537	15,633	14,534	12,329	10,731	11,547
London Port	9,011	10,012	8,897	7,032	6,667	7,065
London South	14,566	15,674	16,124	12,973	11,680	13,687
Manchester	12,351	14,004	13,929	12,214	11,398	11,615
Northampton	18,312	18,243	18,595	13,931	12,365	12,847
Northern England	7,869	8,127	7,694	6,339	5,697	5,818
Southampton	13,640	15,955	13,992	10,827	9,987	10,691
South Wales and Borders	13,362	14,283	13,720	10,889	9,732	10,080
South West England	16,478	16,645	14,733	12,257	11,027	11,984
Thames Valley	19,097	20,206	21,254	18,764	16,687	17,064

Deregistrations

Collections	*October 1987 to September 1988*	*October 1988 to September 1989*	*October 1989 to September 1990*	*October 1990 to September 1991*	*October 1991 to September 1992*	*October 1992 to September 1993*
Belfast	9,845	3,210	3,265	3,766	3,479	3,268
Birmingham	24,694	12,848	12,291	16,524	16,293	15,667
Dover	9,814	4,827	5,767	9,334	8,636	7,728
East Anglia	15,760	6,231	7,226	11,217	10,707	10,329
East Midlands	20,177	9,758	9,848	12,947	11,804	11,484
Edinburgh	14,587	6,004	6,266	7,363	6,449	7,053
Glasgow	11,126	5,995	6,153	7,561	7,327	6,609
Leeds	18,228	10,321	10,189	13,154	12,305	11,744
Liverpool	18,676	9,969	10,076	12,890	12,229	11,882
London Central	9,685	4,239	4,457	4,494	4,914	5,334
London North and West	18,140	9,730	10,578	13,174	15,118	13,549
London Port	13,058	6,759	5,794	9,692	9,733	9,288
London South	19,247	10,017	11,440	14,200	14,376	13,583
Manchester	18,958	10,469	9,781	12,656	13,399	12,487
Northampton	25,340	12,078	12,454	16,170	15,164	13,155
Northern England	12,399	6,040	6,212	7,707	6,899	6,978
Southampton	20,436	10,473	9,996	13,667	13,376	13,039
South Wales and Borders	23,443	10,346	10,230	13,901	11,174	12,705
South West England	26,001	11,566	11,554	15,951	14,808	14,140
Thames Valley	25,151	12,736	13,918	19,270	19,804	18,401

SCOTLAND

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Lang: The cost to the Scottish Office of the car service for Ministers in 1992-93 was £224,163. The number of vehicles involved is three in London and four —part-time—in Scotland.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Lang: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Training Schemes

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were participating in *(a)* training for work—employment training/employment action—*(b)* community action, *(c)* learning for work, *(d)* the business start-up allowance and *(e)* youth training in each month since March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information relating to the community action programme is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The learning for work programme started in August and consequently it is too early for reliable management information to be available. Information on the numbers of people participating in training for work, the business start-up scheme and youth training in Scotland in each month since March, based on the latest returns available for publication, is set out in the table:

	Training for work[1]	*Business start-up scheme*	*Youth training*[2]
1993			
March	18,267	4,782	35,198
April	15,585	4,311	34,045
May	15,202	4,298	32,897
June	14,482	4,202	33,651
July	13,908	4,167	32,724
August	13,058	3,812	31,232

[1] Training for work replaced employment training and employment action on 1 April 1993; the March 1993 training for work figure comprises figures for employment action (3,407) and employment training (14,860).

[2] Youth training figures include participants on youth credits schemes.

Wrongful Arrest

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the wrongful arrest of Lorraine Alison Brown of Marske-by-the-Sea, Cleveland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Miss Brown was arrested upon a warrant issued by the sheriff at Kirkcaldy in relation to certain road traffic offences, and escorted by the police from Redcar to Kirkcaldy to answer the charges against her. It was then discovered, however, that her case had already been dealt with. Miss Brown had earlier been fined. The warrant should have been withdrawn on that previous occasion. Miss Brown was accordingly released without any further appearance in court.

The procurator fiscal at Kirkcaldy has written to Miss Brown's solicitors, apologising for the error. He paid all the expenses of her unnecessary appearance, and the Crown Office has accepted that compensation should be paid.

Enterprise Companies

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parliamentary questions he has referred for answer to the chief executives of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise; how many of these questions have then been passed on to individual local enterprise companies; how many questions in each category have subsequently received replies; how long those replies have taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: It is not my right hon. Friend's practice to refer parliamentary questions to the chief executives of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. It is the intention that all questions are answered by the chairmen, although in one instance a question was passed on by Scottish Enterprise to an individual local enterprise company. Since the responsibility for ensuring that questions are answered rests with the enterprise bodies I have asked the chairmen to respond to the hon. Member on the relevant aspects of her question.

Scottish Agricultural Wages Board

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library the responses to the consultation on the future of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board.

Sir Hector Monro: Yes.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many submissions he has received to the consultation on the future of the Scottish Agricultural Wages Board; and how many of those were in favour of the abolition of the board.

Sir Hector Monro: Fifty-two. Four favoured abolition.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his most recent recommendation to the European Commission on the reference price for farmed salmon.

Sir Hector Monro: It is the responsibility of the European commission to set a reference price for salmon, based on criteria set out in article 23 of regulation 3759/92. The Scottish Office has submitted background information to the Commission on production costs and prices over the last three years.

Sheep

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications there have been for sheep quotas from the national reserve; if he will give the number

of successful applications as a proportion of all applications; and if he will provide a breakdown of the statistics for each region in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: An announcement will be made shortly giving details of the category of producer eligible to apply for an allocation of sheep annual premium quota from the national reserve. The announcement will also explain how and when producers should apply. Until applications have been received and processed it will not be possible to say how many have been successful.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the administration and operation of the national sheep reserve of sheep quotas; what discussions have taken place regarding altering or estending the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: We carried out an extensive public consultation exercise earlier this year concerning the operation of the sheep quota system and received representations from a broad cross section of the industry. Discussions have continued since then and we shall make an announcement shortly explaining how producers eligible for an allocation of quota from the national reserve can submit their application.

Prison Officers

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to alter the status of prison officers in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The precise legal position of Scottish prison officers and governors is different from that of similar staff in England and Wales. I consider it appropriate that as they carry out similar duties to those in England and Wales they should have the same status.

I therefore intend to legislate this Session to place Scottish prison officers and governors on the same footing as those in the rest of the United Kingdom: they should have in substance the same powers, within the Scottish legal framework, and the position of the trade unions which represent them should be the same. As it will in consequence be unlawful for those trade unions to call industrial action, appropriate procedures will be established for settling the remuneration of the staff concerned.

My officials will be in discussion with the Scottish Prison Officers Association and others affected.

Health Service Salaries

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total salary costs for *(a)* administrative and clerical staff, *(b)* managerial staff and *(c)* nursing and midwifery staff employed in the NHS in each year since 1989.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 25 November 1993]:* The information is set out in the table. Details have been taken from health boards' annual accounts. General and senior managers costs are not separately identified but are included within the administration and clerical staff category. Costs are at outturn level and therefore increases are explained in part by annual pay awards. The figures for 1992-93 are provisional.

Year	Administration and clerical (£000's)[1]	Nursing and midwifery (£000's)
1989-90	130,055	778,921
1990-91	152,546	834,093
1991-92	175,718	910,326
1992-93	191,979	925,130

[1]This figure includes those senior nurses and clinicians who have transferred to general/senior manager pay scales, particular in latter years.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Escapes)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for the West Yorkshire police area for the past 12 months *(a)* the number of prison movements to and from courts and *(b)* the number of prisoner escapes from (i) the police, (ii) the Prison Service, (iii) Group 4 custody in transit to and from courts and from custody at court, *(c)* the number of deaths, including suicides, by prisoners at court or in transit from court, *(d)* the number of assaults on (iv) the police, (v) the Prison Service and (vi) Group 4 officers while escorting prisoners to and from courts and *(e)* the number of prisoners arriving at court more than one hour late while in the care of (vii) the police, (viii) the Prison Service and (ix) Group 4 officers;

(2) if he will list for the North Yorkshire police area for the past 12 months *(a)* the number of prison movements to and from courts, *(b)* the number of prisoner escapes from (i) the police, (ii) the Prison Service and (iii) Group 4 custody in transit to and from courts and from custody at court, *(c)* the number of deaths, including suicides, by prisoners at court or in transit from court, *(d)* the number of assaults on (iv) the police, (v) the Prison Service and (vi) Group 4 officers while escorting prisoners to and from courts and *(e)* the number of prisoners arriving at court more than one hour late while in the care of (vii) the police, (viii) the Prison Service and (ix) Group 4 officers;

(3) if he will list for the Humberside police area for the past 12 months *(a)* the number of prison movements to and from courts and *(b)* the number of prisoner escapes from (i) the police, (ii) the Prison Service and (iii) Group 4 custody in transit to and from courts and from custody at court, *(c)* the number of deaths, including suicides, by prisoners at court or in transit from court, *(d)* the number of assaults on (iv) the police, (v) the Prison Service and (vi) Group 4 officers while escorting prisoners to and from courts and *(e)* the number of prisoners arriving at court more than one hour late while in the care of (vii) the police, (viii) the Prison Service and (ix) Group 4 officers;

(4) if he will list for the South Yorkshire police area for the past 12 months *(a)* the number of prison movements to and from courts and *(b)* the number of prisoner escapes from (i) the police, (ii) the Prison Service and (iii) Group 4 custody in transit to and from courts and from custody at court, *(c)* the number of deaths, including suicides, by prisoners at court or in transit from court, *(d)* the number of assaults on (iv) the police, (v) the Prison Service and (vi) Group 4 officers while escorting prisoners to and from courts and *(e)* the number of prisoners arriving at court more than one hour late while in the care of (vii) the police, (viii) the Prison Service and (ix) Group 4 officers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Mr. Martin Redwood, dated 3 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about court escort work in the South Yorkshire, North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Humberside force areas.

Little of the information requested is routinely collected. Of that which is collected much is not in the format you requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The information which is readily available relates mainly to the East Midlands and Humberside area, where responsibility for prisoner escort and court custody work has largely been contracted out to Group 4. The area covered by the contract with Group 4, known as Area 7, covers the police force areas of Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Humberside, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, South Yorkshire and part of North Yorkshire. Group 4 have been operating the contract since 5 April 1993.

Between that date and 31 October 1993 Group 4 were responsible for a total of 61,459 prisoner movements. This includes taking prisoners to court, guarding them at court and taking them to prison from court. 2,152 prisoners delivered by Group 4 arrived at court after the start of court business, including those delivered to courts outside the contract area where the length of the journey precludes timely delivery.

Between 1 November 1992 and 31 October 1993 in the Prison Service areas which are equivalent to the police force areas covered by your Questions and in Area 7 there were a total of 38 escapes from Prison Service or Group 4 custody and a total of 8 assaults on Prison Service or Group 4 staff by prisoners in transit to or from court. Specifically within Area 7 there were 26 escapes from Group 4 custody and 7 assaults on their staff between the start of the contract and 31 October. These figures are not comparable, since the majority of the work taken on by Group 4 was previously performed by the police. The great majority of the escapes from Group 4 custody have been from escorts which would previously have been carried out by the police. Police forces in the area have been unable to provide any data on escapes from escort and assaults during escort.

Between 1 November 1992 and 31 October 1993 there were no deaths of prisoners whilst at court or in transit to or from court whilst in the custody of the Prison Service or the police forces in the areas covered by your Questions. There has been one such death within Area 7 since the start of the contract with Group 4.

Prison Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current year's budget for the Prison Service; what proportion *(a)* was earmarked for and *(b)* will have been spent on projects in each London prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 3 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Prison Service budget and projects in London prisons.

The Prison Service budget for the financial year 1993-94 is £1,524·5 million.

Expenditure on major capital works and building repair projects at London prisons in 1993-94 is as follows:

Prison	*Planned expenditure £'000*	*Current forecast of actual expenditure £'000*
Belmarsh	300	334
Brixton	5,096	3,002
Holloway	712	249
Pentonville	2,608	2,563
Wandsworth	2,561	2,358
Wormwood Scrubs	20,124	18,375

Crime (Clear-up Rates)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in rank order the crime clear-up rates for each police authority in each of the past 10 years, and the current year to date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The requested information is contained in the table.

Clear up rates by police force area 1983-1992
England and Wales
1983

	Per cent.
Dyfed-Powys	57
Gwent	55
Cheshire	51
North Wales	51
Derbyshire	49
Hertfordshire	49
Lincolnshire	49
South Yorkshire	49
Northumbria	48
West Mercia	48
Lancashire	47
Leicestershire	47
South Wales	47
Staffordshire	47
West Yorkshire	47
Cleveland	45
Devon and Cornwall	45
Northamptonshire	45
Cumbria	44
Suffolk	44
Wiltshire	43
Durham	42
Kent	42
Merseyside	42
Essex	41
Gloucestershire	41
Humberside	41
Norfolk	41
North Yorkshire	41
Thames Valley	41
Cambridgeshire	40
Sussex	40
Avon and Somerset	39
Bedfordshire	39
Dorset	38
Nottinghamshire	38
Warwickshire	38
Greater Manchester	36
West Midlands	36
Surrey	34
Hampshire	33
London, City of	18
MPD	17

1984

	Per cent.
Dyfed-Powys	58
Derbyshire	54
Gwent	53
Hertfordshire	51
Cheshire	49
Cumbria	49
Staffordshire	48
Lancashire	47
Suffolk	47
North Wales	46
Northumbria	45
West Mercia	45
Devon and Cornwall	44
Leicestershire	44
South Wales	43
West Yorkshire	42
Wiltshire	42
Merseyside	41
Norfolk	41
Northamptonshire	41
South Yorkshire	41
Thames Valley	41
Dorset	40
Essex	40
Kent	40
Cambridgeshire	39
Durham	39
Humberside	39
Avon and Somerset	38
Befordshire	38
North Yorkshire	38
Sussex	38
Cleveland	37
Gloucestershire	37
Warwickshire	36
Hampshire	35
Lincolnshire	35
Surrey	33
Nottinghamshire	30
West Midlands	30
Greater Manchester	27
London, City of	18
MPD	17

1985

	Per cent.
Derbyshire	55
Dyfed-Powys	55
Gwent	55
Hertfordshire	52
Staffordshire	52
Cumbria	49
South Yorkshire	48
Lancashire	47
Cheshire	46
Devon and Cornwall	46
Northumbria	46
Durham	45
Leicestershire	45
North Wales	45
Suffolk	45
West Mercia	45
South Wales	44
Essex	43
Lincolnshire	42
West Yorkshire	42
Norfolk	41
Cambridgeshire	40
Dorset	40
Humberside	40
Thames Valley	40
Kent	39
Northamptonshire	39
Wiltshire	39
Warwickshire	38
Bedfordshire	37
Cleveland	37
Hampshire	37
Avon and Somerset	36
Sussex	36
Gloucestershire	35
Merseyside	35
Nottinghamshire	35
Surrey	34
Greater Manchester	32
North Yorkshire	31
West Midlands	30
MPD	18
London, City of	17

1986

	Per cent.
Dyfed-Powys	51
Gwent	50
Derbyshire	48
Hertfordshire	46
Lancashire	45
Leicestershire	44
Staffordshire	44
Cheshire	43
South Yorkshire	43
Cumbria	42
Suffolk	41
West Mercia	41
Devon and Cornwall	40
Northumbria	40
Durham	39
South Wales	39
Merseyside	38
West Yorkshire	38
Cambridgeshire	37
Essex	37
Lincolnshire	36
Norfolk	36
Warwickshire	36
Wiltshire	36
Thames Valley	35
Cleveland	34
Dorset	34
Kent	34
Surrey	34
Hampshire	33
Nottinghamshire	33
North Wales	32
North Yorkshire	32
Northamptonshire	31
Sussex	31
Gloucestershire	30
Humberside	30
Avon and Somerset	29
Bedfordshire	29
West Midlands	29
Greater Manchester	27
MPD	16
London, City of	13

1987

	Per cent.
Gwent	53
Dyfed-Powys	51
Cumbria	46
Lancashire	46
Derbyshire	45
Leicestershire	45
Suffolk	45
Hertfordshire	44
Northumbria	44
Merseyside	43
North Wales	43
South Yorkshire	43
Durham	42
Staffordshire	42
West Mercia	42
Northamptonshire	41
Cheshire	40
Devon and Cornwall	39
South Wales	39
West Yorkshire	39
Gloucestershire	38
Lincolnshire	37
Dorset	36
Norfolk	36
West Midlands	36
Wiltshire	36
Cambridgeshire	35
Essex	35
Cleveland	34
Hampshire	34
North Yorkshire	34
Nottinghamshire	34
Surrey	34
Warwickshire	34
Kent	33
Humberside	32
Sussex	32
Thames Valley	31
Avon and Somerset	30
Bedfordshire	29
Greater Manchester	27
London, City of	19
MPD	16

1988

	Per cent.
Gwent	54
Dyfed-Powys	53
Cumbria	51
Cheshire	50
Lancashire	50
South Yorkshire	47
Northamptonshire	46
Merseyside	45
Staffordshire	45
West Mercia	45
Durham	44
Northumbria	44
Suffolk	44
Hertfordshire	43
Leicestershire	43
West Yorkshire	43
Lincolnshire	42
North Wales	42
West Midlands	42
Norfolk	40
Bedfordshire	39
Dorset	39
Gloucestershire	39
North Yorkshire	39
Warwickshire	39
Derbyshire	38
Devon and Cornwall	38
Nottinghamshire	38
Cleveland	37
South Wales	37
Wiltshire	37
Avon and Somerset	36
Humberside	36
Kent	36
Cambridgeshire	34
Hampshire	34
Surrey	34
Thames Valley	34
Essex	32
Sussex	30
Greater Manchester	29
London, City of	25
MPD	17

1989

	Per cent.
Gwent	54
Cheshire	52
Dyfed-Powys	52
Cumbria	49
Wiltshire	46
Merseyside	45
Hertfordshire	44
North Wales	44

	Per cent.
Northamptonshire	43
South Yorkshire	43
Staffordshire	43
Suffolk	43
Dorset	43
Durham	42
Lincolnshire	42
Lancashire	40
Leicestershire	40
Norfolk	40
Northumbria	40
South Wales	39
West Mercia	39
West Midlands	39
Cambridgeshire	38
West Yorkshire	38
Derbyshire	37
Cleveland	36
Devon and Cornwall	36
Gloucestershire	36
Humberside	35
North Yorkshire	35
Nottinghamshire	35
Warwickshire	35
Bedfordshire	34
Avon and Somerset	33
Surrey	33
Thames Valley	33
Essex	32
Hampshire	32
Kent	32
Sussex	31
Greater Manchester	30
London, City of	20
MPD	17

1990

	Per cent.
Gwent	51
Cheshire	50
Dyfed Powys	50
West Mercia	46
Lancashire	44
Merseyside	44
South Yorkshire	44
Wiltshire	44
Cumbria	43
Lincolnshire	43
Suffolk	41
Northumbria	40
North Wales	40
North Yorkshire	40
Staffordshire	39
Cambridgeshire	38
Humberside	37
Norfolk	37
Leicestershire	36
South Wales	36
West Midlands	36
Dorset	35
Northamptonshire	35
Nottinghamshire	35
Durham	34
West Yorkshire	34
Gloucestershire	33
Derbyshire	32
Devon and Cornwall	32
Greater Manchester	32
Hampshire	32
Hertfordshire	30
Avon and Somerset	29
Essex	29
Warwickshire	29
Surrey	27
Sussex	26
Thames Valley	26
Cleveland	25
Kent	25
London, City of	21
Bedfordshire	19
MPD	17

1991

	Per cent.
Dyfed-Powys	50
Gwent	47
Lincolnshire	46
Merseyside	45
Cheshire	41
Dorset	41
Cumbria	40
Lancashire	40
Wiltshire	40
Norfolk	37
Staffordshire	37
Suffolk	37
Cambridgeshire	36
Greater Manchester	36
North Wales	36
North Yorkshire	36
Gloucestershire	35
Northumbria	35
West Mercia	35
Cleveland	33
Hertfordshire	33
Essex	32
Humberside	32
Northamptonshire	31
West Midlands	31
Durham	30
Devon and Cornwall	29
Leicestershire	29
South Wales	29
Derbyshire	28
Hampshire	28
West Yorkshire	28
Nottinghamshire	27
Avon and Somerset	24
Warwickshire	24
Kent	23
Surrey	23
Sussex	23
Thames Valley	22
London, City of	20
Bedfordshire	19
MPD	17

1992

	Per cent.
Dyfed-Powys	53
Gwent	44
Merseyside	42
Lincolnshire	39
Suffolk	39
Cumbria	37
Lancashire	37
Wiltshire	37
Greater Manchester	35
Norfolk	34
West Mercia	34
North Wales	33
North Yorkshire	33
Cleveland	32
Dorset	32
Durham	30
Leicestershire	30
Northamptonshire	30
South Wales	30

	Per cent.
Staffordshire	30
Cheshire	29
Essex	29
Cambridgeshire	27
Kent	27
West Midlands	27
Hampshire	26
Hertfordshire	26
Nottinghamshire	26
South Yorkshire	26
West Yorkshire	25
Gloucestershire	24
Humberside	23
Sussex	23
Warwickshire	23
Derbyshire	22
Surrey	22
Bedfordshire	20
London, City of	20
Thames Valley	19
Devon and Cornwall	18
Avon and Somerset	17
Northumbria	17
MPD	16

MPD = Metropolitan Police District

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Michael Howard: The Home Secretary has three cars supplied by the Home Office. The average annual cost, inclusive of maintenance, is £98,000. Other Home Office Ministers use four cars supplied by the Government car service. In addition, the GCS supplies cars for the transport of ministerial dispatch boxes. The estimated cost of these cars for 1993-94 is £247,000.

Prisons

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the Government's prison building programme.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 25 November at column *574*.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the status of the current discussions on the data protection directive, and in particular the current state of agreement or disagreement between member states on articles 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12 as published in COM(92)4.22.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Council working group has completed its first reading of the revised text of the draft directive. A second reading has started. It would not be right for me to disclose the extent of agreement or disagreement on any particular article. In general, the range of views expressed is very wide.

Information Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has incorporated the code of practice for information security management, published by the British Standards Institution, into relevant contracts with information technology suppliers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The security requirements for IT systems and services used by central Government Departments are stated in the Government IT security policy document. This document is supported by use of the CCTA risk analysis and management method—CRAMM—and Baseline Security for IT systems—BSITS—risk analysis methods, by the Communications Electronic Security Group—CESG—memorandum No. 10 where appropriate and by supporting advice and guidance published by the Government IT security authorities. These are regularly reviewed to ensure best practice, have been developed specifically for use within government and have been in operation for some time. The code of practice for information security management was developed by and established for use by commercial organisations. It is currently not a British standard, and does not specifically address the requirements for the protection of official information.

Mr. Amanullah Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *230*, what consideration was given to complying with the request from the Indian national central bureau of Interpol that Mr. Amanullah Khan be arrested on the occasion of his arrival at Manchester airport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: None. Mr. Khan was not seeking admission to the United Kingdom at Manchester airport on 15 October 1993. He was in transit to another country. The police officers who spoke to him were not aware of the request from the Indian national central bureau of Interpol that he be arrested with a view to extradition.

Work Permits

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will notify Billingham Bombers Ltd. that Igor Slavinsky, Ref. S80 79 56, can now have a work permit to play ice hockey;

(2) if he will approve a work permit for Igor Slavinsky, Ref. 9320830/FHY, to play ice hockey for Billingham Bombers.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 30 November informing him that I had decided to grant Mr. Slavinsky's application to remain and work exceptionally outside the immigration rules.

Prison Accommodation

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to use any floating facility on Humberside to accommodate prisoners.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 3 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the use of a floating facility on Humberside to accommodate prisoners.

The use of floating vessels to accommodate prisoners is one option being considered as part of our contingency plans to deal with increases in the prison population. No final decisions have been taken to use this option or on possible locations.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Howard: No central record of files marked "not for NAO eyes" is maintained. The information could be obtained only by examining individually each of the 1·5 million extant files in my Department, and could therefore only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used rarely and in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

Police Cells

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are detained in police cells *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the north-west; at what locations; and for how long they have been there.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 3 December 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about prisoners detained in police cells *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the North West; and what locations; and for how long they have been there.

On Tuesday 30 November, the latest date for which complete information is available, a national total of ten prisoners were detained in police cells, all in Manchester. They arrived there on that day and were received into prison custody on the following day.

Criminal Justice Act 1993

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he expects to implement the remaining provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Mr. Howard: The following miscellaneous provisions brought into force on 1 December by means of commencement order No. 3: sections 20 to 23, 34 and 35, 44 to 46, and 73.

A further announcement about the implementation of the remainder of the Act will be made in due course.

Police (Performance Indicators)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will select and make known a first set of objectives and performance indicators for policing, as proposed in the White Paper on police reform.

Mr. Howard: The following is the text of a letter which I am sending today to all police authority chairmen and chief constables. I am writing in similar terms to the commissioners of the Metropolitan and City of London police forces, and to the chairman of the City of London police committee.

Key objectives for policing 1994-95

The White Paper on Police Reform contains a commitment that the Home Secretary will publish each year a brief statement of key objectives for the police service. This will explain the tasks which the Government consider that the police should be tackling as matters of priority across the country. The key objectives, which are centred on the principles of the citizens charter, will provide a framework for the assessment of police performance.

I am writing now to set out the Government's key objectives for policing in 1994-95. These are based on the objectives provisionally set out in the White Paper, refined in discussion with the police, with local authority associations and with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The objectives will be further refined in the light of experience gained during the coming year.

I intend to treat 1994-95 as a trial run. This should provide useful experience which will help to ensure that the system of setting objectives and measuring progress is soundly based. Once the necessary legislation is in place, police authorities and chief constables will be required by statute to have regard to the key objectives for policing.

In setting particular objectives the Government is well aware of the wide nature of the police role. This is encapsulated in the guidelines laid down by the first joint Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police:

"The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime; the next that of detection and punishment of offenders if crime is committed. To these ends, all the efforts of the police should be directed. The protection of life and property, the preservation of public tranquility, and the absence of crime, will alone prove whether these efforts have been successful, and whether the objects for which the police were appointed have been attained."

While proposing that particular effort should be directed towards improving the performance of certain tasks, the Government reaffirms the importance which it attaches to other essential policing duties such as the maintenance of public order, the fight against drugs and terrorism and the prevention of crimes against children. In certain areas theft of and from vehicles is a major probem requiring action by the police as well as others. You are, I know, already contributing towards wider Government objectives such as the reduction of the number of road traffic accident casualties by one-third by the year 2000. All these tasks, together with others which I have not mentioned, remain important.

It is precisely because the role of the police is so varied that the Government believes that performance can best be improved by focusing more sharply each year on a small number of areas of concern to the public. The aim of the key objectives is to encourage progress in these areas in addition to maintaining the good levels of service which the police are providing in response to other demands.

The key objectives for 1994-95 will be:

1. to maintain and if possible increase the number of detections for violent crimes;
2. to increase the number of detections for burglaries of people's homes;
3. to target and prevent crimes which are a particular local problem in partnership with the public and other local agencies;
4. to provide high visibility policing so as to reassure the public;
5. to respond promptly to emergency calls from the public.

Progress towards each of these objectives will be measured by

the key performance indicators set out in the Appendix to this letter. In all cases this information is already being gathered by the police for other purposes, such as the Audit Commissioner's performance indicators. They should therefore not add to the paperwork burden on the police. I expect Chief Constables to publish the information collected for the full range of performance indicators in their Annual Reports.

In future years police authorities and Chief Constables will be required to set targets for making progress towards the key objectives. You may, in 1994-95, wish to experiment with setting local targets related to the various key objectives.

I would encourage the publication of the key objectives locally in the context of the Citizen's Charter initiative and in tandem with any existing local policing charters or statements of service standards.

The Association of Chief Police Officers has already undertaken considerable work in defining national standards for the police. The Government welcomes this work which complements the proposals for setting key objectives and targets set out in the White Paper on Police Reform.

APPENDIX

Key performance indicators are:

1. The number of violent crimes detected per 100 officers.
2. The number of burglaries of dwellings detected per 100 officers.
3. No high level indicator is currently available. Work on developing such an indicator for 1995-96 will be taken forward over the next year, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives.
4. Public satisfaction with levels of foot and mobile patrols.
5. (i) The percentage of 999 calls answered within the local target time.
   (ii) The percentage of responses within the local target time to incidents requiring immediate response.

Prison Officers (Industrial Action)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he now intends to take following the injunction he obtained against the calling of industrial action by the Prison Officers Association.

Mr. Howard: On 18 November the High Court issued an interim injunction requiring the general secretary of the Prison Officers Association to call off its planned industrial action which would have resulted in some 1,700 prisoners being held in police cells. The court made it clear that the calling of industrial action by the POA was unlawful.

I recognise that matters cannot be left there. I intend to introduce legislation this Session which, while maintaining the position that it is unlawful for the POA to call industrial action, also extends normal trade union status to organisations representing staff who currently have the powers of a constable.

The legislation will also extend to prison officers the appropriate elements of employment protection legislation, including access to industrial tribunals, and enable regulations to be made to establish procedures for setting the remuneration of the staff concerned. There will need to be discussions with the POA and others about those provisions.

These measures will provide a much needed and firm foundation for the development of constructive industrial relations in the special context of the Prison Service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Information Security

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has incorporated the code of practice for information security management, published by the British Standards Institution, into relevant contracts with information technology suppliers.

Mr. Goodlad: The security requirements for IT services and systems used by central Government Departments are stated in the Government IT security policy document. This document is supported by use of the CCTA risk analysis and management method—CRAMM—and baseline security for IT systems—BSITS—risk analysis methods and by supporting advice and guidance published by the Government IT security authorities. These are regularly reviewed to ensure best practice, have been developed specifically for use within government and have been in operation for some time. The code of practice for information security management was developed by and established for use by commercial organisations and does not specifically address the requirements for the protection of official information.

Publicity

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spends annually on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising and *(c)* press advertising; and what were the corresponding figures for 1985 and 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: Total expenditure by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on advertising in 1992-93, the last financial year for which information is available, was:

	FCO Diplomatic Wing £	*FCO ODA Wing* £
TV advertising	nil	nil
Radio advertising	nil	nil
Press advertising	72,000	283,033

The 1979 and 1985 figures cannot be disaggregated between television, radio and press advertising and other promotional material without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Mr. Goodlad: The number of press officers employed in the FCO news department for the years in question is:

Year	*Number*
1979	11
1985	11
1993	9

The Overseas Development Administration operates a separate information service. The number of information officers employed by the ODA is as follows:

Year	Number
1979	9
1985	12
1993	7

Secondments

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the last five years the number of secondments *(a)* into and *(b)* out of his Department; and if he will give details of which Departments were involved.

Mr. Goodlad: Tables I to V contain details of inward and outward secondments between other Government Departments and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the last five years. Secondments between the Overseas Development Administration and the diplomatic wings of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are shown separately in these tables, as are secondments to the Cabinet Office. Overseas Development Administration exchanges to and from other Government Departments are listed separately at table VI.

In addition to exchanges with other Whitehall departments, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has an interchange programme with the private sector and other foreign ministries. The Overseas Development Administration also has officers on secondment to the World bank and regional development banks.

Table I Part (a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the home civil service at 31 December 1992

Receiving department	Numbers
DTI	9
MOD	2
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	6
ODA	2
Home Office	1
No. 10	1
Civil Service Selection Board	1
	23

Table I Part (b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1992

Parent department	Numbers
DTI	26
MAFF	10
MOD	13
Employment	2
Home Office	88
Treasury	5
DOE	2
NIO	4
Scottish Office	4
CAA	1
Customs and Excise	3
ODA	21
Transport	7
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Health	1
Department of Social Security	1
	189

Table II Part (a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the home civil service at 31 December 1991

Receiving Department	Number
DTI	8
NIO	1
MOD	4
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	9
ODA	5
Home Office	1
Civil Service Selection Board	1
Civil Service College	1
Others	2
	33

Table II Part (b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1991

Parent Department	Number
DTI	23
MAFF	11
MOD	14
Employment	2
Home Office	84
Treasury	4
DOE	2
NIO	4
Scottish Office	2
CAA	1
Energy	1
Customs and Excise	3
ODA	20
Transport	5
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Social Security	1
	178

Table III Part (a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the home civil service at 31 December 1990

Receiving department	Numbers
Treasury	1
MAFF	1
DTI	9
NIO	1
MOD	8
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	12
ODA	1
Home Office	1
Privy Council Office	1
Other	4
	41

Table III Part (b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1990

Parent department	Numbers
DTI	28
MAFF	11
MOD	23
Employment	5
Home Office	93
Treasury	7
Northern Ireland CS	2

Parent department	Numbers
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
CAA	1
Energy	1
Customs and Excise	11
ODA	23
Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Health	2
	216

Table IV Part (a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the home civil service at 31 December 1989

Receiving department	Numbers
Treasury	1
MAFF	1
ECGD	1
DTI	7
NIO	2
MOD	8
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	11
ODA	5
Other	1
	39

Table IV Part (b)
Number of home civil service officers on loan to the FCO at 31 December 1989

Parent department	Numbers
DTI	26
MAFF	10
MOD	22
Employment	6
Home Office	70
Treasury	8
DOE	1
Northern Ireland CS	2
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
CAA	1
Energy	1
Customs and Excise	9
ODA	26
Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
Department of Health	2
	193

Table V Part (a)
Number of DS officers on loan to the Home Civil Service at 31 December 1988

Receiving department	Numbers
ECGD	1
DTI	10
NIO	2
MOD	4
MPO	3
Office of Fair Trading	1
Law Officers Department	1
Cabinet Office	10
ODA	4
Home Office	1
Treasury	1
	38

Table V Part (b)
Number of Home Civil Service Officers on loan to the DS at 31 December 1988

Parent Department	Numbers
DTI	23
MAFF	11
MOD	22
Employment	8
Home Office	73
Treasury	6
DOE	1
N Ireland CS	3
NIO	4
Scottish Office	1
CAA	2
Energy	2
Customs and Excise	10
ODA	23
Transport	3
Cabinet Office	1
	193

Table VI
ODA secondments to and from other Government Departments (excluding FCO)

Year	Outward	Inward
1988	Treasury (1)	Treasury (2)
1989	Treasury (1)	Treasury (1)
1990	Treasury (1) Civil Service College (1)	Treasury (1)
1991	Treasury (1) Civil Service College (1)	Nil
1992	Nil	Nil

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Goodlad: The information requested is not readily available. To provide it would require consultation with all overseas posts. This could be done only at disproportionate cost. The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's internal audit unit regularly checks to ensure that the marking is not abused.

There is no marking "not for PAC eyes".

Council of Ministers

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the forthcoming business in the European Community's Council of Ministers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

Council of Ministers' business for December 1993

1. The following meetings are planned.
2 December: Special Foreign Affairs Council.
2 December: Development Council.
2-3 December: Environment Council.
5 December: Special ECOFIN Council.
6 December: Research Council.
6-7 December: Foreign Affairs Council.
7 December: Telecommunications Council.
10 December: Energy Council.
10-11 December: European Council.
13-16 December: Agriculture Council.
13-14 December: ECOFIN Council.
13 December: Health Council.
16 December: Internal Market Council.
17 December: Industry Council.
20-21 December: Foreign Affairs Council.
20-21 December: Fisheries Council.
22 December: Social Affairs Council.

2. The following subjects are likely to be discussed.

(a) 2 December: Foreign Affairs Council
Uruguay Round
GATT
Commercial Defence Instruments

(b) 2-3 December: Development Council
Development Co-operation policy in the run-up to 2000
Rehabilitation Aid
Mid-term review of Lomé IV
Democracy, human rights and development
Follow-up to UNCED
Relations with South Africa
Projects concerning tropical forests

(c) 2-3 December: Environment Council
Car emissions
Packaging
Ozone Layer Regulation
Copenhagen Amendment Ratification Decision
Amendment to Hazardous Waste Directive
Amendment to Birds Directive
Climate change (including Convention Ratification Decision)
Landfill
PCBS/PCTS
Civil liability Green Paper
UNCED follow-up
Implementation and enforcement of EC law

(d) 5 December: Special ECOFIN Council
Preparation for European Council 10-11 December
Broad economic guidelines (article 103(2) of Treaty on European Union)

(e) 6 December: Research Council
Fourth Framework Programme—adoption of common position (Poss)
Council Resolution on Material Test Reactors—adoption (Poss)
Negotiate Mandate for ITER Protocol 2—adoption (Poss)
Sprint—extension—adoption.

(f) 6-7 December: Foreign Affairs Council
Preparation of 10-11 December European Council
Publication of votes (Poss)
Access to information
Revision of Council Rules of Procedure
Right to vote and stand in EP elections (Poss)
Accession negotiations
Institutional aspects of enlargement
Relations with Morocco (Poss)
  Negotiating mandate for new agreement
Relations with Tunisia (Poss)
  Negotiating mandate for new agreement
Relations with Israel (Poss)
  Negotiating mandate for new agreement
Relations with Russia (Poss)
  PCA
Uruguay round
  Member State participation in MTO
Dual-use Goods (Poss)
Ex-Yugoslavia
South Africa: joint action (Poss)
Middle East: joint action (Poss)
Appointment of European Observer for Cyprus problem
European Energy Charter
Anti-dumping (Poss)
  Dead-burned magnesite from China

(g) 7 December: Telecommunications Council
Agenda available.

(h) 10 December: Energy Council
Hydrocarbons Licensing Directive
Coal State Aids Decision
Internal Energy Market
Commission Communications on
  Thermie
  Energy Objectives to the year 2005
  Trans-European Energy Networks
Energy Charter Treaty
Energy Safety in Eastern Europe/FSU

(i) 10-11 December: European Council
White Book on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment
Article 103 broad economic policy guidelines
GATT
Enlargement, including institutional issues
Subsidiarity
Ballardur Stability Pact
Former Yugoslavia
Justice/Home Affairs Co-operation

(j) 13-16 December: Agriculture Council
Set-aside
Oilseeds
Agrimoney
Sugar
New Zealand butter
New Zealand sheepmeat
Pesticides
Plant breeders rights
Animal feeding stuffs (enzymes)
Inspection fees
Welfare at slaughter
Welfare in transport
Poultry/poultry meat
Beef market (poss)
Sheep market (poss)

(k) 13-14 December: ECOFIN Council
Follow-up to European Council 10-11 December 1993 (adoption of Council recommendation on broad economic policy guidelines).
Report on progress with economic and monetary convergence and with the implementation of Community law concerning the Single Market.
Interest rate subsidies for EIB loans to small and medium-sized enterprises.
Progress with ratification of the European Investment Fund.
Preparation of the second stage of EMU.
Listing particulars directive (document 4199/93, COM (92)566).
(Poss) Amending directive on the co-ordination of laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to the Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities (UCITS) (document 4901/93, COM(93)226)
(Poss) Withholding tax on savings.
Carbon/Energy Tax (document 7018/92, COM(92)226)
7th VAT directive.
(Poss) Excise duties on mineral oils.
(Poss) Interest and Royalties Directive.
Portuguese Convergence Programme
Taxation of Savings
(Poss) Interest and Royalties Directive

(l) 13 December: Health Council
Draft Resolution on Europe Against Cancer Programme (4832/93)
Draft Resolution on the Extension of Europe against AIDS Programme into 1994 (9397/93)
Draft Conclusions on Blood and Blood Products (4593/93)
Draft Conclusions on a European Epidemiological Network (9400/93)

Draft Council Directive on Tobacco Advertising (COM(92)196 final).
Any other business.
(m) 16 December: Internal Market Council
(Poss) Data Protection
(Poss) Recreational Craft
(poss) Motor Cycle Power
(poss) Economie Sociale
(poss) Trademarks
(poss) European Pharmacopoeia
(poss) Legal Protection of Biotechnological Inventions
(poss) Pension Funds
(poss) 14th amendment to Marketing and Use of Dangerous Substances Directive
(poss) Food Labelling
(poss) Additives other than sweeteners and colours

(n) 17 December: Industry Council
agenda unavailable

(o) 20/21 December: Foreign Affairs Council
Enlargement negotiations in the margins.

(p) 20/21 December: Fisheries Council
TACS and Quotas (all elements)
Structures
Spain and Portugal
Third country landings licensing
Restructuring of fishing fleets

(q) 22 December: Social Affairs Council
agenda unavailable

Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom will contribute to the enhanced structural adjustment facility operated by the International Monetary Fund.

Mr. Hurd: The United Kingdom will contribute £50 million to the next phase of the enhanced structural adjustment facility of the International Monetary Fund. ESAF supports economic reform programmes in low-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This brings the United Kingdom contribution to about 11 per cent. of the total fund.

Our new contribution will be made in 1994-95 from resources released by an underspending of EC aid. It will not add to planned levels of public expenditure. ESAF adds to the effectiveness of our bilateral aid programme and complements our Trinidad terms initiative to relieve the debt burdens of the poorest countries pursuing economic reform. Our new contribution underlines Britain's position at the heart of the international effort to promote sustainable recovery and growth in the developing world.

China

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government are doing to enforce the law forbidding the import of products of forced prison labour from China.

Sir John Cope: I have been asked to reply.

The prohibition on the importation of foreign prison made goods is enforced by HM Customs and Excise. Under the provisions of the Foreign Prison-Made Goods Act 1897 the prohibition can only be enforced when evidence is supplied to customs proving the foreign prison-made origin of the goods. Customs has received no evidence to date which would prove import into the United Kingdom of specific goods made in Chinese prisons, but it is willing to act upon any adequate evidence supplied to it.

DEFENCE

Vitez Garage, Bosnia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by which units the site known as Vitez garage, Bosnia, is currently being used for accommodation purposes; how many personnel are involved; whether improvements planned to be made to facilities, including the provision of ablution and sanitation units, have been effected; whether the 35 four-man accommodation units on an adjacent site have yet been commissioned and occupied; what plans he has for expanding or improving accommodation on these sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The site is currently being used for accommodation purposes by part of the logistic support element of 1 Coldstream Guards, a light aid detachment of REME, a forward recovery group of REME and a forward ordnance team of Royal Logistic Corps, a total of 131 personnel. Occupied and in use are 39 four-man accommodation units, two rest rooms, three shower blocks, three toilet blocks and one laundry block. In addition, there are three toilets in the existing garage. One fire-damaged portacabin is to be replaced and there are plans to provide portacabin kitchen facilities to enable the present kitchen area to revert to its original use.

Low Flying

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his oral answer of 23 November, *Official Report*, column 314, if he will place in the Library details of the intensity of low flying in each affected area.

Mr. Hanley: For administrative purposes, the United Kingdom is divided into a number of low-flying areas. Records are maintained of the amount of low flying conducted in each LFA but it is not my Department's practice to release this detailed information. Information is not available on the amount of low flying conducted within LFAs over particular locations, such as national parks. Low flying is conducted in areas of low population but, consistent with our policy of dispersing the activity as widely as possible, national parks are not specifically targeted for low flying.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will supply the hon. Member for Don Valley with a current copy of the map showing the structure of the *(a)* day and *(b)* night low-flying system.

Mr. Hanley: I have arranged for a copy of the map showing the structure of the day low-flying system to be placed in the Library. A copy of the map showing the structure of the night low-flying system is already in the Library.

Radar Surveillance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations and dates where radar surveillance of transit areas has been carried out during the last five years; and what are the current requirements before his Ministry carries out such operations.

Mr. Hanley: Locations for Skyguard low-flying monitoring are decided having regard to a number of

factors, including exercise activity and reports of disturbance. Priority is given to locations where flying down to 250 ft may take place. There have been no deployments to monitor low flying in transit areas during the last five years.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many operational incidents the RAF's search and rescue helicopters have been called out to deal with from each search and rescue base during 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Hanley: The total number of callouts from RAF stations was:

	1992	*[1]1993*
Boulmer	134	135
Brawdy	158	115
Chivenor	174	123
Coltishall	106	76
Leconfield	160	119
Leuchars[2]	131	43
Lossiemouth	241	201
Manston	162	128
Valley	187	168
Aldergrove	22	14
Total	1,475	1,122

[1]Up to and including 31 October 1993.
[2]Flight disbanded 1 April 1993.

Pilot Training

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the prospects of increasing the pilot flying training undertaken by the RAF in the United Kingdom for air forces of other countries.

Mr. Hanley: In line with normal policy, the provision of pilot flying training in the United Kingdom for air forces of overseas countries is dictated by the availability of surplus training capacity within the RAF. Opportunities presently exist for such training and potential customers have been informed accordingly.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to initiate a nuclear weapons convention along the lines of the chemical weapons convention with the aim of a verifiable global plan on the design, manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Hanley: The United Kingdom's nuclear policy was set out in my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's speech to the centre for defence studies on 16 November, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Iraq

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he possesses on the role of the Ibn Al Haytham centre in Iraq.

Mr. Hanley: The Ibn Al Haytham missile research and development centre was established by the Iraqis in March 1992 and is located 15 km north-east of Baghdad. Its primary purpose is to conduct research and development on missiles with ranges of up to 150 km. This work is permitted under UN SCR 687 (1991). The establishment has been visited by six UNSCOM inspections.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many experts his Department has contributed to the United Nations special commission missions to Iraq since May 1991.

Mr. Hanley: Some 50 personnel from my Department have participated in support of United Nations special commission missions to Iraq since May 1991.

Sri Lanka

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has that British military equipment transported in 1990-91 for use in the Gulf war was subsequently directly or indirectly purveyed to the warring parties in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Hanley: I am not aware that any British military equipment transported in 1990-91 for use in the Gulf conflict was subsequently transferred to the warring parties in Sri Lanka.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Hanley: The precise number of files held by my Department marked "not for NAO eyes" could be established only at disproportionate cost.

The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and the Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

Political Advisers

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the political advisers employed in his Department during 1993.

Mr. Hanley: During 1993 Mr. Perry Miller was employed as special adviser to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence from 1 January to 14 February and Mr. Crispin Blunt has been employed since then.

HEALTH

Prescription Budgets

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library tables showing *(a)* indicative prescription budgets and *(b)* the prescription element of general practitioner fund-holder budgets for 1991-92 and 1992-93 in each family health services authority area and for each NHS region showing (i) planned expenditure, outturn expenditure in cash terms and standard price terms, (ii) the percentage expenditure, (iii)

actual expenditure per head of population served each year both in cash and standard price terms and (iv) the percentage increase between years.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information will be placed in the Library. Information for actual expenditure per head of population and the percentage increase between the years is not available centrally.

Administration Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the total amount spent on administration by *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities, *(c)* family health service authorities and *(d)* the Department of Health/NHS management executive, in (i) 1989-90, (ii) 1990-91, (iii) 1991-92 and (iv) 1992-93 and her expectation of expenditure in those categories for 1993-94.

Dr. Mawhinney: Administration expenditure is shown in the table.

The information requested for 1993-94 is not available for regional and district health authorities and family health services authorities.

Expenditure on Adminstration

	1989-90 £000s	*1990-91 £000s*	*1991-92 £000s*	*1992-93 £000s*	*1993-94 £000s current allocation*
Regional Health Authorities[1,2]	144,135	177,626	312,037	327,349	[4]—
District Health Authorities[1,2]	469,603	573,028	327,036	387,387	[4]—
Family Health Services Authorities	66,508	103,880	136,332	161,881	[4]—
Department of Health[3]	174,681	216,785	240,267	276,280	264,608

[1] These figures cover the total revenue expenditure on the pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed at health authority headquarters level together with the costs of the purchaser function. They exclude administrative support in the hospital departments and at other local levels which is regarded as operational.

[2] The figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are not comparable with the figures for 1991-92. This is because of the introduction of capital charges and changes to accounting policies following the introduction of the internal market.

[3] Costs for the national health service management executive are included in the Department of Health figures.

[4] Not available.

Source: Annual accounts of regional and district health authorities, family health services authorities and the Department of Health.

Hospital Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list, for 1992-93, by regional health authority *(a)* the average daily number of beds available and *(b)* new accident and emergency cases during the year; (2) if she will list, for 1992-93, by regional health authority per 1,000 population *(a)* the average daily number of beds available and *(b)* new accident and emergency cases during the year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

NHS hospitals and trusts, England 1992-93

	Average number of daily available beds	*Average number of daily available beds per 1,000 population*	*New accident and emergency cases*	*New accident and emergency cases per 1,000 population*
England total [1]	231,363	4·8	10,993,202	227·2
Northern	18,704	6·0	712,704	230·0
Yorkshire	18,583	5·0	851,205	230·2
Trent	20,869	4·4	926,631	195·3
East Anglian	9,944	4·8	338,875	162·2
North West Thames	16,307	4·5	771,198	214·6
North East Thames	18,348	4·8	964,819	254·0
South East Thames	15,273	4·1	918,914	247·5
South West Thames	15,287	5·0	617,496	202·9
Wessex	13,232	4·4	564,475	188·6
Oxford	9,313	3·6	453,362	175·6
South Western	15,851	4·8	663,641	200·1
West Midlands	23,445	4·4	1,333,724	252·7
Mersey	11,552	4·8	702,597	291·2
North Western	22,150	5·5	1,086,088	270·3

[1] Figure includes special health authorities.

Influenza Vaccine

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement as to the reasons given by the National Institute of Biological Standards and control for rejecting supplies of the influenza vaccine from the company Duphar; and what alternative arrangements have been made for this coming winter.

Mr. Sackville: The decision which prevented the marketing of the Duphar vaccine was made by the Medicines Control Agency—MCA—of the Department of Health after receiving advice from specialist advisers and the National Institute of Biological Standards and Control.

Duphar was originally granted a product licence for influenza vaccine in early August 1993. During late September the company applied to the MCA to make a major change to its manufacturing process.

Information provided by Duphar, however, gave inadequate reassurance of the safety and efficacy of the product proposed for marketing since clinical studies being carried out by the company were far from complete.

Other manufacturers have stepped in to fill the gap caused by the loss of Duphar influenza vaccine this year, and already more vaccine has been distributed than in previous years.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of medium and long-stay beds available in NHS psychiatric hospitals and trusts in England and by region in each year from 1984-85 to 1991-92.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* short-stay, *(b)* medium-stay and *(c)* long-stay psychiatric beds were available in each region in each year from 1982.

Mr. Bowis: The available information will be placed in the Library. Beds are classified as either short stay or long stay, and are shown in total prior to 1987-88. Information for 1992-93 is provisional.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many short and long-stay beds are provided for patients in private and NHS other hospitals illustrated in figure 2 of the Yates report.

Mr. Bowis: The breakdown between long and short-stay beds is not available for the private sector. In 1991-92 there were 12,600 mental illness beds in privately registered nursing homes or hospitals and 22,000 short-stay and 27,000 long-stay beds in mental illness wards in national health service hospitals in England.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has given to the Royal College of Psychiatrists recommendation that the closure of mental hospitals should not go ahead until alternative services are in place.

Mr. Bowis: This is in line with Government policy.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist on levels of community provision for people with mental health problems required in an area before a mental hospital can be closed.

Mr. Bowis: The mental illness key area handbook gives guidance on the range of service provision needed for adult psychiatric services in the community, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she issues to NHS trusts about the salaries of chief executives; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 5 November at column *535*.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the NHS status of trust hospitals and where their ownership lies.

Dr. Mawhinney: Trusts remain fully part of the national health service. They are accountable through the NHS management executive to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. They are also accountable to NHS purchasers through contracts for service delivery. Each NHS trust is a body corporate and has ownership of its land, buildings and other property.

Pacemakers

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the interval between her Department's receipt of a warning from Siemens in respect of certain pacemakers and the issue of pacemaker technical note No. 48; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Twenty-five working days elapsed between the Department of Health first being advised of the Siemens pacemaker lead problem and the issue of pacemaker technical note No. 48.

The pacemaker technical note was a follow-up to the medical advisory notice issued by Siemens on 4 February 1993 to all relevant clinicians notifying them of the problem. The action was dependent on Siemens advising the Department of the publication of its advisory notice. Eleven working days elapsed between receipt of this information and the publication of the pacemaker technical note. Copies of both documents are available in the Library.

Community Health Councils

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to change the role of management of community health councils.

Dr. Mawhinney: Community health councils have an important role in representing the views of users and we support a strong role for them now and in the future. The future arrangements for establishing and funding CHCs will need to be considered in the context of the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the House on 21 October at columns *398-412*.

Orthodontics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what limits there are to providing orthodontic care for children under the national health service.

Dr. Mawhinney: The national health service provides all the treatment necessary to secure and maintain oral health.

Maternity Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if her Department has currently set up a review committee reviewing maternity services; when her Department last set up a committee reviewing maternity services; what was its conclusions; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: A review of national health service maternity care during childbirth has recently been completed by the expert maternity group. The group was established as part of the Government's response to the House of Commons Health Select Committee report on maternity services, published in 1992.

The expert group's report, "Changing Childbirth," was published on 5 August. A consultation period, to enable

interested parties to comment on the report, ended on 29 October. Ministers are currently considering the comments received before deciding on future action. Guidelines will be issued to the NHS in due course.

Earlier reviews of particular aspects of NHS maternity care have been conducted on behalf of the Department by the maternity services advisory committee. Three reports were published between 1982 and 1985, covering antenatal care, care during childbirth, and care of the mother and baby.

Copies of these documents and reports are available in the Library.

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of St. Bartholomew's hospital, London.

Dr. Mawhinney: The St. Bartholomew's/Royal London/London Chest Trust application is currently out to consultation. A decision on this will be made in the new year.

Winter Deaths

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement relating to the excess winter deaths in the west midlands region.

Mr. Bowis: The number of excess deaths in the west midlands region during the winter of 1991-92—the latest available figures—was 3,373.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement setting out the current conditions of service and remuneration of *(a)* executive and *(b)* non-executive directors of Doncaster health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: The current conditions of service for executive members of Doncaster health authority are those of all other national health service general and senior managers. The chief executive is paid within the range set for district general manager grade 2—£45,710 to £66,030. Executive members of health authorities are paid on the senior manager pay spine, which ranges from £14,940 to £46,600 per year.

Non-executive members of health authorities hold a statutory office under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, and their appointment and tenure of office is governed by the National Health Service Regional and District Health Authorities (Membership and Procedure) Regulations 1990. Non-executive members of health authorities receive an annual remuneration of £5,000.

Low Birthweights

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research her Department has funded in response to the proposals of the Audit Commission report "Children First" on data about the outcome of health care in childhood and the prevalence of disability among very low birthweight babies who survive into childhood; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The publication, earlier this year, of the report of the Audit Commission's study into hospital services for children was welcomed by the Government, particularly the emphasis which it placed on monitoring health outcomes. The vital importance placed by the Government on evaluating both the short-term and long-term impact of neonatal intensive care interventions had been acknowledged at paragraph 2.7.10 of their response to the second report from the Health Committee, 1991-92—Cm 2018—in July 1992. This also referred to a number of population-based studies which had been commissioned to look into the long-term effects on survivors of care.

Since then, the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has helped to fund a study of the outcomes for babies weighing less than 1,500 gm at a number of different hospitals and examining a range of different risk factors, including birthweight, which make up the clinical risk index for babies. This study is being extended on a national basis and the results are expected later next year.

The national perinatal epidemiology unit, a centrally funded Department of Health research unit based in Oxford, has done some preliminary pilot work with Action Research into the detection of trends in morbidity and disability in seven-year-old children of different birthweights. The Department has been closely involved in this exercise which may lead to the development of a national monitoring system.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Hackney

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the future of Queen Elizabeth hospital, Hackney.

Dr. Mawhinney: East London and City health authority is currently reviewing the future provision of children's services in east London. Its findings will be considered alongside the outcome of consultation by North East Thames regional health authority on the "Making London Better" proposal that the management of the Queen Elizabeth and the Homerton hospitals should merge.

Death Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the total number of deaths for each year since 1990, and the current year to date from *(a)* tuberculosis, *(b)* malignant neoplasm of the cervix, *(c)* Hodgkin's disease, *(d)* chronic rheumatic heart disease, *(e)* all respiratory diseases, *(f)* asthma, *(g)* appendicitis, *(h)* abdominal hernia, *(i)* cholelithiases and cholecistitis and also *(j)* maternal deaths, for each regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: This information will be placed in the Library.

Health Charges

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will announce changes in prescription, sight test or dental examination charges for the coming financial year.

Dr. Mawhinney: Judgments are made each year about how finite health resources can be best targeted for

maximum health gain. Prescription and dental charges are one aspect of these considerations. Any announcements will be made at the appropriate time. Patients are not charged for national health service sight tests.

NHS Trusts (Salaries)

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table setting out the total estimated salary bill for each trust within the Greater London area, identifying separately the totals for *(a)* management and administrative staff, *(b)* medical staff, *(c)* nursing staff and *(d)* ancillary staff, in the current financial year, and indicating the percentage change over the previous 12 months.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available until national health service trusts submit their accounts after the end of the financial year.

Medical Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the non-statutory code of practice concerning the confidentiality of medical records, promised after the draft National Health Service Functions (Preservation of Confidentiality) Regulations were withdrawn in 1987, has yet to be published.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is firmly committed to producing guidance on the confidentiality, use and disclosure of personal health information and intends to do so as soon as possible. We are seeking clarification of the law in relation to confidentiality, and as soon as this has been resolved, draft guidance will be issued for consultation.

Waltham Forest District Health Authority

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the proposed new larger regional health authority will restore the funding cut to Waltham Forest district health authority made by the current regional health authority; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the weighted capitation funding system, health authorities are funded for their resident population. Departmental guidance gives regional health authorities discretion to use their judgment about the precise distribution of funds which suits their districts' needs, based on the analysis of local information. The present allocation for Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority is a matter for North East Thames regional health authority and the hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Stavely, the chairman, for details.

Residential Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each local authority the maximum payments made towards the cost of *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing care.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to amend current legislation to give a statutory right to community health councils to visit nursing and residential homes and to provide additional resources to community health councils to carry out this role; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Community health councils already have a statutory right under the law to visit premises controlled by district health authorities. We have no plans to introduce legislation to give CHCs the statutory right to visit residential homes.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the current guidelines to local authorities for the provision of residential care when an elderly relative lives in a different local authority to his or her family and wishes to be located in accommodation within that family's local authority area.

Mr. Bowis: We have issued a statutory direction requiring local authorities to place people in the home of their choice in England and Wales subject to certain practical limitations such as costs, suitability and availability. The original direction was contained in circular LAC (92) 27 which was issued on 23 December 1992. Circular LAC (93) 18, was issued in August 1993. Copies of the two circulars are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from the Audit Commission concerning payments made by health authorities and trusts to private nursing and residential care homes relating to the provision of nursing and care to former hospital in-patients.

Mr. Sackville: Earlier this year the Audit Commission brought to the attention of the national health service management executive concerns raised by a number of appointed auditors that payments made by some health bodies may not be in accordance with their legal powers. Those cases are being investigated, and where appropriate the executive will ensure that the position is regularised.

Industrial Relations

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist governing the conduct of industrial relations in NHS trusts.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service trusts are expected to follow good industrial relations practice, for example as outlined by the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service and in guidance issued by the NHS management executive. Additionally, Whitley council agreements should be observed for those staff employed on centrally agreed conditions.

Regional Funding

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate the difference in funding health services in each region as a result of the change from RAWP to weighted capitation.

Mr. Sackville: The use of resource allocation working party (RAWP) targets was discontinued in 1990, when weighted capitation was introduced. Consequently, no RAWP targets are currently available for comparison with weighted capitation shares. Comparisons would not be meaningful. Under the old system, health authorities were funded for their "catchment population", whereas now they are purchasers of services for their resident population, with cross-boundary flows of patients being covered by payments under national health service contracts.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will provide the latest available figures on NHS staff numbers by region in the form of her answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *457*.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

All NHS Staff groups by Region in England at 30 September 1992 in Whole Time Equivalents

	Medical & Dental	*Nursing & Midwifery*	*Professional & Technical*	*PAMs*	*Scientific/ Professional*	*Gen/Senior Managers*	*Admin & Clerical*
Northern	3,140	25,120	2,080	2,260	740	710	7,590
Yorkshire	3,630	27,560	2,670	2,890	870	1,350	9,000
Trent	4,170	35,790	3,540	3,830	1,220	1,040	10,910
East Anglian	1,860	15,390	1,400	1,810	500	650	4,290
North West Thames	3,390	24,770	2,010	2,380	930	940	9,520
North East Thames	4,230	31,250	3,110	3,120	1,390	1,560	10,370
South East Thames	3,710	28,570	2,700	2,810	1,560	1,090	9,880
South West Thames	2,620	22,380	1,870	2,390	750	520	7,470
Wessex	2,570	22,170	1,790	2,350	670	970	6,540
Oxford	2,160	16,370	1,470	1,880	640	770	5,910
South Western	2,750	26,160	2,200	2,680	930	850	8,360
West Midlands	4,740	41,320	4,140	4,410	1,350	1,730	13,010
Mersey	2,530	19,390	1,980	2,000	560	860	6,240
North Western	4,360	35,290	3,060	3,590	1,120	1,250	11,200
SHAs	1,320	7,210	780	780	410	460	2,600
Others	50	50	2,140	10	420	1,940	12,120
England	47,220	378,790	36,940	39,200	14,080	16,090	135,010

	Ancillary	*Ambulance Inc Officers*	*Works*	*Maintenance*	*Others*	*Total*
Northern	6,860	1,330	290	1,220	440	51,800
Yorkshire	6,610	1,510	260	1,120	320	57,800
Trent	9,730	1,820	390	1,320	160	73,910
East Anglian	3,650	790	150	600	40	31,120
North West Thames	2,980	630	150	780	850	49,330
North East Thames	3,300	530	190	1,230	3,160	63,420
South East Thames	5,720	920	220	960	390	58,520
South West Thames	4,510	690	160	950	490	44,800
Wessex	4,190	950	170	760	90	43,230
Oxford	1,990	830	170	640	30	32,860
South Western	5,460	1,470	210	800	540	52,410
West Midlands	10,120	1,900	460	1,750	220	85,160
Mersey	3,850	790	150	730	270	39,370
North Western	7,310	1,470	330	1,360	70	70,400
SHAs	1,360	0	40	230	0	15,200
Others	1,360	2,220	10	120	220	20,670
ENGLAND	79,000	17,840	3,340	14,570	7,310	789,990

Sources: Department of Health form KM49
Department of Health non-medical work force census
Department of Health medical and dental work force census

Notes:
1. All figures are independently rounded to the nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.
2. The decrease in nursing and midwifery numbers is almost entirely due to Project 2000 learners who are not included in the work force.
3. Nursery and midwifery figures exclude agency nurses and medical and dental figures exclude locum doctors.
4. The increase in general and senior managers is mainly due to the extension of those terms and conditions to other staff groups.
5. The increase in administrative and clerical staff is largely due to the strengthening of administrative functions, and increased support for clinical services.
6. The figures for all regions include both directly managed units and NHS trusts.
7. The figures for others include the London ambulance service, family health service authorities and other statutory authorities.
8. Some totals differ from those given in my reply to the hon. Member on 4 November at column *457* where figures for the South Yorkshire paramedical services have been transferred from the Yorkshire to Trent region and NW Thames and RHA figures have been adjusted to include the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire ambulance service.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by her Department.

Mr. Sackville: The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

The usual practice in the Department is to assign the marking to individual documents rather than to files. Information on the number of documents so marked could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nicotine Patches

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the numbers of prescriptions, the expenditure and the expenditure per head on nicotine patches in each family health service authority area and NHS region in 1992.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 30 November 1993]:* This information will be placed in the Library.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Claimants, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Doncaster area are currently receiving *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit; what percentage of the Doncaster population this represents; and what were the figures (i) 12, (ii) 24, (iii) 36 and (iv) 48 months ago.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 2 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many people in the Doncaster area are currently receiving *(a)* Income Support *(b)* Family Credit and *(c)* Housing Benefit; what percentage of the Doncaster population this represents; and what were the figures (i) 12 (ii) 24 (iii) 36 and (iv) 48 months ago.

Regrettably, all of this information is not readily available. This is because some Income Support (IS) records for 1989 and 1990 have been destroyed in accordance with routine procedures. Also Agency District boundaries do not correspond with those of local authorities. In fact a small part of the Doncaster area is covered by the Mexborough Benefit Office within the Agency's Rother and Dearne District. Family Credit (FC) is administered centrally from Blackpool and Housing Benefit (HB) by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

I am therefore able to provide some information on IS customers of the Agency's Doncaster District—to obtain details of those covered at Mexborough would incur disproportionate cost. FC and HB details, however, relate to the Doncaster area as a whole. The details provided are covered in the attached appendixes and have been obtained from The Office of Population and Censuses, Family Credit Unit, the Analytical Services Division and the IS Management Information Statistics.

For the purpose of calculating relevant percentages, Doncaster has been defined as the Metropolitan District of Doncaster. The Office of Population and Census advise that the latest figure available for the population was 288, 854 at April 1991. For the reasons given above, it is not possible to provide a percentage figure related to IS.

I hope this information is helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Income Support	
May 1989	22,513
May 1990	22,332
November 1991	26,216
November 1992	28,771
August 1993	29,241

Housing benefit		*Percentage*
1988-89	24,500	8·4
1989-90	24,000	8·3
1990-91	23,000	7·9
1991-92	22,500	7·7
1992-93	24,000	8·3

It should be noted that these figures are averages of the quarterly counts for each year quoted and have been rounded to the nearest 500. Some of the recipients of Housing Benefit may also be in receipt of Family Credit or Income Support.

Family Credit		*Percentage*
24 November 1989	1,491	0·5
2 November 1990	1,657	0·5
31 October 1991	1,769	0·6
30 October 1992	2,415	0·8
29 October 1993	2,888	0·9

It should be noted that the above percentages show claimants as a percentage of the Doncaster population in receipt of each benefit. Dependants are not included in the calculation.

Cold Weather Payments

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those meteorological stations which have registered an average of 0 deg C for *(a)* three nights, *(b)* four nights, *(c)* five nights, *(d)* six nights and *(e)* seven nights during 1993; and if he will list the total amounts of severe weather payments triggered by area as a result of recorded temperatures during 1993.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the cold weather payments scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. M. Bichard to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 2 December 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking about Cold Weather Payments.

Data provided by the Meteorological Office does not include information on those meteorological stations which have registered an average of 0 degrees Centigrade for three, four, five and six nights. The regulations relating to Cold Weather Payments define a period of cold weather as a consecutive period of seven days during which the average mean daily temperature is 0 degrees Centigrade or less.

Information relating to Cold Weather Payments made up to the end of March 1993 is held in the Library. Payments made since that date are shown by Benefits Agency District, and are attached as Annex A.

A list of those weather stations which have averaged 0 degrees Centigrade for seven consecutive days during the period from the end of March 1993 to 27 November 1993 is also attached as Annex B.

I hope you find this helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Annex A

Cold weather payment statistics
1 April 1993 to 27 November 1993

Office	*Number of payments*	*Total amount (£)*
Barnsley	376	2,256·00
Birmingham North West	18,209	109,254·00
Bristol Brunel	53	318·00

Office	Number of payments	Total amount (£)
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	13,902	83,412·00
Cambridgeshire	205	1,230·00
Channel	65	390·00
East Yorkshire	693	4,158·00
East Sussex	161	966·00
Glasgow West	9,848	59,088·00
Hereford and Worcester	21,545	129,270·00
Leeds Riding	204	1,224·00
Lomond and Argyll	8,245	49,470·00
Mid Wales and Maelor	11,237	67,422·00
North Tyneside	5,024	30,144·00
Oldham	353	2,118·00
Renfrew	11,692	70,152·00
Sale/East Cheshire	289	1,734·00
Shropshire	18,888	113,328·00
South Downs	25	150·00
South East Hampshire and Wight	169	1,014·00
West Kent	6,410	38,460·00
Wiltshire	15,011	90,066·00

Annex B

Weather stations which averaged 0 degrees centigrade or less for seven consecutive days between 1 April 1993 and 27 November 1993

Aviemore
Bedford Royal Aircraft Establishment
Birmingham Airport
Carlisle
Dumfries (Drungans)
Easthampstead Airport
Edinburgh Airport
Eskdalemuir
Gatwick Airport
Glasgow Airport
Kinloss
Leeming
Leuchars
Lyneham
Shawbury
Tulloch Bridge
Wilsden

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in how many cases of the total number of cases where the Child Support Agency have assessed maintenance as payable maintenance has been collected; and how many of those cases where maintenance has been collected were transferred to the CSA from the liable relatives section of his Department;

(2) what is his latest estimate of the number of parents with care who have requested that the Child Support Agency collect maintenance on their behalf; and what percentage of these have had maintenance successfully collected;

(3) what percentage of the total number of maintenance assessments made by the Child Support Agency in the first six months of its operation, excluding those cases inherited from the liable relatives section of his Department, have resulted in maintenance payable by the absent parent;

(4) how many maintenance assessments were made by the Child Support Agency in the first six months of its operation, excluding those cases inherited from the liable relatives section of his Department; and how many of these are for parents with care who are working and not in receipt of income support, family credit or disability working allowance.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Ros Hepplewhite, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ms R. Hepplewhite to Mrs. Jane Kennedy, dated 2 December 1993:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking various questions about the Agency's operations.

The Agency does not collect information that identifies maintenance assessments according to the status of the parent with care, nor whether an assessment relates to an existing case which was previously dealt with under the liable relatives provisions before taken on by the Agency. In relation to the total number of cases assessed in the first six months of operations, the absent parent was assessed as liable to pay more than the statutory minimum in over 26,000 cases. By the end of October 1993, a total of 57,000 assessments had been completed, and 40,000 were for more than the statutory minimum.

You also asked about the collection of maintenance. Information on maintenance being collected is not currently available, but will be later in the financial year.

I hope you will find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Benefit Statistics

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table similar to table 9a in "The Growth of Social Security", but showing claimant numbers instead of expenditure in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1988-89 and 1992-93, for each of retirement pension basic, retirement pension earnings related, widow's benefit, unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, statutory sick pay, invalidity benefit age 65 years plus, invalidity benefit age 60 to 64 years, invalidity benefit age under 60 years, supplementary benefit/income support age 65 years plus, supplementary benefit/income support age 60 to 64 years, supplementary benefit/income support age under 60 years, child benefit, one-parent benefit, family income supplement/family credit, rate rebate, rent allowance, rent rebate and community charge benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the tables.

Retirement pension/widows benefit

	November 1978	March 1983	March 1989	March 1993
Retirement pension				
basic	8,602,000	9,232,000	9,791,000	10,055,000
net additional pension	not available	792,000	2,533,000	3,801,000
Widows benefit	458,000	409,000	373,000	337,000

Statistics are from: the Retirement Pension/Widows Benefit Bi-Annual Inquiry, and are grossed up from a 10 per cent. sample.
The net additional pension reflects the pension after contracted-out deductions.

	November 1978	November 1982	November 1988	November 1992
Unemployment benefit	492,000	975,000	500,000	654,000

Statistics are from the Quarterly Analysis of Unemployed Claimants, and are based on a 100 per cent. sample.

	2 June 1979	2 April 1983	1 April 1989	[1]1992-93
Sickness benefit	430,000	338,000	109,000	135,000

[1] Statistics are based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants apart from 1992-93 which is taken direct from the Departmental Report (Cm 2213).

	1978-79	1982-83	[1]1988-89	[1]1992-93
Statutory sick pay	not available	not available	365,000	330,000

[1] This information is taken from the Departmental Report (Cm 2213).
Statutory Sick Pay was introduced from 1 April 1983.

Invalidity benefit

	2 June 1979	2 April 1983	1 April 1989	4 April 1992
Age 65 and over	38,000	55,000	151,000	219,000
Age 60 to 64	173,000	217,000	286,000	330,000
Age under 60	399,000	465,000	689,000	890,000

Statistics are based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants.

Supplementary benefit/income support

	November 1978	December 1982	May 1988	May 1992
65 and over	1,610,000	1,662,000	1,433,000	1,368,000
60 to 64	202,000	249,000	280,000	263,000
Age under 60	1,121,000	2,355,000	2,638,000	3,456,000

Statistics are from the Suplementary Benefit/Income Support Annual Inquiries, and are grossed up from a 1 per cent. sample.

	31 December 1978	31 December 1982	31 December 1988	31 December 1992
Child benefit	7,178,000	7,045,000	6,706,000	6,857,000

Statistics are from the Annual Child Benefit statistics, and are grossed up from a 4 per cent. sample.

	31 December 1978	31 December 1982	31 December 1988	31 December 1992
One parent benefit	311,000	508,000	708,000	855,000

Statistics are from the Annual One Parent Benefit statistics and are grossed up from a 4 per cent. sample.

Family income supplement/family credit

	1978-79	1982-83	1988-89	1992-93
Family income supplement	85,000	165,000	—	—
Family credit	—	—	280,000	442,000

The Family Credit statistics are based on a 5 per cent. sample of awards.

Housing benefit/community charge benefit

	[1]1978-79	[1]1982-83	[1]1988-89	[1]1992-93
Rent rebate	1,210,000	3,050,000	3,125,000	3,105,000
Rent allowance	225,000	260,000	965,000	1,210,000
Rent rebate	3,055,000	5,320,000	5,150,000	—
Community charge benefit	—	—	—	6,655,000

[1] These figures are underlying the expenditure information given in table 9a of the Growth of Social Security Expenditure. They reflect average numbers of beneficiaries in receipt of Housing Benefit/Community Charge Benefit: Domestic rates were abolished and Community Charge introduced in Scotland in 1989 and the rest of Great Britain in 1990.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the figures for child benefit expenditure and expenditure on families in tables 9a, 9b, 10, 11a, 11b and 12 of "The Growth of Social Security," so that the cost of residual child tax allowances in 1978-79 is included; and if in table 12 he will also distinguish between the growth in expenditure on two-parent families and one-parent families.

Mr. Burt: The amended figures are as follows:

	£ million
Table 9a:	
Child Benefit expenditure 1978-79 (cash)	2,226
Table 9b:	
Child Benefit expenditure 1978-79 (92-93) prices	6,213

	£ million
Table 10:	
Average annual real increase in Child Benefit expenditure	
1978-79 to 1992-93	–0·53 per cent.
1978-79 to 1983-84	1·09 per cent.

	£ million
Table 11a:	
Benefit expenditure—Family 1978-79 (cash)	3,033
Table 11b:	
Benefit expenditure—Family 1978-79 (92-93 prices)	8,466

Table 12:
Average annual real increase in benefit expenditure

	1978-79 to 1992-93	1978-79 to 1983-84	1983-84 to 1986-87	1986-87 to 1989-90	1989-90 to 1992-93
					Percentages
All Families	3·07	3·06	5·06	–1·38	5·69
Two parent families	0·39	2·89	3·65	–7·54	1·32
Lone parent families	7·20	3·46	8·21	9·21	10·63

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table tabulating the costs of administering the social security benefit system in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1986-87, 1990-91 and the latest year for which figures are available, at current and constant prices, and as percentages of benefit expenditure; and what were the costs of administering *(a)* basic retirement pension, *(b)* earnings-related retirement pension, *(c)* child benefit, *(d)* unemployment benefit and *(e)* supplementary benefit/ income support in the same years at current and constant prices and as percentages of relevant benefit expenditure.

Mr. Scott: The available information is in the table. Information on earnings-related and basic retirement pension is not held in the form requested.

Cost of administering social security benefits

	1978-79	1982-83	1986-87	1990-91	1991-92
Cost of administering Social Security Benefits					
Outturn prices	764	1,514	2,074	3,201	3,564
Constant 1991-92 prices	2,004	2,520	2,876	3,373	3,564
Administration cost as a percentage of benefit expenditure	4·9	4·8	4·6	5·7	5·5
Cost of administering Retirement Pension					
Outturn prices	108	205	235	354	329
Constant 1991-92 prices	283	341	326	373	329
Administration cost as a percentage of RP benefit expenditure (see notes)	1·4	1·5	1·3	1·6	1·3
Cost of administering Child Benefit					
Outturn prices	56	97	102	107	118
Constant 1991-92 prices	147	161	141	113	118
Administration cost as a percentage of Child Benefit expenditure	3·1	2·6	2·2	2·2	2·2
Cost of administering Unemployment Benefit					
Outturn prices	67	132	179	182	322
Constant 1991-92 prices	176	220	248	192	322
Administration cost as a percentage of UB expenditure	10·6	8·8	10·4	20·9	20·1
Cost of administering Supplementary Benefit/IS					
Outturn prices	208	593	929	1,348	1,378
Constant 1991-92 prices	735	987	1,288	1,420	1,373
Administration cost as a percentage of Supplementary Benefit/IS expenditure	12·4	9·3	11·6	15·2	11·8

Notes:
[1]Prices are in millions.
[2]GDP deflator used to calculate prices.
[3]Figures cover all components of Retirement Pension (RP).

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Mr. Scott: On security grounds, I do not propose to provide this information.

Government Car Service

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost to the Department of the car service for Ministers; and how many vehicles are involved.

Mr. Hague: There are five cars and the projected annual cost for the current financial year is £209,196.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he is yet in a position to publish the discussion papers on occupational pensions issues to which he referred in his statement to the House on 3 November, *Official Report*, columns 354-65.

Mr. Hague: The first five papers in a series of discussion papers on non-state pensions have been published today as a basis for detailed discussions with interested parties. The results of this exercise will help to formulate our detailed policy proposals. Copies of the papers have been placed in the Library.

Benefits

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the most recently available figures to show the cost of benefits paid to unemployed persons *(a)* male and over 60 years, *(b)* male aged 55 to 60 years and *(c)* female aged 55 to 60 years.

Mr. Hague: Unemployed people may receive any or all of the following major benefits: unemployment benefit, income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and family credit. They may also receive help with NHS charges. The amount of all benefits paid to unemployed people is not kept according to age grouping and cannot be obtained.

The latest statistics relating to the numbers of claimants for the two most common of the major benefits—UB and IS—for the age and sex groups specified in the question, are given in the tables.

Claimants receiving benefit as at 13 May 1993

		Number receiving benefit
Unemployed males aged 60 and over		
Number receiving	UB and IS	4,060
Number receiving	UB only	26,140
Number receiving	IS only	8,732
Unemployed males aged 55-59		
Number receiving	UB and IS	3,786
Number receiving	UB only	28,871
Number receiving	IS only	70,339
Unemployed females aged 55-59		
Number receiving	UB and IS	404
Number receiving	UB only	12,032
Number receiving	IS only	16,377

Occupational Pension Schemes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the proportion of women in employment who are within occupational pension schemes.

Mr. Hague: In 1991, the latest year for which figures are available, 37 per cent. of all women in employment —including those in part-time employment—were members of occupational pension schemes.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people currently receive mobility allowance;

(2) how many people receive the mobility component of the living allowance at *(a)* the higher rate and *(b)* the lower rate; and if he will break the figures down by (i) age, (ii) sex, (iii) whether the recipient holds a driving licence and (iv) whether payment is made to an appointee.

Mr. Scott: Mobility allowance was replaced from April 1992 by the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Information is not available about recipients of the mobility component who hold a driving licence. Information about payments to appointees could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Data about the two rates of mobility component broken down by age and sex are shown in the table.

DLA mobility components in payment at 31 August 1993 (rounded)

	Higher rate			*Lower rate*		
	Female	*Male*	*Total*	*Female*	*Male*	*Total*
5-09	6,000	8,000	14,000	5,000	9,000	13,000
10-14	5,000	7,000	12,000	4,000	7,000	12,000
15-19	5,000	6,000	11,000	4,000	6,000	10,000
20-24	8,000	10,000	19,000	6,000	8,000	14,000
25-29	11,000	13,000	24,000	7,000	9,000	15,000
30-34	14,000	15,000	30,000	7,000	8,000	15,000
35-39	19,000	18,000	37,000	6,000	8,000	14,000
40-44	26,000	24,000	50,000	6,000	7,000	13,000
45-49	38,000	34,000	72,000	6,000	7,000	13,000
50-54	47,000	45,000	91,000	6,000	7,000	12,000
55-59	69,000	68,000	137,000	6,000	6,000	12,000
60-64	86,000	94,000	180,000	7,000	7,000	13,000
65-69	73,000	81,000	154,000	2,000	2,000	5,000
70-74	32,000	33,000	66,000	0	0	0
75-79	6,000	6,000	13,000	0	0	0
80+	1,000	1,000	2,000	0	0	0
TOTAL	448,000	462,000	911,000	73,000	90,000	163,000

1. Source is 5 per cent. sample.
2. All figures provisional and may be subject to amendment.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by his Department.

Mr. Scott: The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and the National Audit Office, under which documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO and Public Accounts Committee are not automatically available to the NAO while they are current.

To provide information on the number of files marked "not for NAO eyes" which are held by this Department would involve a large trawl exercise which could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new training initiatives will be announced in the near future.

Miss Widdecombe: In his Budget speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the Government's plans to introduce modern apprenticeships.

By offering young people high-quality work-based training leading to technician, supervisor and similar level qualifications, modern apprenticeships will have the potential to make a significant contribution to our economic competitiveness. We aim to increase to over 40,000 the number of young people achieving national vocational qualifications at level 3 through training in England—roughly tripling the current number.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployed persons on the training for work programme achieved recognised qualifications in the latest period for which figures are available.

Miss Widdecombe: Training for work replaced employment training in April 1993 and it is still too early to say how many leavers have gained a qualification. The latest period for which figures are available is April 1992 to December 1992. In that period 36 per cent. of all employment training leavers in Great Britain gained a qualification or credit towards one.

Stonemasons and Woodcarvers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to fund the training of apprentices to ensure sufficient stonemasons and woodcarvers are available to maintain buildings of the National Heritage.

Miss Widdecombe: The prime responsibility for ensuring sufficient availability of vocational skills rests with employers in a particular sector, and training and enterprise councils enable employers to manage Government training initiatives in a way which supports local priorities. Funding from youth training and youth credits already supports some apprenticeships which might not otherwise exist, and the modern apprenticeships announced in the Budget will be an opportunity for a major increase in the number of apprenticeships available across the economy as a whole.

Employers of stonemasons are in scope to the Construction Industry Training Board—CITB—a statutory body which is empowered to levy employers to enable collective funding of training. From its income, the CITB disburses training grants to employers to ensure that high-quality training takes place.

Career Development Loans

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people *(a)* are currently on a course which has been supported by a career development loan, *(b)* are repaying a career development loan, *(c)* have had recovery action taken against them because they have defaulted on the loan and *(d)* have had to defer repayments on their career development loan because of hardship for each region and for Great Britain as a whole; what is the average amount of loan taken out; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Information by region on the number of people currently in training supported by a career development loan—CDL—and the number of people currently repaying a loan is shown in the table.

Details of the number of people who have had recovery action taken against them because they defaulted on the loan are not available.

No information is held on the number of trainees who have had to defer repayment on loans due to hardship.

At the end of October 1993, the average loan amount for loans taken out in the current financial year was £2,812.

Region	*Number Currently in Training*	*Number Currently Repaying Loans*
Northern	173	769
Greater Manchester	113	635
North West	321	884
Yorkshire and Humberside	427	1,484
West Midlands	390	1,077
East Midlands	365	1,057
Eastern	481	1,765
South East	772	2,291
London	1,378	3,988
South West	475	1,861
Wales	213	647
Scotland	594	1,681
Great Britain	5,702	18,139

Social Fund

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the contribution from the European social fund and the proportion of programme expenditure that represented to *(a)* youth training/youth training scheme, *(b)* training for work/employment training/employment action and the previous programmes they replaced, *(c)* business start-up allowance/enterprise allowance scheme, *(d)* non-advanced further education, *(e)* high technology national training, *(f)* employment rehabilitation centres and *(g)* jobstart allowances and other employment subsidy schemes in each year since 1987; what amount of support the ESF will be providing to each programme in 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available about European social fund—ESF—support for Government training programmes between 1990 and 1993 is provided in the table. European Commission regulations do not require information about individual programmes to be retained after three years from the date of the final claim. Information is no longer available prior to 1990 for specific programmes. The total amount claimed for the three-year period is £558·62 million. The information in the period 1987 to 1991 inclusive relates to ESF support for programmes operating in Great Britain, for 1992 in England and Wales and for 1993 in England.

Government programmes designed to give the young and long-term unemployed the skills they need to compete for jobs have received a valuable contribution from the ESF.

	TFW/ET/HTNT		*YT*		*EAS/BSU*		*Jobplan interviews*		*Restart*	
	ESF support £ million	*Per cent.*	*ESF support £ million*	*Per cent.*	*ESF support £ million*	*Per cent.*	*ESF support £ million*	*Per cent.*	*ESF support £ million*	*Per cent.*
1990[5]	126·36	[1]11·63	8·85	[1]1·00	29·91	[1]20·99	—	—	—	—
1991[5]	156·62	[2]18·72	15·81	[2]2·06	20·85	[2]18·59	—	—	—	—
1992[6]	141·17	[3]18·47	14·78	[3]2·28	12·98	[3]15·80	—	—	—	—
1993[6]	152·07	[4]19·55	31·26	[4]4·54	8·96	[4]8·93	10·23	[4]33·80	2·98	[4]39·60

[1] Outturn derived from 1989-90 and 1990-91 financial years.
[2] Outturn derived from 1990-91 and 1991-92 financial years.
[3] Outturn derived from 1991-92 and 1992-93 financial years.
[4] Outturn estimated from 1992-93 and 1993-94.
[5] Amounts provided are final ESF claim totals.
[6] Amounts provided are ESF application totals.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the outturn expenditure given to each training and enterprise council in England in 1992-93 at 1993-94 prices; and what is the budget for each TEC in 1993-94 in total and broken down in the same way as given in his answer of 18 February to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), *Official Report*, column *341*.

Miss Widdecombe: Total 1993-94 budgets for each training and enterprise council—TEC—broken down by programme and management fee are shown in the table.

I will write to the hon. Member about the outturn expenditure given to each TEC in England.

Youth training

	£
Hampshire	16,047,985
Heart of England	5,242,274
Isle of Wight	1,742,460
Kent	18,062,061
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	5,140,633
Surrey	4,405,432
Sussex	10,287,749
Thames Valley Ent	12,602,202
South East Total	73,530,796
AZTEC	3,692,164
CENTEC	7,430,302
CILNTEC	8,037,943
LETEC	14,169,207
North London	3,888,513
North West London	2,896,199
SOLOTEC	8,513,285
South Thames	11,757,361
West London	7,406,653
London Total	67,791,627
Bedfordshire	5,604,888
Cambridgeshire	3,196,782
Essex	16,534,219
Greater Peterborough	4,691,786
Hertfordshire	13,125,126
Norfolk/Waveney	10,297,504
Suffolk	9,450,401
Eastern Total	62,900,706
Avon	11,986,489
Devon/Cornwall	23,830,082
Dorset	6,664,970
Gloucestershire	6,411,555
Somerset	5,788,739
Wiltshire	5,926,164
South West Total	60,607,999
Birmingham	18,558,199
Central England	4,158,285
Coventry/Warwickshire	11,845,007
Dudley	4,955,104
HAWTEC	5,568,011
Sandwell	5,006,485
Shropshire	6,299,786
Staffordshire	20,619,930
Walsall	3,778,373
Wolverhampton	5,059,768
West Midlands Total	85,848,948
Greater Nottinghamshire	9,261,085
Leicester	12,979,065
Lincolnshire	10,730,363
North Derby	4,962,627
North Nottinghamshire	7,423,985
Northamptonshire	7,481,478
South Derby	8,417,026
East Midlands Total	61,255,629
Humberside	16,226,497
North Yorkshire	7,258,191
Wakefield	4,891,686
Sheffield	9,562,261
Rotherham	5,709,086
Barnsley/Doncaster	12,833,878
Leeds	7,646,213
Bradford	10,693,263
Calderdale/Kirklees	12,535,694
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	87,356,769
Bolton/Bury	6,863,992
Manchester	16,208,606

	£
METROTEC	5,352,625
Oldham	4,713,622
Rochdale	4,038,291
South and East Cheshire	7,279,469
Stockport	5,299,155
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	49,755,760
CEWTEC	9,249,995
Cumbria	9,735,130
ELTEC	9,616,309
LAWTEC	13,247,988
Merseyside	27,637,344
NORMID	7,719,985
QUALITEC	5,616,592
North West (W) Total	82,823,343
Durham	12,861,366
Northumberland	7,519,133
Teeside	13,745,206
Tyneside	18,334,040
Wearside	7,782,659
Northern Total	60,242,404

Work-related further education

	£
Hampshire	3,545,140
Heart of England	890,673
Isle of Wight	302,807
Kent	2,876,925
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	395,229
Surrey	1,865,131
Sussex	2,296,433
Thames Valley Ent	2,743,048
South East Total	14,915,386
AZTEC	1,383,791
CENTEC	1,371,847
CILNTEC	1,388,733
LETEC	3,111,983
North London	1,914,141
North West London	1,686,598
SOLOTEC	1,863,071
South Thames	2,863,643
West London	2,200,576
London Total	17,784,383
Bedfordshire	1,060,803
Cambridgeshire	635,860
Essex	2,916,051
Greater Peterborough	811,130
Hertfordshire	1,901,768
Norfolk/Waveney	1,672,635
Suffolk	765,679
Eastern Total	9,763,926
Avon	1,673,934
Devon/Cornwall	3,451,753
Dorset	1,208,862
Gloucestershire	1,015,500
Somerset	1,203,301
Wiltshire	1,304,511
South West Total	9,857,861
Birmingham	2,411,852
Central England	862,187
Coventry/Warwickshire	1,787,808
Dudley	766,542
HAWTEC	906,058

	£
Sandwell	647,417
Shropshire	867,855
Staffordshire	2,008,829
Walsall	523,864
Wolverhampton	662,175
West Midlands Total	11,444,587
Greater Nottinghamshire	1,435,361
Leicester	1,596,264
Lincolnshire	1,234,413
North Derby	741,942
North Nottinghamshire	761,200
Northamptonshire	1,186,312
South Derby	1,174,671
East Midlands Total	8,130,163
Humberside	1,673,110
North Yorkshire	1,538,541
Wakefield	618,484
Sheffield	1,371,436
Rotherham	480,208
Barnsley/Doncaster	982,861
Leeds	1,335,090
Bradford	786,207
Calderdale/Kirklees	1,299,055
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	10,084,992
Bolton/Bury	1,046,800
Manchester	2,623,333
METROTEC	740,802
Oldham	413,181
Rochdale	542,808
South and East Cheshire	687,027
Stockport	676,753
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	6,730,704
CEWTEC	1,008,843
Cumbria	780,029
ELTEC	1,625,906
LAWTEC	2,431,361
Merseyside	2,240,840
NORMID	977,192
QUALITEC	426,359
North West (W) Total	9,490,530
Durham	1,061,832
Northumberland	419,980
Teeside	1,031,871
Tyneside	1,500,033
Wearside	744,199
Northern Total	4,757,915

Education business links

	£
Hampshire	129,177
Heart of England	89,416
Isle of Wight	32,755
Kent	134,686
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	71,205
Surrey	113,132
Sussex	126,113
Thames Valley Ent	157,735
South East Total	854,219
AZTEC	171,000
CENTEC	140,000
CILNTEC	128,022
LETEC	234,334

	£
North London	157,000
North West London	145,904
SOLOTEC	100,580
South Thames	234,000
West London	96,842
London Total	1,407,682
Bedfordshire	88,602
Cambridgeshire	77,432
Essex	115,011
Greater Peterborough	69,348
Hertfordshire	98,916
Norfolk/Waveney	55,345
Suffolk	88,043
Eastern Total	592,697
Avon	135,684
Devon/Cornwall	239,404
Dorset	82,690
Gloucestershire	82,557
Somerset	44,831
Wiltshire	79,533
South West Total	664,699
Birmingham	130,727
Central England	94,931
Coventry/Warwickshire	120,174
Dudley	99,341
HAWTEC	92,691
Sandwell	80,551
Shropshire	105,299
Staffordshire	72,254
Walsall	102,776
Wolverhampton	101,942
West Midlands Total	1,000,686
Greater Nottinghamshire	149,910
Leicester	115,854
Lincolnshire	40,477
North Derby	75,871
North Nottinghamshire	93,924
Northants	77,310
South Derby	149,649
East Midlands Total	702,995
Humberside	128,038
North Yorkshire	84,906
Wakefield	58,397
Sheffield	96,119
Rotherham	126,162
Barnsley/Doncaster	207,352
Leeds	50,952
Bradford	142,800
Calderdale/Kirklees	108,075
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	1,002,801
Bolton/Bury	108,100
Manchester	235,300
METROTEC	133,000
Oldham	128,300
Rochdale	71,300
South and East Cheshire	50,000
Stockport	49,800
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	775,800
CEWTEC	147,000
Cumbria	77,000
ELTEC	195,000
LAWTEC	169,000
Merseyside	338,000
NORMID	140,000
QUALITEC	120,000
North West (W) Total	1,186,000
Durham	120,711
Northumberland	80,162
Teeside	119,674
Tyneside	491,730
Wearside	130,151
Northern Total	942,428

Careers partnerships

	£
Hampshire	15,000
Heart of England	15,000
Isle of Wight	25,000
Kent	10,000
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	25,000
Surrey	15,000
Sussex	10,000
Thames Valley Ent	30,000
South East Total	145,000
AZTEC	40,000
CENTEC	24,000
CILNTEC	26,681
LETEC	40,000
North London	40,000
North West London	40,000
SOLOTEC	25,000
South Thames	30,000
West London	21,683
London Total	287,364
Bedfordshire	15,000
Cambridgeshire	30,000
Essex	15,000
Greater Peterborough	0
Hertfordshire	30,000
Norfolk/Waveney	15,000
Suffolk	15,000
Eastern Total	120,000
Avon	17,000
Devon/Cornwall	28,000
Dorset	17,000
Gloucestershire	24,000
Somerset	17,000
Wiltshire	17,000
South West Total	120,000
Birmingham	10,000
Central England	10,000
Coventry/Warwickshire	10,000
Dudley	19,000
HAWTEC	10,000
Sandwell	24,000
Shropshire	10,000
Staffordshire	10,000
Walsall	24,000
Wolverhampton	24,000
West Midlands Total	151,000
Greater Nottinghamshire	0
Leicester	15,000
Lincolnshire	15,000
North Derby	8,000
North Nottinghamshire	20,000
Northamptonshire	30,000

	£
South Derby	12,000
East Midlands Total	100,000
Humberside	30,000
North Yorkshire	15,000
Wakefield	30,000
Sheffield	15,000
Rotherham	30,000
Barnsley/Doncaster	15,000
Leeds	0
Bradford	0
Calderdale/Kirklees	15,000
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	150,000
Bolton/Bury	38,000
Manchester	47,000
METROTEC	13,000
Oldham	15,000
Rochdale	15,000
South and East Cheshire	15,000
Stockport	15,000
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	158,000
CEWTEC	35,000
Cumbria	15,000
ELTEC	13,000
LAWTEC	13,000
Merseyside	45,000
NORMID	13,000
QUALITEC	13,000
North West (W) Total	147,000
Durham	15,000
Northumberland	13,000
Teeside	33,000
Tyneside	31,000
Wearside	13,000
Northern Total	105,000

Careers libraries

	£
Hampshire	186,224
Heart of England	79,552
Isle of Wight	25,312
Kent	204,304
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	21,696
Surrey	136,504
Sussex	232,328
Thames Valley Ent	143,736
South East Total	1,029,656
AZTEC	73,500
CENTEC	79,750
CILNTEC	44,250
LETEC	129,550
North London	80,250
North West London	47,650
SOLOTEC	113,700
South Thames	112,000
West London	91,300
London Total	771,950
Bedfordshire	25,000
Cambridgeshire	52,000
Essex	227,597
Greater Peterborough	37,000
Hertfordshire	194,584
Norfolk/Waveney	88,000
Suffolk	37,400
Eastern Total	661,581
Avon	132,016
Devon/Cornwall	181,958
Dorset	84,178
Gloucestershire	85,590
Somerset	70,374
Wiltshire	79,884
South West Total	634,000
Birmingham	109,625
Central England	45,673
Coventry/Warwickshire	99,576
Dudley	31,973
HAWTEC	65,778
Sandwell	36,544
Shropshire	68,516
Staffordshire	119,673
Walsall	29,234
Wolverhampton	27,408
West Midlands Total	634,000
Greater Nottinghamshire	78,257
Leicester	121,668
Lincolnshire	70,011
North Derby	46,124
North Nottinghamshire	59,000
Northamptonshire	84,535
South Derby	72,405
East Midlands Total	532,000
Humberside	81,510
North Yorkshire	99,420
Wakefield	51,054
Sheffield	50,160
Rotherham	24,185
Barnsley/Doncaster	58,220
Leeds	115,542
Bradford	95,837
Calderdale/Kirklees	68,072
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	644,000
Bolton/Bury	47,800
Manchester	127,800
METROTEC	31,900
Oldham	23,800
Rochdale	20,900
South and East Cheshire	33,800
Stockport	39,000
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	325,000
CEWTEC	61,997
Cumbria	72,992
ELTEC	64,991
LAWTEC	96,995
Merseyside	110,900
NORMID	53,000
QUALITEC	19,000
North West (W) Total	479,875
Durham	88,980
Northumberland	44,440
Teeside	88,980
Tyneside	105,160
Wearside	44,000
Northern Total	371,560

Training for work

	£
Hampshire	11,665,618
Heart of England	3,858,212
Isle of Wight	1,379,369
Kent	14,232,343
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	2,829,713
Surrey	5,057,271
Sussex	11,042,127
Thames Valley Ent	8,482,205
South East Total	58,546,858
AZTEC	6,825,503
CENTEC	15,613,383
CILNTEC	14,456,709
LETEC	24,000,588
North London	13,156,694
North West London	7,135,522
SOLOTEC	8,240,523
South Thames	25,166,155
West London	7,399,737
London Total	121,994,814
Bedfordshire	5,285,187
Cambridgeshire	2,302,357
Essex	12,668,893
Greater Peterborough	4,588,012
Hertfordshire	7,156,808
Norfolk/Waveney	11,288,618
Suffolk	4,651,158
Eastern Total	47,941,033
Avon	14,971,534
Devon/Cornwall	25,533,963
Dorset	6,703,318
Gloucestershire	5,068,345
Somerset	5,255,668
Wiltshire	5,622,688
South West Total	63,155,516
Birmingham	22,328,234
Central England	5,078,153
Coventry/Warwickshire	13,158,154
Dudley	5,788,085
HAWTEC	4,867,681
Sandwell	6,423,583
Shropshire	5,523,999
Walsall	4,830,477
Wolverhampton	5,442,464
West Midlands Total	85,352,355
Greater Nottinghamshire	10,314,638
Leicester	8,877,929
Lincolnshire	11,783,913
North Derby	5,013,978
North Nottinghamshire	7,464,456
Northamptonshire	3,840,188
South Derby	7,739,104
East Midlands Total	55,034,206
Humberside	17,748,578
North Yorkshire	6,763,131
Wakefield	6,879,885
Sheffield	14,268,298
Rotherham	6,106,957
Barnsley/Doncaster	13,740,141
Leeds	13,379,984
Bradford	8,345,142
Calderdale/Kirklees	10,800,160
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	98,032,276
Bolton/Bury	5,473,743
Manchester	18,170,265
METROTEC	4,722,238
Oldham	3,698,127
Rochdale	4,688,477
South and East Cheshire	4,358,567
Stockport	3,812,332
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	44,923,749
CEWTEC	11,025,720
Cumbria	6,376,747
ELTEC	7,421,013
LAWTEC	12,373,434
Merseyside	30,041,270
NORMID	5,512,679
QUALITEC	4,719,713
North West (W) Total	77,470,576
Durham	16,791,889
Northumberland	6,670,090
Teeside	18,308,303
Tyneside	25,145,755
Wearside	12,558,651
Northern Total	79,474,688

Local initiative fund

	£
Hampshire	435,751
Heart of England	435,229
Isle of Wight	174,033
Kent	455,281
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	481,000
Surrey	638,000
Sussex	900,000
Thames Valley Ent	1,097,409
South East Total	4,616,703
AZTEC	451,729
CENTEC	713,129
CILNTEC	634,670
LETEC	696,380
North London	456,335
North West London	403,793
SOLOTEC	490,000
South Thames	680,000
West London	935,056
London Total	5,461,092
Bedfordshire	270,000
Cambridgeshire	398,000
Essex	799,423
Greater Peterborough	188,274
Hertfordshire	514,000
Norfolk/Waveney	375,000
Suffolk	300,000
Eastern Total	2,844,697
Avon	535,000
Devon/Cornwall	1,014,662
Dorset	1,742,602
Gloucestershire	451,000
Somerset	448,180
Wiltshire	407,000
South West Total	4,598,444
Birmingham	661,306
Central England	181,600
Coventry/Warwickshire	571,220
Dudley	313,093

	£
HAWTEC	626,157
Sandwell	176,202
Shropshire	543,192
Staffordshire	171,581
Walsall	192,952
Wolverhampton	258,701
West Midlands Total	3,696,400
Greater Nottinghamshire	557,000
Leicester	660,000
Lincolnshire	1,105,000
North Derby	140,000
North Nottinghamshire	163,000
Northants	209,000
South Derby	311,000
East Midlands Total	3,145,000
Humberside	481,711
North Yorkshire	1,056,126
Wakefield	453,253
Sheffield	1,075,471
Rotherham	365,507
Barnsley/Doncaster	1,885,689
Leeds	458,028
Bradford	542,878
Calderdale/Kirklees	2,239,937
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	8,558,600
Bolton/Bury	956,095
Manchester	659,750
METROTEC	89,341
Oldham	104,334
Rochdale	204,644
South and East Cheshire	706,660
Stockport	674,300
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	3,395,124
CEWTEC	285,000
Cumbria	290,000
ELTEC	910,000
LAWTEC	345,000
Merseyside	345,000
NORMID	285,000
QUALITEC	280,000
North West (W) Total	2,740,000
Durham	305,964
Northumberland	201,000
Teesside	2,427,791
Tyneside	426,373
Wearside	206,120
Northern Total	3,567,248

Business start-up scheme

	£
Hampshire	2,040,800
Heart of England	364,250
Isle of Wight	310,000
Kent	2,342,290
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	356,550
Surrey	858,630
Sussex	1,177,000
Thames Valley Ent	1,130,290
South East Total	8,579,810
AZTEC	762,629
CENTEC	1,235,739
CILNTEC	1,799,591
LETEC	1,064,189
North London	1,384,045
North West London	662,336
SOLOTEC	1,889,159
South Thames	1,806,800
West London	947,800
London Total	11,552,288
Bedfordshire	449,530
Cambridgeshire	344,400
Essex	1,052,600
Greater Peterborough	300,530
Hertfordshire	1,401,917
Norfolk/Waveney	1,300,452
Suffolk	869,925
Eastern Total	5,719,354
Avon	1,548,379
Devon/Cornwall	3,274,300
Dorset	743,250
Gloucestershire	1,591,850
Somerset	581,300
Wiltshire	1,603,523
South West Total	9,342,602
Birmingham	2,278,900
Central England	972,836
Coventry/Warwickshire	1,518,320
Dudley	555,710
HAWTEC	921,759
Sandwell	538,208
Shropshire	836,648
Staffordshire	1,367,918
Walsall	381,350
Wolverhampton	559,240
West Midlands Total	9,930,889
Greater Nottinghamshire	1,372,890
Leicester	1,929,850
Lincolnshire	1,229,450
North Derby	573,699
North Nottinghamshire	897,277
Northamptonshire	900,716
South Derby	514,170
East Midlands Total	7,418,052
Humberside	1,768,900
North Yorkshire	1,630,200
Wakefield	748,011
Sheffield	1,035,005
Rotherham	682,000
Barnsley/Doncaster	1,161,350
Leeds	1,444,850
Bradford	1,201,860
Calderdale/Kirklees	1,527,000
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	11,199,176
Bolton/Bury	974,287
Manchester	2,813,367
METROTEC	762,750
Oldham	457,090
Rochdale	265,346
South and East Cheshire	568,875
Stockport	840,570
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	6,682,285
CEWTEC	1,210,317
Cumbria	1,120,991
ELTEC	1,086,860
LAWTEC	1,124,456
Merseyside	2,348,590

	£
NORMID	784,550
QUALITEC	437,580
North West (W) Total	8,113,344
Durham	1,476,115
Northumberland	661,824
Teeside	1,389,360
Tyneside	1,266,866
Wearside	496,344
Northern Total	5,290,509

Employer investment in people

	£
Hampshire	819,134
Heart of England	550,065
Isle of Wight	334,985
Kent	662,135
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	478,208
Surrey	868,968
Sussex	871,988
Thames Valley Ent	910,705
South East Total	5,496,188
AZTEC	515,164
CENTEC	1,675,794
CILNTEC	309,773
LETEC	891,861
North London	671,820
North West London	405,849
SOLOTEC	410,504
South Thames	1,008,529
West London	363,139
London Total	6,252,433
Bedfordshire	323,499
Cambridgeshire	370,470
Essex	461,799
Greater Peterborough	305,525
Hertfordshire	464,767
Norfolk/Waveney	576,462
Suffolk	470,500
Eastern Total	2,973,022
Avon	988,340
Devon/Cornwall	1,320,661
Dorset	1,526,840
Gloucestershire	308,000
Somerset	615,000
Wiltshire	333,657
South West Total	5,102,498
Birmingham	1,046,645
Central England	283,981
Coventry/Warwickshire	757,776
Dudley	286,915
HAWTEC	433,665
Sandwell	333,991
Shropshire	419,195
Staffordshire	1,298,090
Walsall	454,033
Wolverhampton	183,772
West Midlands Total	5,498,063
Greater Nottinghamshire	478,125
Leicester	698,649
Lincolnshire	399,363
North Derby	350,595
North Nottinghamshire	401,568
Northamptonshire	519,131
South Derby	738,232
East Midlands Total	3,585,663
Humberside	1,044,174
North Yorkshire	304,980
Wakefield	319,630
Sheffield	855,136
Rotherham	262,758
Barnsley/Doncaster	324,230
Leeds	598,023
Bradford	400,524
Calderdale/Kirklees	260,204
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	4,369,659
Bolton/Bury	383,656
Manchester	1,183,250
METROTEC	248,554
Oldham	188,375
Rochdale	348,862
South and East Cheshire	687,850
Stockport	318,485
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	3,359,032
CEWTEC	880,183
Cumbria	301,264
ELTEC	590,337
LAWTEC	1,389,970
Merseyside	1,314,784
NORMID	482,250
QUALITEC	123,820
North West (W) Total	5,082,608
Durham	554,900
Northumberland	328,450
Teeside	752,241
Tyneside	946,714
Wearside	421,976
Northern Total	3,004,281

National Development Projects

	£
Hampshire	80,000
Heart of England	285,282
Isle of Wight	8,000
Kent	244,227
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	284,250
Surrey	116,001
Sussex	3,500
Thames Valley Ent	50,109
South East Total	1,071,369
AZTEC	18,741
CENTEC	97,372
CILNTEC	235,163
LETEC	0
North London	164,199
North West London	57,001
SOLOTEC	298,002
South Thames	349,569
West London	325,290
London Total	1,545,337
Bedfordshire	191,460
Cambridgeshire	57,000
Essex	308,346
Greater Peterborough	67,669
Hertfordshire	186,500

	£
Norfolk/Waveney	109,000
Suffolk	278,356
Eastern Total	1,198,331
Avon	144,909
Devon/Cornwall	120,455
Dorset	57,117
Gloucestershire	150,972
Somerset	54,000
Wiltshire	92,000
South West Total	619,453
Birmingham	304,000
Central England	70,000
Coventry/Warwickshire	85,000
Dudley	104,000
HAWTEC	101,900
Sandwell	171,550
Shropshire	198,966
Staffordshire	75,450
Walsall	150,000
Wolverhampton	199,750
West Midlands Total	1,460,616
Greater Nottinghamshire	115,400
Leicester	0
Lincolnshire	263,800
North Derby	49,900
North Nottinghamshire	45,000
Northamptonshire	121,912
South Derby	74,985
East Midlands Total	670,997
Humberside	226,154
North Yorkshire	0
Wakefield	0
Sheffield	387,169
Rotherham	119,702
Barnsley/Doncaster	0
Leeds	333,805
Bradford	0
Calderdale/Kirklees	241,035
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	1,307,865
Bolton/Bury	0
Manchester	310,475
METROTEC	0
Oldham	60,001
Rochdale	79,999
South and East Cheshire	176,754
Stockport	135,375
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	762,604
CEWTEC	245,505
Cumbria	0
ELTEC	272,435
LAWTEC	318,125
Merseyside	376,102
NORMID	150,901
QUALITEC	138,101
North West (W) Total	1,501,169
Durham	226,372
Northumberland	196,529
Teeside	251,038
Tyneside	522,507
Wearside	110,890
Northern Total	1,307,336

Skill choice

	£
Hampshire	465,300
Heart of England	0
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	0
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	0
Surrey	0
Sussex	0
Thames Valley Ent	0
South East Total	465,300
AZTEC	442,875
CENTEC	0
CILNTEC	0
LETEC	0
North London	0
North West London	0
SOLOTEC	0
South Thames	0
West London	0
London Total	442,875
Bedfordshire	0
Cambridgeshire	400,684
Essex	0
Greater Peterborough	0
Hertfordshire	801,500
Norfolk/Waveney	0
Suffolk	0
Eastern Total	1,202,184
Avon	0
Devon/Cornwall	0
Dorset	449,460
Gloucestershire	0
Somerset	0
Wiltshire	434,000
South West Total	883,460
Birmingham	1,149,250
Central England	0
Coventry/Warwickshire	696,000
Dudley	0
HAWTEC	0
Sandwell	0
Shropshire	0
Staffordshire	0
Walsall	0
Wolverhampton	0
West Midlands Total	1,845,250
Greater Nottinghamshire	546,000
Leicester	0
Lincolnshire	0
North Derby	0
North Nottinghamshire	0
Northamptonshire	0
South Derby	0
East Midlands Total	546,000
Humberside	0
North Yorkshire	0
Wakefield	0
Sheffield	0
Rotherham	0
Barnsley/Doncaster	0
Leeds	0
Bradford	0
Calderdale/Kirklees	0
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	0

	£
Bolton/Bury	0
Manchester	0
METROTEC	0
Oldham	0
Rochdale	0
South and East Cheshire	661,250
Stockport	0
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	661,250
CEWTEC	544,200
Cumbria	0
ELTEC	0
LAWTEC	0
Merseyside	0
NORMID	0
QUALITEC	0
North West (W) Total	544,200
Durham	0
Northumberland	560,000
Teeside	0
Tyneside	542,500
Wearside	0
Northern Total	1,102,500

Open Learning Credits

	£
Hampshire	200,000
Heart of England	0
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	0
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	0
Surrey	0
Sussex	0
Thames Valley Ent	0
South East Total	200,000
AZTEC	0
CENTEC	200,000
CILNTEC	0
LETEC	0
North London	0
North West London	0
SOLOTEC	0
South Thames	0
West London	0
London Total	200,000
Bedfordshire	0
Cambridgeshire	0
Essex	0
Greater Peterborough	0
Hertfordshire	200,001
Norfolk/Waveney	0
Suffolk	0
Eastern Total	200,001
Avon	0
Devon/Cornwall	200,000
Dorset	0
Gloucestershire	14,130
Somerset	0
Wiltshire	0
South West Total	214,130
Birmingham	0
Central England	0
Coventry/Warwickshire	200,000
Dudley	0
HAWTEC	0
Sandwell	0
Shropshire	0
Staffordshire	0
Walsall	0
Wolverhampton	0
West Midlands Total	200,000
Greater Nottinghamshire	0
Leicester	0
Lincolnshire	0
North Derby	0
North Nottinghamshire	200,000
Northamptonshire	0
South Derby	0
East Midlands Total	200,000
Humberside	200,000
North Yorkshire	0
Wakefield	0
Sheffield	0
Rotherham	0
Barnsley/Doncaster	0
Leeds	50,000
Bradford	0
Calderdale/Kirklees	0
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	250,000
Bolton/Bury	0
Manchester	200,000
METROTEC	0
Oldham	0
Rochdale	0
South and East Cheshire	0
Stockport	0
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	200,000
CEWTEC	0
Cumbria	0
ELTEC	0
LAWTEC	0
Merseyside	0
NORMID	200,000
QUALITEC	0
North West (W) Total	200,000
Durham	0
Northumberland	0
Teeside	0
Tyneside	100,000
Wearside	100,000
Northern Total	200,000

Out of school childcare

	£
Hampshire	0
Heart of England	75,220
Isle of Wight	0
Kent	134,186
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	40,601
Surrey	0
Sussex	0
Thames Valley Ent	100,000
South East Total	350,007
AZTEC	69,956
CENTEC	0

	£
CILNTEC	0
LETEC	80,140
North London	71,015
North West London	0
SOLOTEC	0
South Thames	53,364
West London	0
London Total	274,475
Bedfordshire	82,319
Cambridgeshire	0
Essex	0
Greater Peterborough	0
Hertfordshire	79,481
Norfolk/Waveney	65,000
Suffolk	0
Eastern Total	226,800
Avon	68,895
Devon/Cornwall	126,000
Dorset	0
Gloucestershire	10,000
Somerset	0
Wiltshire	0
South West Total	204,895
Birmingham	0
Central England	50,000
Coventry/Warwickshire	60,000
Dudley	0
HAWTEC	46,000
Sandwell	0
Shropshire	40,000
Staffordshire	0
Walsall	50,000
Wolverhampton	0
West Midlands Total	246,000
Greater Nottinghamshire	53,000
Leicester	53,200
Lincolnshire	15,000
North Derby	0
North Nottinghamshire	53,000
Northamptonshire	0
South Derby	0
East Midlands Total	174,200
Humberside	74,150
North Yorkshire	0
Wakefield	0
Sheffield	50,000
Rotherham	48,050
Barnsley/Doncaster	0
Leeds	0
Bradford	0
Calderdale/Kirklees	58,800
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	231,000
Bolton/Bury	0
Manchester	0
METROTEC	33,000
Oldham	0
Rochdale	47,250
South and East Cheshire	47,750
Stockport	0
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	128,000
CEWTEC	57,000
Cumbria	53,913
ELTEC	57,000
LAWTEC	0
Merseyside	0
NORMID	0
QUALITEC	0
North West (W) Total	167,913
Durham	20,000
Northumberland	25,001
Teeside	40,002
Tyneside	61,000
Wearside	0
Northern Total	146,003

	Management Fee £
Hampshire	1,552,979
Heart of England	1,004,362
Isle of Wight	459,306
Kent	1,813,678
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	613,356
Surrey	1,103,275
Sussex	1,571,399
Thames Valley Ent	1,769,501
South East Total	9,887,856
AZTEC	1,310,523
CENTEC	2,729,136
CILNTEC	2,182,386
LETEC	3,312,440
North London	1,970,663
North West London	1,335,653
SOLOTEC	2,176,115
South Thames	3,198,219
West London	1,920,322
London Total	20,126,457
Bedfordshire	977,672
Cambridgeshire	794,959
Essex	2,551,120
Greater Peterborough	950,206
Hertfordshire	1,819,754
Norfolk/Waveney	1,637,008
Suffolk	1,227,324
Eastern Total	9,958,043
Avon	2,049,246
Devon/Cornwall	3,821,053
Dorset	1,434,413
Gloucestershire	1,277,621
Somerset	1,276,647
Wiltshire	1,316,089
South West Total	11,175,069
Birmingham	2,904,048
Central England	1,092,988
Coventry/Warwickshire	1,966,031
Dudley	1,045,807
HAWTEC	1,016,420
Sandwell	1,082,684
Shropshire	1,124,207
Staffordshire	2,381,460
Walsall	970,775
Wolverhampton	1,073,675
West Midlands Total	14,658,095
Greater Nottinghamshire	1,278,065
Leicester	1,789,460
Lincolnshire	1,571,308

	Management Fee £
North Derby	960,167
North Nottinghamshire	1,156,983
Northamptonshire	1,084,507
South Derby	1,293,524
East Midlands Total	9,134,014
Humberside	2,713,015
North Yorkshire	1,460,995
Wakefield	1,342,539
Sheffield	2,131,804
Rotherham	1,157,943
Barnsley/Doncaster	1,800,073
Leeds	2,063,229
Bradford	1,558,130
Calderdale/Kirklees	1,592,970
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	15,820,698
Bolton/Bury	1,002,700
Manchester	3,416,666
METROTEC	883,457
Oldham	793,998
Rochdale	765,003
South and East Cheshire	844,999
Stockport	961,710
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	8,668,533
CEWTEC	1,701,649
Cumbria	1,509,880
ELTEC	1,329,777
LAWTEC	2,183,805
Merseyside	3,690,016
NORMID	1,308,900
QUALITEC	820,254
North West (W) Total	12,544,281
Durham	2,509,460
Northumberland	1,364,519
Teeside	2,809,819
Tyneside	2,985,225
Wearside	1,617,715
Northern Total	11,286,738

	Total £
Hampshire	37,183,108
Heart of England	12,889,535
Isle of Wight	4,794,027
Kent	41,172,116
Milton Keynes/North Bucks	10,737,441
Surrey	15,177,344
Sussex	28,518,637
Thames Valley Ent	29,216,940
South East Total	179,689,148
AZTEC	15,757,575
CENTEC	31, 301,452
CILNTEC	29,243,921
LETEC	47,730,672
North London	23,954,675
North West London	14,816,505
SOLOTEC	24,119,939
South Thames	47,259,640
West London	21,708,398
London Total	255,892,777
Bedfordshire	14,373,960
Cambridgeshire	8,659,944
Essex	37,650,059
Greater Peterborough	12,009,480
Hertfordshire	27,975,122
Norfolk/Waveney	27,480,024
Suffolk	18,153,786
Eastern Total	146,302,375
Avon	34,261,426
Devon/Cornwall	63,142,291
Dorset	20,714,700
Gloucestershire	16,491,120
Somerset	15,355,040
Wiltshire	17,216,049
South West Total	167,180,626
Birmingham	51,892,786
Central England	12,900,634
Coventry/Warwickshire	32,875,066
Dudley	13,965,570
HAWTEC	14,656,120
Sandwell	14,521,215
Shropshire	16,037,663
Staffordshire	40,036,710
Walsall	11,487,834
Wolverhampton	13,592,895
West Midlands Total	221,966,493
Greater Nottinghamshire	25,639,731
Leicester	28,836,939
Lincolnshire	28,458,098
North Derby	12,922,903
North Nottinghamshire	18,739,393
Northamptonshire	15,535,089
South Derby	20,496,766
East Midlands Total	150,628,919
Humberside	42,395,837
North Yorkshire	20,211,490
Wakefield	15,392,939
Sheffield	30,897,859
Rotherham	15,112,558
Barnsley/Doncaster	33,008,794
Leeds	27,475,716
Bradford	23,766,641
Calderdale/Kirklees	30,746,002
Yorkshire and Humberside Total	239,007,836
Bolton/Bury	16,895,173
Manchester	45,995,812
METROTEC	13,010,667
Oldham	10,595,828
Rochdale	11,087,880
South and East Cheshire	16,118,001
Stockport	12,822,480
North West (Greater Manchester) Total	126,525,841
CEWTEC	26,452,409
Cumbria	20,332,946
ELTEC	23,182,693
LAWTEC	33,693,134
Merseyside	68,487,846
NORMID	17,627,457
QUALITEC	12,714,419
North West (W) Total	202,490,839
Durham	36,032,589
Northumberland	18,084,128
Teeside	40,997,285
Tyneside	52,458,903
Wearside	24,225,705

	Total £
Northern Total	171,798,610

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total budget allocated by his Department during 1992-93 to *(a)* Cumbria TEC, *(b)* Durham TEC, *(c)* Northumberland TEC, *(d)* Teesside TEC, *(e)* Tyneside TEC and *(f)* Wearside TEC; and what was the total amount spent by his Department on training and enterprise councils in the United Kingdom as a whole for the same period.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 6 November 1992, *Official Report*, column *434*. This provides details of the total budget allocated to each training and enterprise council—TEC—including Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland, Teesside, Tyneside and Wearside.

The total amount spent on TECs in England during 1992-93 was £1·291 billion.

Expenditure relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the respective Secretaries of State.

Bomb-proofing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the cost, by location, of bomb-proofing the Department's premises.

Miss Widdecombe: On security grounds, I do not propose to give this information.

Departmental Papers

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for the last 12 months the titles of papers published by his Department and by the Employment Service.

Miss Widdecombe: As the reply consists of a long list of information, I will write to the hon. Member.

Advertising

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much his Department spends annually on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising and *(c)* press advertising; and what were the corresponding figures for 1985 and 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department's overall advertising and publicity budget for 1993-94 is £10·8 million. Breakdown by media category will not be available until the end of the financial year. In 1992-93 expenditure by media category was as follows:

	£ million
Television	Nil
Press/Radio	4·3
Other Promotional	3·9

Expenditure on advertising and promotional material by the Department in 1985-86 was £1·2 million and in 1979-80 £70,000. Figures for television, radio and newspaper advertising and other promotional material are not available separately for those years. The figures for 1985-86 and 1979-80 refer only to Employment Department expenditure. They do not cover expenditure by the former Manpower Services Commission.

Press and Publicity Officers

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many press and publicity officers are currently employed in his Department; and how many were employed in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: A total of 90·5 press and publicity staff are currently in post in the Employment Department's information branch. Available figures do not go back further than 1989 when the information branch was formed by the merger of the Employment Department's information division and the Training Agency's information services branch.

Figures for information branch staff in post since 1989 are as follows:

	Number
1989-90	118
1990-91	120
1991-92	119
1992-93	104·5

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many industrial tribunal members are allocated to *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* Leicester.

Miss Widdecombe: Nottingham region has 128 lay members. Of these, 76 mainly sit at Nottingham and 52 at Leicester. There are also four full-time chairmen, of whom three normally sit at Nottingham and one at Leicester. In addition, there are eight part-time chairmen who may sit in more than one location.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the additional travelling costs of applicants to industrial tribunals following the transfer of the industrial tribunal to Nottingham from Leicester.

Miss Widdecombe: The location of the industrial tribunals is a matter for the president and I understand that estimates of the savings and costs, including travelling cost, of the various accommodation options are not yet available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received in relation to the proposals to move the industrial tribunal from Leicester to Nottingham.

Miss Widdecombe: None. This is a matter for the President of the Industrial Tribunals (England and Wales).

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whom he has consulted about the proposed relocation of the industrial tribunal from Leicester to Nottingham.

Miss Widdecombe: The location of the industrial tribunals is a matter for the President of the Industrial Tribunals to determine.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the estimated costs for the relocation of the industrial tribunal from Leicester to Nottingham.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand that no decision has yet been taken to relocate the Leicester office and that an estimate of possible costs is not yet available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to move the industrial tribunal office in Leicester to Nottingham; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Under the regulations governing the industrial tribunals, it is for the President of the Industrial Tribunals to determine where tribunals shall sit. However, I understand that the existing accommodation in both Nottingham and Leicester is unsatisfactory and that the president is considering a number of options for the future provision of tribunal facilities in the Nottingham region.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases the industrial tribunals in *(a)* Nottingham and *(b)* Leicester have heard in each of the last 10 years.

Miss Widdecombe: I regret that figures are only available for 1985 onwards. The details are as follows:

	Nottingham	*Leicester*
1985-86	357	304
1986-87	358	324
1987-88	412	290
1988-89	362	314
1989-90	346	298
1990-91	412	475
1991-92	624	520
1992-93	1,006	684

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons were registered as unemployed, on the last available date, who were *(a)* male and over 60 years, *(b)* male aged 55 to 60 years and *(c)* female aged 55 to 60 years.

Miss Widdecombe: In October 1993 unadjusted unemployment among men aged over 60 years was 43,794. For men and women aged 55 to 59 years, the figures were 153,248 and 47,166 respectively.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of men aged 60 years and over were in *(a)* full-time employment, *(b)* part-time employment and *(c)* unemployed on 1 November in each year from 1983 and at the latest available date.

Miss Widdecombe: Available information for Great Britain based on estimates from the labour force survey—LFS—is given in the table:

Proportions of men aged 60 years and over in

Spring each year	*Full-time employment Per cent.*	*Part-time employment Per cent.*	*ILO unemployment Per cent.*
1984	17·0	4·8	2·4
1985	16·1	4·7	2·3
1986	15·1	4·4	2·1
1987	14·7	4·7	2·3
1988	14·5	5·1	2·0
1989	14·6	5·5	1·9
1990	14·0	5·8	1·7
1991	14·1	5·3	1·8
1992	13·5	5·7	1·8
1993	12·0	5·3	2·3

Source: LFS. Not seasonally adjusted.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has of the proportion of women of working age who are currently in employment.

Miss Widdecombe: Estimates from the labour force survey—not seasonally adjusted—show that, in Great Britain at spring 1993, 65 per cent. of women of working age were in employment. A detailed analysis of the characteristics of women in employment is provided in an article in the November 1993 *Employment Gazette*—pages 483-502—entitled "Women in the Labour Market", a copy of which is held in the Library.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how an employer's contribution of 50 per cent. for access for work services is expected to affect employers' willingness to recruit disabled persons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Access to work will increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities through helping more people with disabilities to obtain and retain jobs and making a much wider range of help available. We are currently finalising details of the changes with these aims in mind.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Burundi

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy on committing United Kingdom Government funds to the UN voluntary fund for the Organisation of African Unity's peacekeeping mission to Burundi.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no plans to contribute to the UN voluntary fund for an Organisation of African Unity peacekeeping mission to Burundi. We have already committed $1 million to the UN trust fund for Liberia and we anticipate that other European partners, which did not contribute to that fund, will take the lead on Burundi.

British assistance in Burundi is focused on the appalling problem of refugees and displaced persons. We have already contributed £350,000 to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees appeal and £100,000 to the International Red Cross. In addition, we are considering urgently other non-governmental organisations requests for humanitarian assistance to refugees within Burundi. We support discussions between the OAU and the European Union on ways in which more systematic help can be given to African conflict resolution mechanisms.

Somali Refugees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Kenyan Government on the subject of assistance for the refugees from Somalia who are now in Kenya.

Mr. Goodlad: We have advised the Government of Kenya that we are prepared to continue to help them to cope with the refugees in the north, more than 85 per cent. of whom are Somalis. My noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development hopes to discuss this issue with President Moi during her forthcoming visit to Kenya in early January.

Aid Projects

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made with other aid donors in agreeing economic and social indicators against which the progress of aid projects can be judged.

Mr. Goodlad: The Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—OECD—provides a forum for co-ordination between aid donors. Following discussions in the Development Assistance Committee, the OECD published in 1992 a manual, "DAC Principles for Effective Aid", copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. These principles cover, among other things, economic and social issues relating to the appraisal of aid projects. They are being incorporated into the Overseas Development Administration's procedures for managing aid projects.

Nepal

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the expected environmental impact of the proposed World bank-funded Arun II dam project in Nepal.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) on 29 November, at columns *313-14*.

The World bank's ongoing discussions with non-governmental organisations and other interested parties include consideration of the environmental impact of the proposed project. We shall consider the environmental aspects of the project when the World bank has completed its appraisal.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all bilateral aid projects located in the Arun valley of Nepal.

Mr. Goodlad: The following United Kingdom bilateral aid projects are located in the Arun Valley of Nepal:

1. Pakhribas agricultural centre;
2. Koshi hills seeds and vegetable project;
3. Community forestry project;
4. Eastern region road maintenance project; and
5. Eastern region primary health care project.

In addition, some work is carried out in the Arun valley under the forestry research project and the Gurkha Welfare Trust scheme.

Uganda

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the involvement of the United Kingdom Government in the Uganda forestry rehabilitation programme, initiated by the World bank in 1987.

Mr. Goodlad: The forestry rehabilitation programme in Uganda is being co-financed by the World bank and the European Community. We are not providing any support for the project through our bilateral assistance programme to Uganda.

Privatisation Advice

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of his officials are currently advising east European countries on privatisation policies.

Mr. Goodlad: None.

Know-how Funds

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total amount of money allocated to the Government know-how fund since its introduction.

Mr. Goodlad: Expenditure under the fund from 1989 to March 1993 was £112,262,000. The expenditure for this financial year is expected to be approximately £53 million.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current advisory board members of each of the United Kingdom know-how funds.

Mr. Goodlad: A list has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Kenya

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy towards aids projects to Kenya; and if he will list the projects and the amount of financial help given as of 22 November.

Mr. Goodlad: At the consultative group meeting on 22 and 23 November Britain pledged programme aid grants up to a possible £15 million in support of Kenya's economic recovery. This new assistance acknowledges the economic and political reforms undertaken since November 1991 and will help support the further economic reform programme to be agreed with the World bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The first £5 million will be made available when spending arrangements have been agreed: the further £10 million will be dependent on a satisfactory review by the IMF in mid-1994 of the new economic reform agenda, and the further development of an overall acceptable political environment. We will be looking particularly for effective action to improve open and accountable government including action to deal with corruption, to reduce tribal tensions and strengthen law and order in the affected areas, and to enhance press freedom.

Our longer-term development assistance programme continues; provisional bilateral expenditure for 1992-93

was over £32 million. I have placed a list of current projects, involving financial assistance and know-how in the Libraries of the House.

World Bank

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the World bank will engage in official celebrations for its 50th anniversary.

Mr. Goodlad: A conference to mark the 50th anniversary of the Bretton Woods institutions to be held jointly by the World bank and the IMF, is planned to be held in Madrid on 29 and 30 September 1994, immediately before the annual meetings of the World bank and the International Monetary Fund.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Essex Coast Environmentally Sensitive Area

Dr. Spink: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects to implement the Essex Coast ESA; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: We plan to launch this ESA in March of next year.

Land Statistics

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will publish in the *Official Report* the figures in hectares for *(a)* set-aside, *(b)* pulses, *(c)* oil seed rape and *(d)* cereals for 1989, 1990 and 1991 which were used to calculate the base area in England.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 November 1993]:* The figures used to calculate the base area in England are as follows:

Base Area (ha)	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*Three-Year average*
Cereals	3,280,95	3,109,432	2,967,283	3,122,222
Sweetcorn	1,303	1,322	1,530	1,378
Oilseeds	283,479	343,052	388,308	388,280
Proteins	209,063	210,730	198,437	206,077
Set-aside	38,577	80,537	104,280	74,465

The figure for oilseeds is mostly oilseed rape but includes small areas planted to sunflowers and other minor crops. The figure for protein crops has been revised to exclude the area planted to vining peas following its withdrawal from the list of eligible crops. For the purposes of determining the base area for the arable area payments scheme, the set-aside areas submitted to the EC Commission were based on actual set-aside agreements for the years 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Woodlands

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list each privately owned wood in Yorkshire that has received special management grants to provide for public access under the woodland grant scheme; and what is the area of each of these woods and the size of the grant.

Mr. Jack: Special management grants are paid for work in those woodlands which are of special value for nature conservation, landscape, public recreation or a combination of these. The provision of public access, by itself, does not qualify for payment of a grant.

Special management grants have been paid in respect of 20 woodlands or estates in Yorkshire the owners of which have indicated that facilities for public recreation or public access would be provided. These are as follows:

Woodland	*Area (hectares)*	*Grant £*
Amenity Trust Woodland	37·2	1,435
Bella Wood	23·2	812
Bilton Beck and Rudding Bottoms	10·7	375
Broad Lane Wood	1·9	67
Cliff Wood	38·6	1,351
Cod Beck Reservoir	87·3	3,056
Escrick Estate	9·3	382
Haw Park Wood	57·2	2,002
Newmillerdam Country Park	89·7	3,140
Notton Wood	38·8	1,356
Shibden Park	6·9	311
Skipton Wood	15·4	539
Skipwith Common	168·0	5,873
Spoilbank Wood	4·2	191
Stanley Marsh	3·2	146
Studley Royal (North)	62·5	2,300
Sutton Park	10·7	385
Tong Garden Centre	1·3	59
Washburn Valley	298·0	11,083
Wentworth Estate Woodlands	32·7	1,150

Diseased Cattle

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the safeguards instituted under the EC single market against the import of diseased cattle, with particular reference to warble fly, brucellosis and foot and mouth disease; and what representations she has had saying that cattle imported into the United Kingdom should now be cleared by her Department's veterinary officers before any movement is permitted on to farms or to dealers.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on 1 December at column *590*.

Warble Fly

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations she has had about the safety of the use of organo-phosphorus based products to treat warble fly infections; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I have received a small number of representations about the safety of use of organophosphorus—OP—products to treat warble fly infections, and I understand that some farmers are reluctant to treat their animals using these products. Provided the label instructions are carefully followed, the use of such warblecides poses no hazard to human health. If, however, anyone is in doubt as to how the product should be used, they should seek expert advice from their veterinary surgeon or the manufacturer. OP products should not be used for this purpose between 30 November and 15 March.

Farmers who have cattle which may have been exposed to warble fly infestation, including those within the 3 km treatment zones of known affected premises, may choose to have blood samples from their cattle tested for signs of infestation. Anyone wishing to pursue this possibility should contact his local divisional veterinary officer for details of the arrangements. Where results are negative, treatment of cattle will not be required.

Wildlife Units

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if she will list the locations of her wildlife units that are currently based at Ministry of Defence establishments; what is the nature of the work being conducted by each unit; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The work of the only wildlife unit based at a Ministry of Defence establishment was outlined in the answer given to the hon. Member on 26 October at column *564*.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of beef and butter were supplied to pensioners and those on benefits throughout the United Kingdom in each of the last five years.

Mr. Jack: In the United Kingdom, the following amounts of produce were distributed to eligible groups, including those pensioners that meet the qualifying criteria, under the EC surplus food scheme:

	Butter (tonnes)	*Beef (tonnes)*
1989-90	3,000	3,000
1990-91	3,800	3,000
1991-92	3,800	3,000
1992-93	3,700	3,000

For 1993-94, 12,200 tonnes of beef is being made available.

Wages

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the minimum agricultural wages applied to those working for agricultural gangmasters in each year since 1991.

Mr. Jack: Yes, provided that the work undertaken is within the statutory definition of agriculture.

Potatoes

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when she expects the Council of Agriculture Ministers to discuss the proposed European Community potato regime; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Commission's draft proposal was last before the Agriculture Council in May. It has not been on the agenda since then, nor is it on the agenda for December.

Badgers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what results have been achieved to date by her wildlife unit at royal air station, Aston Down in its investigations of badgers spreading bovine tuberculosis to cattle; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The wildlife unit has an operational, not a research, role.

Set-aside Scheme

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations her Department has had with interested parties about the inclusion of riverside buffer zones in the set-aside scheme; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The management conditions for set-aside under the arable area payments scheme were the subject of a consultation document issued in March 1993. The 1993-94 arable area payments guide advises that set-aside placed next to sites such as rivers and streams can act as a buffer to protect those areas and help reduce run-off of fertilisers and pesticides.

Another consultation document issued in March 1993 contained proposals to create or improve a range of wildlife habitats by taking them out of production for 20 years. Water fringes are one of the targeted habitats, with the objective of protecting the water and its flora and fauna, as well as creating a wildlife habitat on the waterside banks. Our decision to go ahead with this new habitat scheme was announced on 10 August 1993 and the scheme will open for applications in 1994.

Sheep Quota

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications there have been for sheep quotas from the national reserve; if she will give the number of successful applications as a proportion of all applications; and if she will provide a breakdown of the statistics for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: Before applications to the national reserves can be invited, the necessary legislation must be laid before Parliament. This will be done shortly. At the same time, I shall give details about the arrangements for making applications.

Departmental Files

Mr. Byers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many files marked "not for National Audit Office eyes" are held by her Department.

Mr. Jack: The marking "not for NAO eyes" is used in accordance with an agreement between the Treasury and

the National Audit Office, under which current documents relating to the handling of relations between Departments and the NAO are not automatically available to the NAO.

There are unlikely to be a great number of such files but no central file record is kept in MAFF, and to obtain this information by a departmental inquiry to all the various registries would be very time consuming and costly.

Wages Board

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many submissions she has received to the consultation on the future of the Agricultural Wages Board; and how many of those were in favour of the abolition of the board.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: When the consultation period closed on 1 November 1993, some 3,566 responses had been received and 14 petitions. A further 32 responses have been received since the end of the consultation period. The vast majority were in favour of retention of the board.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

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Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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